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The revision of an existing English language textbook to meet the demands of outcomes-based education

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Chapter 4

New Horizons – History and Evaluation

"...Instead of being forced to use one prescribed textbook, teachers are now being asked to select appropriate material from a wide range of approved books and kits." (Potenza 1998: 56)

The textbook that is the focus of the research was the first book in a series catering for junior secondary school through to matric. Written by Dick Dawson, the book is 144 pages long, with black and white line drawings as the predominant illustrations, and takes a communicative approach to language teaching. It makes some effort to be cross-curricular in nature and was touted at the time of publication as "a modern, integrated English course with a strong emphasis on the oral and functional approach to English learning." [xv]

The activities in the textbook include stories, structured dialogues, word games, dictionary tasks, quizzes, research projects and language activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing. Some of the functions of language covered include requesting information, asking for help, making a complaint, clarifying a point of view, explaining information clearly, taking part in an interview, leading a debate, showing approval and disapproval. Types of texts used

include poetry, short fictional extracts, the Highway Code, brochures, airline timetables, reference texts, signs, symbols, charts, and maps and the language of science and mathematics. Practice in written language is given through such activities as preparing official and informal letters, sending telegrams, writing reports, and writing compositions. Study skills covered include how to scan a text, to read for detail, to take notes, to choose important information or summarise and to select and compare information. There are ten lessons for each of the sixteen units of the book; enough, claimed the author and publisher, for about two weeks of work.

Generally the use of headings is confusing with up to 19 different headings throughout the textbook. Within the units, some headings are repeated up to four times and some of the sub-headings appear only once in the book. Headings include:

- Reading and study skills
- Study skills
- Comprehension skills
- Comprehension and study skills
- Communication skills
- Language skills
- Reading and comprehension
- Oral composition
- Writing skills

- Literacy skills
- Reference skills
- Listening skills
- Research skills
- The project
- Reading and talking skills
- Reading and comprehensive skills
- Poetry
- Reading and study skills

In many instances the headings are inaccurate, for example units that begin with the heading "Reading and study skills" sometimes teach no study skills at all. While the reading passages are often African in nature, they are rarely typical of South Africa, a reflection of the book's market (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Kenya in addition to the former homelands of South Africa).

While the text is quite cross-curricular, the cross-curricular items are not well integrated and the book has a strong bias toward rural topics, such as agriculture and fishing. Human and social sciences, technology and arts and culture could be brought in quite easily by changing reading extracts.

Throughout the text great emphasis is placed on reading comprehension and traditional comprehension questions are the mainstay of the exercises. For example, unit 1 has an extract about Lake Kariba and the types of fish that are found there. The comprehension questions do not require learners to do anything more than regurgitate what they have read, for example where does Alex Sibanda live?, What kind of work does he do?, What does his boat look like?, How big is the kapenta fish? Questions should be made more purposeful and open-ended to encourage lively discussion. The choice of news articles as extracts could facilitate more topical, exciting and learner-focused activities. Life-related discussion questions from lower to higher order that challenge learners and encourage creative responses should be included in units where possible to allow learners to practice meaningful and purposeful communication and to develop critical thinking and evaluation skills.

A serious problem exists in the sections on communication skills. These exercises seem to use elision exercises in an attempt to encourage learners to develop a more first language and fluent manner of speaking; however, these particular exercises are unlikely to be very helpful. *Pronunciation,* a textbook by Dalton and Seidlhofer, OUP, 1994, provides examples of elision exercises using words such as "whajya",

"howja", "whachya", "didya", "doya", "wanna", "gotcha", and "whereja", but they do not string entire sentences together. These exercises are more likely to simply confuse learners who are incapable of picking out "reminding" in a sentence like *ThanksforremindingmeBye* or "to" in *Ijustwantedtoconfirmourappointmentfortomorrow*. They should be revised or replaced with other more meaningful and purposeful speaking exercises. See the figure below for an example from Unit 3 of the original textbook.

Figure 4 Exercise 1, Activity 5 from Unit 3 from New Horizons.

5 Communication skills Ⓣ
Speaking fluently
A speech of thanks

Exercise 1
Work in pairs. Practise saying the following sentences with your partner. Say the groups of words together to practise your fluency, speed and rhythm.

We're very grateful to you for coming to speak to us.
We'reverygratefultoyou forcomingtospeaktous.

I'd like to study in the United States because life there will be so different
I'dliketostudyintheUnitedStates becauselifethere willbesodifferent.

It will be a tremendous experience to study in your country.
Itwillbeatremendousexperience tostudy inyourcountry.

