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AN EVALUATION OF ENGLISH COURSEBOOKS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: Evaluating two English coursebooks used at Wima Kids English course, this study aims at finding out whether Hip Hip Hooray and Backpack fulfill the objectives of teaching English at Wima Kids and whether they are designed according to the principles of TEYL. Furthermore, in what aspects Hip Hip Hooray could be complemented with the materials in Backpack. The instruments used in this study were the researchers themselves equipped with an Evaluation Checklist by Bilash (2009) and in-depth interviews with some teachers who have used those two books in their classes. Using the check list, it was found out that Hip Hip Hooray and Backpack are in accordance with the objective of teaching English at Wima Kids, which is to help learners to be able to use English for communication, especially orally. The two series also fulfill the principles of TEYL. Further, the last finding revealed that Backpack can supplement Hip Hip Hooray series in language content, topic content, teaching tips and techniques, and grammar activities.

Keywords: young learners, coursebook, coursebook evaluation

Abstrak: Dengan mengevaluasi dan menganalisa dua buku bahan ajar di lembaga kursus bahasa Inggris anak, WIMA Kids, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah buku Hip Hip Hooray dan Backpack memenuhi tujuan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di lembaga tersebut dan apakah sesuai dengan prinsip pembelajaran bahasa Inggris untuk *young learners*, serta mencari tahu bagian buku Backpack yang bisa digunakan untuk melengkapi materi Hip Hip Hooray. Instrumen penelitian ini adalah peneliti yang menggunakan ceklis evaluasi dari Bilash (2009) dan juga wawancara mendalam dengan beberapa guru yang telah menggunakan kedua buku tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa buku Hip Hip Hooray sudah sesuai dengan tujuan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di WIMA Kids, yang bertujuan membantu siswa menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam berkomunikasi secara lisan. Selain itu, kedua buku tersebut juga memenuhi prinsip-prinsip pengajaran untuk *young learners*. Buku Backpack dapat melengkapi buku Hip Hip Hooray dalam bahasa, topik, kiat-kiat dan teknik mengajar serta jenis kegiatan tata bahasa.

Kata-kata kunci: *young learners*, buku ajar, evaluasi buku ajar

In recent years there has been a tremendous increase in the number of preschools (Play Group and Kindergarten) and Elementary Schools with the label National Plus or Semi International Schools. In their competition to get a lot of students, those schools offer curriculums especially designed to give an added value to their graduates, especially in the ability to

communicate in English. As a result there was a huge market for English coursebooks provided by various publishers.

As can be predicted, the schools tried to get a hold on a Course book from foreign publishers, such as Cambridge, Oxford, Pearson, just to name a few. The teachers in school do not have any other choice, than to use a particular book in class decided by the school. After using the book for some time the teachers found out that the book is not in accordance to the syllabus of the school or it does not completely fulfilled their needs.

In fact, due to the wide choice of English coursebooks available, the teachers have a good chance to choose the book most appropriate for the curriculum of the school as well as for their students. However, as what has been observed by the writers, the teachers do not know how to evaluate a coursebook. Thus, there is an urgent need for teachers, principals, and head of courses to have the ability to choose the most suitable coursebook for their students. If they are unable to choose the right book for the school or course, then the English teaching and learning process cannot have optimum result.

The English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University (WMCUS) has an English course, called Wima Kids, for children and teenagers. This course, which was established in the year of 2000, has been using a coursebook named *Hip Hip Hooray* since December 2011. These series are used starting from Preschool 2 until Basic 4.

It has been observed that the instructors of Wima Kids often try to find supplementary materials from other sources especially the internet. Recently, the English Department has bought a new series called *Backpack*, which also consists of six Student books and six Workbooks. This new series, which is also used by some other schools in Surabaya, is available at the Self Access Center of the English Department of WMCUS. Therefore the books were evaluated in three aspects—(1) whether *Hip-Hip Hooray* and *Backpack* are in accordance to the objectives of teaching English at Wima Kids; (2) whether *Hip Hip Hooray* and *Backpack* are designed according to the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners; and (3) in what aspects *Hip Hip Hooray* coursebook can be supplemented with the materials in *Backpack*.

THE PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

There are many principles of teaching English to young learners proposed by different experts in the field. McCloskey (2002) proposed seven principles as follows: (1) Offer learners enjoyable, active roles in the learning experience because children learn best when they enjoy an activity; (2) Help students develop and practice language through collaboration; (3) Use multi-dimensional, thematically organized activities; (4) Provide comprehensible input with scaffolding. This is the combination between Krashen's and Bruner's ideas; (5) Integrate language with content; (6) Validate and integrate home language and culture; and (7) Provide clear goals and feedback on performance.

Meanwhile, Brewster (2007) also proposed some principles as follows: (1) Considering children's excellence to observe something and grasp meaning in their L1 from various sources, teachers can help them draw on the skill in English by providing contextualized language with visual support; (2) As children learn L1 words through repetitions, incorporating repetition in teaching them English is important; (3) As children like to try to work out grammar rules for themselves in L1, teachers can expose to them contextualized and motivating English input to work with; (4) Based on children's skill in guessing and predicting, teachers can draw on these skills as part of 'learning to learn'; (5) As children like

Teachability and Flexibility

- 39 The book provides sufficient support, such as CDs, cassettes, DVD, flashcards, posters to help students get a clear input
- 40 The book is suitable for mixed ability classes and classes of different sizes
- 41 The book provides opportunities to localize and personalize activities
- 42 The book caters for different preferred learning styles (VAK)
- 43 The teacher still has to supplement the coursebook with materials from other sources

Assessment

- 44 The book provides adequate opportunities for learner assessment
- 45 Adequate assessment materials such as progress tests are included or easily obtained

Practical considerations

- 46 The book is durable
- 47 The book is easily available in the bookstores
- 48 **The book is affordable for the parents to buy**

[adapted from Dickinson, Pinter, and Brewster (2007)]

Appendix 3: Interview questions for the teachers

These are the main questions of the interview and other questions will be added based on the results of the Evaluation Checklist.

1. Does the methodology in the book encourage the students to be active in the classroom?
2. Do the activities motivate students to communicate in English especially orally?
3. Is the vocabulary suitable for the students' levels?
4. Does *Hip Hip Hooray* need to be supplemented with materials from other sources?
5. In what aspects does *Hip Hip Hooray* mostly need to be modified or supplemented?