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INTRODUCTION

ENGLISH NEXT: A new approach

In recent years, there have been many fundamental developments in what we know about how people acquire a second or foreign language. Research suggests that second or foreign language acquisition is much more than simply learning linguistic items, but rather more an holistic, organic process at the centre of which stands the learner. The most important of these developments are the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages** and the **European Language Portfolio**, the **lexical approach**, the **task-based approach** and an approach which addresses **multiple intelligences and different individual learning styles**. These developments have necessarily had wide-ranging implications for the way learners learn and teachers teach, posing new challenges and placing high demands on the way any modern language course must be designed and implemented.

The ENGLISH NEXT series has been developed to take full account of the most important implications of the latest research into second and foreign language acquisition and to combine and implement these methodological developments to achieve a best practice approach. The principles upon which the ENGLISH NEXT concept is based can be summarised thus:

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

- The most important didactic implications are:
- tasks lie at the centre of the learning process;
 - learners need to develop learning strategies and compensation strategies;
 - a new teacher/learner relationship is required – the teacher becomes more of an initiator and mediator and the learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning process;
 - the fostering of learner autonomy;
 - the importance of learner's self-reflection and self-evaluation according to the can-do statements of the CEFR level descriptors.

The European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio has been developed to help learners plan, organise and improve their individual language learning process.

It also helps learners evaluate themselves and set themselves personal goals. It consists of the following three parts:

- a *Language Biography*, which helps learners to reflect on what they can already do, what they want to learn further and how they want to continue learning;
- a *Language Passport*, which is a record of language skills, qualifications and experience. It lists the languages that learners have some competence in and allows them to document their knowledge and skills through a résumé of language learning and intercultural experiences and certificates and diplomas;
- a *Dossier*, in which learners can collect documents which are of particular interest to them and pieces of work which they have produced as examples of their personal language achievements and competence.

Although learners will initially require a certain amount of guidance and support in creating and developing their personal Portfolios, the ultimate goal is that their Portfolios become their own "property" which they continue to revise and add to independently, leading to true learner autonomy.

A lexical approach

A lexical approach implies that:

- language is an organic whole which must be taught and learnt as such;
- language can more effectively be acquired through carefully selected, high frequency lexical "chunks" rather than isolated components;
- learners need to acquire "natural language" rather than "textbook language".

A task-based approach

Tasks are central when acquiring a second or foreign language because:

- learners acquire language more effectively and are more highly motivated when they are required to select from the range of language available to them to complete an authentic task with a real outcome, e.g. buying a train ticket;
- in tasks, learners primarily focus on *meaning* and *communication*.

Multiple intelligences and different individual learning styles

- individual learners have individual learning styles

– learning strategies and compensation strategies must be fostered and developed.

The ENGLISH NEXT concept combines all of these new lines of research to produce a fresh and holistic approach to learning English for a new generation of language course which ensures learner success.

The ENGLISH NEXT series

ENGLISH NEXT is an innovative, communicative course for adult learners of English covering the levels A1 (elementary level) to B1 of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*. The ENGLISH NEXT series meets the individual needs of learners and addresses the demands of the *CEFR* in an interesting and motivating way.

The ENGLISH NEXT philosophy

The ENGLISH NEXT concept is based on the following four central tenets:

1. *Relevance – giving learners the language they need*

ENGLISH NEXT takes full account of the fact that English is a *lingua franca* spoken not only by native speakers, but also used by non-native speakers to communicate. It exposes learners to “natural language”, that is, language as it is spoken in a wide variety of contexts around the world. To achieve this, it is therefore of vital importance that learners experience a wide range of high-frequency vocabulary, phrases and grammatical structures right from the very beginning of their learning careers.

The vocabulary of the ENGLISH NEXT series reflects and uses the *Bloomsbury Corpus of World English*, a language corpus which lists words with the frequency at which they occur in the language. In the ENGLISH NEXT series, the Student’s Book includes an alphabetical list of words which appear in the units with their frequency, thus a 1-star word appears in the 5001-7500 most frequent words, a 2-star word appears in the 2501-5000 most frequent words, and a 3-star word appears in the 2500 most frequent words.

Following the central principle of the lexical approach, vocabulary and phrases are introduced and practised in useful “chunks”. Similarly, ENGLISH NEXT presents grammatical items as “spoken

grammar”, that is, items of grammar are not broken down into isolated units, but introduced in natural and authentic contexts and in a truly communicative way. The advantage is that learners are no longer confused by abstract grammatical rules, but learn grammar as part of language as a whole. This also means that learners no longer “speak like a coursebook”, but acquire language as it is used in real life.