Exercise 2 A speech of thanks
Now give your speech of thanks to Mr Carter and Mr Newman. Include reasons why you would like to win a scholarship to the United States.

There is a good mix of individual, pair and group work throughout the book and an emphasis is placed on skills

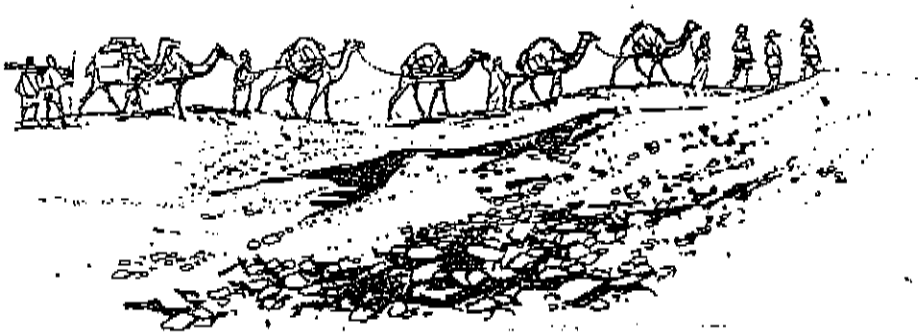
development; however, more meaningful and purposeful speaking opportunities must be included in the pair and group work exercises to render this textbook truly communicative in approach. Rather than pairs of learners filling in the answers to pre-set statements or practising a predetermined dialogue, a more interesting and useful exercise would have them creating questions for or an original dialogue with each other that they could share with the rest of the class.

The black and white line drawings in the textbook are very dated and overall do little to enhance the text. Most of the illustrations seem to have been intended merely to break up chunks of text. There seems to have been little effort made to incorporate the art into the text and, in addition, the layout and design of the pages do not facilitate text accessibility. New artwork throughout the textbook would have to be commissioned and greater effort made to ensure that the illustrations help learners to develop cultural, visual, media and critical literacies by using a variety of abstract as well as more realistic and authentic artwork. A fresher, more accessible design is imperative. The original artwork is not representative of South African demographics, a change that is critical in order for all learners to relate to it. (See the figure below for an example of artwork from the original textbook.) A significant problem is the gender-bias that is a characteristic of the

textbook as a whole, not simply the artwork. Females feature in only half a dozen of the illustrations and play a prominent role in only a few of the extracts.

Figures 5a, b and c Examples of the artwork from New Horizons

5a



5b



5c



Generally the units in this textbook seem quite short compared to other language teaching textbooks at a similar level, but exercises could be expanded depending on the initiative of the teacher. An enrichment activity or project added to the end of each unit could be used by teachers as an optional exercise for those learners who learn faster or as assessment projects for learner portfolios.

A section should be included in the Introduction which directs learners to the reference sections in the back of the textbook which include a sample letter in block form, reference tables for tenses, examples of direct and indirect speech, auxiliary verbs, forms of the passive, pronouns and different kinds of nouns, punctuation rules and question tags, and a list of common irregular verbs. These appendices should be retained, as they could be very helpful to learners in large classes who may not have sufficient access to teacher attention or take more time to absorb information. If extent and production costs allowed, the reference sections could be expanded to include other types of correspondence and a frame for classroom note taking. (See the appendix for facsimiles of the reference pages from the original textbook.)

A major flaw in the original textbook is that extracts and other texts used are not properly credited so that the original authors can not be acknowledged, even for the purposes of this analysis. For a revision, one of the most important tasks of the editor would be to draw up a permission brief and ensure that all borrowed material was properly acknowledged on the acknowledgement page.

Many of the elements of the textbook that should be changed occur repeatedly throughout the units. To avoid repetition, the units requiring the most change are discussed in more detail, with other units briefly summarised in terms of necessary changes. A brief unit by unit analysis of the textbook follows:

Unit 1 – Activities that should be changed in this unit include amongst others:

- Reading and study skills passage
- Written work under Activity 2
- Communication skills
- Oral composition

Many of the other activities should be discarded completely or redesigned but detailed attention will be focused on the four mentioned above.

The Reading and study skills passage should be changed from the extract about Lake Kariba to something more South African. Unless the change of extracts is one related to fishing or boats, the short passage under language skills should also be changed. A sea story about the Cape or a news article about a ship sinking would be appropriate choices for the extract and the passage. Changing the passages would require substantial rewriting of the exercises.

The written work under Activity 2 should be a more creative exercise rather than learners merely copying answers to the Study skills context work section into their exercise books. Instead learners could write their own fictional account of an activity that they enjoy or summarise the Reading and study skills extract using the vocabulary words that were highlighted.

