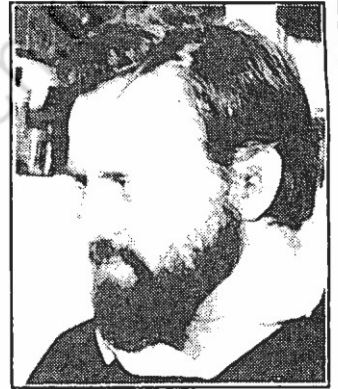


MARIO RINVOLUCRI and ETAIN CASEY argue about coursebooks.

# 'Slaughter the golden goose'



MARIO RINVOLUCRI advances his reasons as to the negative impact of coursebooks on students

**A** student on a recent summer course wrote these insightful words:

"...Also the choice of having no textbook was really right. When you have a book you are forced to follow it and often you forget what are the real needs of the student. Without any book you can work on any subject that would interest the class, sniffing different books if it is necessary..."

"This English course was, for me, a new experience. I've been four times in England on different courses. I attended English courses in Italy but they were academic courses - I mean - we had a timetable which included writing, speaking, listening exercises and nothing was left to the personal (students or teachers') imagination.

"On the other hand, this course I have just done included all the basilar skills but everything is done with the purpose of making students collaborate with teachers.

"On this course I don't see teachers as persons who have only to check if we do our homework or study, but as persons who could cope with us. I don't feel me passively

learning but I think I am cooperating to build up my English language knowledge.

"I really liked learning how some things could be showed in different ways. Language is supposed to be a subject always changing and so I think it is important to learn the lively language and the use of words nowadays in speeches."

I never had a student who put the case against coursebooks as cogently as Caterina, so I have decided to list further reasons why coursebooks are a human, cultural and linguistic disaster.

**In themselves.**

- Coursebooks distort language by simplifying input thus offering students a palpably unspeakable dialect.

- They impose massive chunks of text from outside and pay scant attention to students' own text resources.

- They con teachers and students into the half-belief that you can teach a language segment by segment in some sort of linear sequence.

- They offer students a false sense of security, making them feel they have covered this and that area. Real security lies in a student grabbing and appropriating language, not having flaccidly gone

through it in five colours.

- They lead students into systematic error production, like the over-use of the present continuous by Germans.

**The culture coursebooks create around them. The textbook encourages the following teacher behaviours:**

- conveyor-beltism

- sloth

- non-responsiveness to emergent student needs

- routinisation

- intense boredom as the years roll by

- reliance on the book in lieu of personal knowledge about the language (in the case of native speakers) and knowledge of the language (in the case of non-native speaking teachers)

- obedience to pre-set external authority

**The use of a textbook encourages students to:**

- accept mind-boggling regularity of lesson shapes

- accept as true flimsy half-rules, especially in grammar

- rely on a gruelly, spoon-fed diet and demand little of themselves

- let the presence of a distant writer stand between them and their teacher and between them and their class-mates.

**The existence of the**

**coursebook as a major pillar of language teaching encourages schools to:**

- promise each student a copy of the sacred object

- expect teachers to use it as the core of their teaching (a typical DoSutterance to teachers at the start of a course is: "Have you chosen your coursebooks yet?" - in enlightened schools, teachers are allowed to be with their group for a couple of hours before choosing the coursebooks.

**The money they make:**

Coursebooks (the ones that take off in the marketplace) are the publishers' golden geese, together with dictionaries and exam crammer books. If even a small minority of institutions and teachers agreed with the thoughts in this article sufficiently to act on them, the coursebook market leaders would very soon take action to ward off the financial threat.

A free exchange of ideas is fine, providing it does not endanger the laying capacity of golden geese. How much longer will these stifling geese mother us and smother us?

*Mario Rinvolucri is a language teacher at the Cambridge Academy and a consultant to the Pilgrims/Longman series.*

MR/LB

28 August 1992

Melanie [REDACTED]  
Managing Editor  
EFL Gazette  
[REDACTED]  
LONDON [REDACTED]

Dear Melanie

Herewith the piece on coursebooks for the December issue.

Yours

Mario

See you in Lille.

HUMANIZING LANGUAGE TEACHING  
HUMANIZING LANGUAGE TEACHING

ST Voice

The Coursebook Con or Golden Geese

Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims

ST  
Voice

2003

March

A student on a recent summer course wrote these insightful words:

Caterina

"... Also the choice of having no textbook was really right. When you have a book you are forced to follow it and often you forget what are the real needs of the students. Without any book you can work on any subject that would interest the class, sniffing different books if it is necessary. ...

This English course was, for me, a new experience. I've been four times in England in different courses, I attended English courses in Italy but they were academic courses - I mean - we had a timetable which included writing, speaking, listening exercises and nothing was left to the personal (students of teachers') imagination. On the other hand this course I have just done comprehend all the basiliar skills but everything is done with the purpose of making students collaborate with teachers.

On this course I don't see our teachers as persons who have only to check if we do our homework or if we study but as persons who could cope with us. I don't feel me passively learning but I think I am cooperating to build up my English language knowledge.

I really liked learning how some things could be showed in different ways and also how could manage to see things under different lights. Language is supposed to be a subject always changing and so I think it is important to learn the lively language and the use of words in nowadays speeches."

I have never had a student who put the case against coursebooks as cogently as Caterina and I intend to use the rest of the space I have to list further reasons why coursebooks are a human, cultural and linguistic disaster.

1. In themselves:

- They distort language by simplifying input thus offering students a palpably unspeakable dialect.
- They impose massive chunks of text from outside and pay scant attention to students' own text resources.
- They con teachers and students into the half-belief that you can teach a language segment by segment in some sort of reasonable linear sequence.
- They offer students a false sense of security, making them feel they have 'covered' this and that area. Real security lies in a student grabbing and appropriating language, not in having flaccidly gone through it in five colours.
- They lead students into systematic error production, eg. over-use of the present continuous by German speakers.