Furthermore, learners encounter language in a variety of authentic contexts and are encouraged to use the language they acquire in realistic tasks with real outcomes. This not only increases learner motivation and fosters a sense of real achievement, but also helps learners to become autonomous language users in the spirit of the *CEFR*.

2. *Credibility – turning “I can’t” into “I can”*

The criteria of the *CEFR* lie at the heart of the ENGLISH NEXT philosophy and are actively implemented. The learner is placed at the centre of his/her learning, and learner autonomy and the personalisation of learning are fostered right from the start.

An entire page at the end of each unit, entitled *Exploring my progress* and *Exploring my learning*, contains can-do statements and learning/compensation strategies. The can-do statements encourage the learner actively to reflect upon and evaluate his/her learning progress. However, ENGLISH NEXT does not merely require learners to tick boxes – the series uses a system of cross-referencing which takes learners back to the parts of the unit where the item was introduced and practised for revision, and forward to the relevant *Homestudy* section and further online Internet activities for extra practice. In this way, ENGLISH NEXT supports the learner at every step of the way to help the learner turn “can’t do” into “can do”.

The learning/compensation strategies are fully integrated in authentic contexts within the units themselves. Cross-references beside specific unit activities take the learner to the *Exploring my learning* sections where they are provided with further practical learning tips and strategies which cater for different types of learner and different personal learning styles. ENGLISH NEXT also provides learners with useful information and helpful suggestions in the *Companion* booklet and on its website about how learners can create their

own *European Language Portfolio* to plan their learning and document their progress.

In this way, ENGLISH NEXT provides a wide range of support to help learners achieve their individual language-learning goals and implements the central principles of the *CEFR* clearly and actively.

3. Clarity – transparency at every step of the learning process

A clear structure and user-friendly layout is a must for any modern coursebook to guarantee transparency at every step of the learning process. To this end, the structure and layout of the ENGLISH NEXT **Student's Books** have been designed to be clear, logical and user-friendly.

The overall structure follows a clearly-defined pattern:

- Each different section of the **Student's Book** is colour-coded so as to be immediately recognisable - green for the core units and *Plus* sections, blue for the *Exploring* pages, orange for the *Consolidation* units, purple for the *Homestudy* sections and yellow for the *Reading Club* - the *Reading Club*, *Plus* and *Homestudy* sections are collected together at the back of the book.

The structure of the different sections of the **Student's Book** is equally well-defined:

- Each core unit represents approximately 180 minutes teaching and covers a unifying topic or theme, which is organised into 4 Aspects. Each *Plus* section has 1-2 further Aspects, each *Consolidation* section consists of two pages, and there are three pages for each *Homestudy* section.

The left-hand margin contains cross-reference links to *Homestudy* activities for further practice and to the *Exploring learning* page. In the same margin, the *@work* symbol beside an activity signals English which is also used in work situations and the globe symbol marks an activity which involves reflection on cultural phenomena.

Focus on... boxes are integrated into each unit to highlight specific aspects of the English language – *Focus on spoken English* highlights typical aspects of the spoken language, *Focus on grammar* draws attention to important grammar items, *Focus on vocabulary* centres on important vocabulary aspects.

Equally, the **Teacher's Guide** provides easy-to-follow, step-by-step guidance for using the ENGLISH NEXT coursebooks in the classroom.

The transparency of the ENGLISH NEXT structure further supports learning success and facilitates teaching at every step of the way.

4. Flexibility – meeting learners' and teachers' individual needs

Learners have a wide variety of personal reasons and aims for learning English. ENGLISH NEXT places the learner at the centre of his/her own learning process with a wealth of material which caters to his/her individual needs and interests.

The ENGLISH NEXT series covers the levels from A1 to B1 and provides educational institutions with the flexibility to design and offer a wider range of courses of different types and lengths, for example, courses for beginners, for less able or slower learners and for more able or faster learners, and for intensive courses. At the same time, having shorter "steps" makes it easier for learners of different abilities and backgrounds to join a course at any point. Learners can, therefore, also be secure in the knowledge that when they buy the coursebook, they will use the whole of it, rather than only part of it.

The flexibility of ENGLISH NEXT is achieved in a large number of ways. The basis is the core units in the **Student's Book**, then, for example, the *Plus* sections can be used to extend the duration of a course. Alternatively, they also provide extra material for more able learners who complete the core unit material more quickly. The *Reading Club* also provides material for faster learners. The *Plus* sections can also be used to help less able learners who may require more practice. Further practice material for learners is available on the CD-ROM and on the Internet at the ENGLISH NEXT website, (www.hueber.de/next). This means that learners can always find further practice material to aid their learning progress. This again fosters learner autonomy and ensures learners' success.