Both the communications work and the oral composition of Activities 4 and 8 should allow learners to respond creatively rather than make scripted responses. They could interview a fellow learner or present an oral report to the whole class on a topic related to the theme.

Under the reading and comprehension section, a facsimile of a real dictionary could aid the learner in acquiring dictionary skills. This sort of artwork could be used throughout the book where dictionary skills are taught.

Under the writing skill exercise, the paragraph writing exercise could be more directly related to the learners' everyday experience and made more purposeful in nature. More effort could be made to make the unit cross-curricular, perhaps incorporating natural science and/or technology.

Unit 2 – Activities in this unit that should be changed include amongst others:

- Reading and study skills
- Comprehension questions

Once again the reading passage under "Reading and study skills" should be replaced. This unit, as does unit 1, uses an extract on Lake Kariba and a pursuit that is more rural in nature. Given that many schools are in peri-urban areas, more attention must be paid to making the material more representative of and relevant to all grade 10 learners, not just those in rural areas.

As in unit 1, the comprehension questions are very traditional and answers come directly from the text. Questions should take a critical language awareness approach while still testing comprehension. Such an approach to questions tests not only textual comprehension but helps learners to examine texts critically, to analyse and question. At this level, learners should be doing these things as a preparation for later studies; thus answers should require a paragraph rather than a one-word answer. A critical language awareness approach coupled with the communicative language approach is an excellent way to create discussions that are wider and more closely related to

learners' own experience and their daily lives as well as more purposeful and meaningful.

Unit 3 – The Reading and study skills section of this unit is centred on applying for a scholarship. At this level, filling in such a form is an excellent skill to acquire, but a critical look at advertising and advertisements could be used in this section instead and the skill of filling in an application form could be used later in the unit. Critical language awareness is an important element of the Learning Area and such a focus on advertisements could also bring in an element of life orientation and arts and culture.

The general comments about the communication skill exercises apply to this unit. In addition, the comprehension skill exercises' questions are not likely to inspire interest or excitement in today's grade 10 learners.

Unit 4 – This unit features another reading extract, not properly acknowledged and with no indication of what larger text it was extracted from, that is a rural setting outside South Africa. A more urban-based focus should be introduced in this unit to balance the rural slant of the first two units. The section on using a telephone directory should be expanded to include an activity using the Yellow Pages or a business directory.

Unit 5 – This unit uses another extract set in a rural area and dealing with farming, but the setting is South Africa. However, this is one unit in which the artwork is used to good effect as learners are asked to make inferences about what has happened from what they see in the illustrations. This sort of integration of artwork and exercises should be used throughout the book where possible.

Unit 6 – This unit focuses on the Highway Code, which would have to be checked to ensure that the information is still factual and relevant. The communication function practised is asking for information and the exercise designed for it is a scripted text about what documents one needs before one may drive a car. As a rule, many of the communication exercises throughout the textbook use scripted responses. Learners should be given more opportunities to be creative in their responses and to use communication in ways that are relevant to their everyday lives. In this instance, pairs could take turns talking about a trip they took or individual learners could give talks to the class about places of interest in their locale to visit.

One of the exercises involves using a distance table, which is a good opportunity to show learners that mathematics and mathematical sciences can be useful in daily life. It also gives

the teacher the chance to teach the learners some cross-curricular language that relates to the Mathematical Literacy and Mathematical Sciences Learning Area.

Two of the writing exercises are friendly letter writing and creating a brochure. Learners at this level should be given more autonomy in terms of such activities and be permitted to allow their creativity to flow.

Unit 7 – The extract in this unit, "Halloran's Greed", from a longer story called "A Bushman's Paradise" by Fred C. Cornell, is a prime opportunity to bring in the use of critical language awareness and how language reflects culture, how naming practices differ and what a particular "naming" says about how a culture values that person or thing. The exercises must be readjusted toward such an approach; otherwise the extract and the language used could be very offensive to learners. Terms like Hottentot and bushman are used in the extract in ways that are no longer acceptable.

Unit 8 – The song in the unit upon which some of the exercises are based is outdated and must be replaced by something more contemporary, perhaps a rap song from South Africa's Cape Town based Prophets of da City or a popular overseas rap artist like Tupac. If the local group is used, the song could lend itself

to a discussion of drugs or gangsterism in the Cape Flats and elsewhere.

The article on singing star Yvonne Chaka Chaka is also outdated and should be replaced by one to which learners could more easily relate, perhaps Twins, Boom Shaka, Arthur or one of the other popular kwaito groups.