2. The culture they create around them

- The textbook encourages the following teacher behaviours:

- a) conveyor-beltism
- b) sloth
- c) non-responsiveness to emergent student needs
- d) routinisation
- e) intense boredom as the years roll by
- f) reliance on the book in lieu of personal knowledge about the language (in the case of native speakers) and knowledge of the language (in the case of non-native speaking teachers)
- g) obedience to pre-set external authority
- h) please fill this one in yourself: .....

- The use of a text book encourages students to:

- a) accept mind-boggling regularity of lesson shapes
- b) accept as true flimsy half-rules, especially in the area of grammar
- c) rely on a gruelly, spoon-fed diet and demand little of themselves
- d) let the presence of a distant writer stand between them and their teacher and between them and their class-mates.

- The existence of the coursebook as a major pillar of language teaching encourages schools to:

- a) promise each student a copy of the sacred object
- b) quietly expect their teachers to use the coursebook as the core of their teaching (a typical DOS utterance to teachers at the start of a course is "Have you chosen your coursebooks yet?" - in enlightened schools teachers are allowed to be with their group for a couple of hours before choosing the textbook for the course!

### 3. The money they make

Coursebooks (the ones that take off in the marketplace) are the publishers' golden geese, together with dictionaries and exam crammer books. If even a small minority of institutions and teachers agreed with the thoughts in this article sufficiently to act on them practically, the coursebook market leaders would very soon take action to ward off the financial threat.

A free exchange of ideas is fine, providing it does not for one split second endanger the laying capacity of golden geese. How much longer will these stifling geese other us, mother us and smother us?

Melanie: How about a goose cartoon here.

The Coursebook con or Golda Geise.

Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims

A student on ~~my~~ recent summer course wrote these insightful words:

" Also the choice of having no textbook was really right. When you have a book you are forced to follow it and often you forget what are the real needs of the students. Without any book you can work on any subject that would interest the class, sniffing different books if it is necessary. ....

This English course was, for me, a new experience. I've been four times in England in different courses, I attended English courses in Italy but they were academic courses - I mean- we had a timetable which included writing, speaking, listening exercises and nothing was left to the personal ( students of teachers' ) imagination . On the other hand this course I have just done comprehend all the basiliar skills but everything is done with the purpose of making students collaborate with teachers.

On this course I don't see our teachers as persons who have only to check if we do our homework or if we study but as persons who could cope with us. I don't feel me passively learning but I think I am cooperating to build up my English language knowledge.

I really liked learning how some things could be showed in different ways and also how could manage to see things under different lights. Language is supposed to be a subject always changing and so I think it is important to learn the lively language and the use of words in nowadays speeches. "

I have never had a student who put the case against coursebooks as cogently as Caterina and I intend to use the rest of the space I have to list further reasons why coursebooks are ~~an unmitigated~~ human, cultural and linguistic disasters:

1. In themselves:

- they distort language by 'simplifying input and thus offering students a palpably ~~unintelligible~~ *unintelligible* ~~of the language~~ *unintelligible dialect*.
- They impose massive chunks of text from outside and pay scant attention to students' own text resources.
- they con teachers and students into the half-belief that you can teach a language segment by segment is some sort of reasonable *linear* sequence.
- They offer students a false sense of security, making them feel they have 'covered ' this and that area. Real security lies in a student grabbing and appropriating language, not in

~~They lead students into systematic error producing, eg over using present continuous~~

*Please don't correct Italian errors*

*By Emma Spedant*



having flaccidly gone through it in five colours.  
 - They lead students into systematic error production, eg: over-

2. The culture they create round them *use of (re)present continuous by German speakers.*

- The textbook encourages the following teacher behaviours:
  - a) conveyorbeltism
  - b) sloth
  - c) non-responsiveness to emergent student needs
  - d) routinisation
  - e) intense boredom as the years roll by
  - f) reliance on the book in lieu of personal knowledge about the language ( in the case of **native** speakers) and knowledge of the language ( in the case of non-native speaking teachers)
  - g) **O**bedience to preset external authority
  - h) please fill this <sup>one</sup> in yourself: .....

- The use of a text book encourages students to
  - a) accept mind-boggling regularity of lesson ~~time~~ shapes
  - b) accept as true flimsy half-rules, especially in the area of grammar
  - c) rely on a gruelly, spoon-fed diet and demand little of themselves
  - d) ~~lose~~ <sup>let</sup> the <sup>presence</sup> of a distant writer stand between them and their teacher and between them and their class-mates

- the existence of the coursebook as a major pillar of language teaching encourages schools to
  - promise each student a copy of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> sacred object
  - quietly expect their teachers to use the coursebook as the core of their teaching ( a typical DOS utterance <sup>to teachers</sup> at the start of a course is " Have you chosen your coursebooks yet? " - in enlightened schools teacher are allowed to be with their group for a couple of hours before choosing the textbook for the course! )

3. The money they make

Coursebooks ( the ones that take off in the marketplace ) ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> the publishers' golden geese, together with dictionaries and exam crammer books. If even a small minority of institutions and teachers agreed with the thoughts in this article sufficiently to act on them practically the coursebook market leaders would very soon take action to ward off the financial threat.



3.

A free exchange of ideas is fine providing it does not for one split second endanger the laying capacity of golden geese.

How much longer will these stifling geese ~~smother us?~~

Relevance: how about a goose cartoon here.

other us, mother us, <sup>and</sup> smother us?

HLL: DIGITAL Teaching  
Humanizing Language