This unit also contains a dictionary exercise that would benefit from artwork that is a facsimile of a page from a dictionary.

Unit 9 – The extract on World War II should be replaced by an article on a more recent conflict, perhaps something relating to Rwanda or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Open-ended discussion questions could be included, for example questions about war, refugees, and land mines, etc.

The difference between indirect and direct speech and prepositions are taught in this unit, with speech from the extract providing the frames for changing direct to indirect speech and a map as the vehicle for teaching prepositions. Both these exercises are rather ordinary but serve the purpose intended.

Retaining the map work would be an opportunity to bring in both human and social sciences and natural sciences. Learners

could be asked to discuss why people use maps and to investigate what kind of maps there are. Directions such as north, south, east and west could be brought into the vocabulary exercise and other activities could be devised, such as having learners create different kinds of maps of their communities or of the school grounds.

Unit 10 – This is a cross-curricular unit that brings in agriculture again, another instance of a rural bias in this text; however, the context is textiles we grow for our clothing The cross-curricular nature of the book could be expanded by using a technology, science or human and social sciences topic, for example the materials that we use to make clothing (nylon, spandex, linen, polyester, cotton, etc.) or textile making machines. Man-made materials like vinyl are particularly prevalent now in shoes, bags, etc. This could be exploited either in additional reading assignments in the unit or in questions that are asked. A mini research project on one of these topics could be used as an enrichment activity.

Unit 11 – The extract in this unit also lends itself to a critical language awareness approach. The use of the word "cripple" could be used to prompt a discussion about terminology that is acceptable or offensive and unacceptable or about what it means to be disabled. Discussion questions could focus on who has a

friend or family member who has some kind of disability. How do we treat people with disabilities? Are disabled people useless or can they contribute to the family? Etc.

The reading and comprehension questions could be used to raise discussions about truth and friendship and could be used to make the whole unit more learner-centred and life-related.

The oral composition exercise in this unit is too prescriptive. The exercise should be changed to give learners more leeway and make the whole thing more purposeful. The role-plays should focus more on what the characters could have done and how else they might have handled the situation.

Unit 12 – This is another cross-curricular unit that has a focus on science and technology and health. The exercises relating to primus stoves could bring in safety aspects regarding the use of primus stoves and the proper handling and storing of such liquids as methylated spirits and paraffin.

As is the case throughout the text, comprehension skill questions are closed, with little scope for discussion, alternative answers, or the integration of skills.

Unit 13 – The reading extract in this unit about a rainmaker could be changed to a news article on the Thulamela dig or South Africa's own Rain Queen and some discussion questions could be added that bring in history and arts and culture. How do we find out about people who lived many years ago? Why is it so important to study other cultures and people and their history? These and other questions could prompt an interesting class discussion. The cross-curricular nature of the book could then expand to include more than science, agriculture and health. If the reading and comprehension skills passages changes, the reading and study skills passage should change to a related topic. In fact, the unit would have to be completely rewritten but would then be more topical.

Unit 14 – This unit focuses on using an encyclopaedia and has extracts about leopards and lions and various snakes. This unit could be expanded into a unit on national parks and/or endangered species and/or dangerous and helpful animals.

The comparative and superlative forms of adjectives are taught but many of the examples do not relate to the animals that are highlighted in the encyclopaedia work. Examples of the differences in sizes and weight of various kinds of animals could be used to provide practice in comparatives and

superlatives and could also be used to bring in mathematics to the text.

Generally, using the theme of the extract upon which to base the other exercises would seem to be a way to consolidate the concepts embedded in the theme and to provide more meaningful practice for learners when using their communication and writing skills. This notion should be carried through all the units of the textbook.

Unit 15 – The reading and comprehension extract about Pule's unlucky day lends itself to a discussion about such things as honesty, what alternatives one might have in a desperate situation, etc. The oral composition exercise could incorporate some of these ideas, rather than simply recreating the story through dramatisation.

Unit 16 - The telegram form and the airline timetable in this unit in the continuation of Pule's story must be updated to reflect ones currently in use. The unit could be expanded to include a bus or train schedule and possibly an e-mail message for well-resourced schools that have access to computers.

Unit 16 seems to be the one unit that allows more scope for learner creativity and provides more leeway in the use of

creativity in the writing skill exercise that ends the unit and the book.

The preceding general evaluation was the first step in preparing for the revisions necessary to attempt to meet the philosophical and theoretical demands of OBE. In the next chapter, the changes that were required to ensure that the critical cross-curricular and specific outcomes are reflected in the text will be explained.