

FINAL DISSERTATION

An Analysis of the Writing Skill in English Primary Education Coursebooks in Catalonia. How has it evolved over the past 30 years?

Catrin SAMSON ESTAPÉ

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Tutor: Mariona Casas

Early Childhood Education and Primary School Teaching, majoring in English

Faculty of Education, Translation and Humanities

University of Vic – Central University of Catalonia

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyse how the writing skill is worked on in English coursebooks in the Catalan context. We aimed to see how this skill was presented over the last 30 years, since English was first introduced as the foreign language children learn at school in Catalonia. The research was carried out through the analysis of three English coursebooks of Macmillan Publishers, from three different periods (1997, 2005 and 2014). The information obtained from the coursebooks (the Pupil's Book, the Activity Book and the Teacher's Book) was compared with the state school foreign language curriculum at the time. The data collected was analysed in order to identify which types of writing activity the coursebooks included, the number of activities compared to the other three skills (speaking, listening and reading) and the evolution of writing work since English became the principal foreign language studied at primary school.

Key words: coursebook, primary education, writing skill, English as a foreign language (EFL), curriculum

Resum

El propòsit d'aquest article és analitzar com es treballa la destresa d'escriptura en els llibres d'anglès en el context català. Volem veure com s'ha presentat durant els darrers 30 anys, des que l'anglès es va convertir en la Llengua Estrangera que les criatures aprenien a les escoles de Catalunya. La investigació s'ha dut a terme mitjançant l'anàlisi de tres llibres d'anglès de Macmillan Publishers, de tres períodes diferents (1997, 2005 i 2014). La informació obtinguda dels llibres de text (Pupil's Book, Activity Book i Teacher's Book) s'ha contrastat amb el currículum de la seva època. Les dades recollides s'han analitzat per identificar quins tipus d'activitats d'escriptura presenten els llibres de text, la quantitat d'activitats en contrast amb les altres tres habilitats (parlar, escoltar i llegir) i l'evolució de com l'escriptura es tractava quan l'anglès va començar a incloure com a llengua estrangera i com és la situació avui dia.

Paraules clau: llibre de text, educació primària, escriptura, anglès com a llengua estrangera (EFL), currículum

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es analizar cómo se trabaja la habilidad de escritura en los libros de inglés en el contexto catalán. El objetivo es ver cómo se presentó en los últimos 30 años, desde que el inglés se presentó como la principal lengua extranjera que los infantes aprendían en las escuelas de Cataluña. La investigación se ha llevado a cabo a través del análisis de tres libros de inglés de Macmillan Publishers, de tres períodos diferentes (1997, 2005 y 2014). La información obtenida de los libros de texto (Pupil's Book, Activity Book y Teacher's Book) se ha contrastado con el currículo de su época. Los datos recopilados se han analizado para identificar qué tipos de actividades de escritura presentan los libros, la cantidad de actividades en contraste con las otras tres habilidades (hablar, escuchar y leer) y la evolución de cómo se trataba la escritura cuando el inglés entró como lengua extranjera de aprendizaje y cómo es hoy en día.

Palabras clave: libro de texto, educación primaria, escritura, inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), currículo

1. Introduction

English is the most common foreign language that European children learn at school. It is the most widespread language in the world and not just because of the number of people that speak it, but because of what it is used for. It is the major language for news and communication, business and government and it is used as an official language in many regions.

Nonetheless, learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) was rare in Catalonia until recently. Previously, French was the most common foreign language in schools, for geographical and historical reasons. As Criado and Sánchez (2009) mention, around the 1970s Spain opened up to Europe and experienced significant economic growth, encouraging a focus on English, which started to replace French as the principal foreign language taught in schools. As Richards and Rodgers (2014) mention, crucial social events and processes, such as the Second World War, increasing migration, globalisation, the internet and the global spread of English have gone hand in hand. Since 1998 all primary schools in the European Union have been required to teach at least one foreign language and, if possible, introduce a second one.

The teaching of English has evolved since it was first introduced as a foreign language in Catalan schools. Methods and approaches constantly change as the teaching and learning process has to keep up with ongoing changes in society. As methodologies have changed, coursebooks have changed too. To begin with, the children only had their coursebooks and the teachers were the source of all knowledge. Nowadays, due to technological advances, as Cunningsworth (1995) mentions, students are in contact with television, the internet, computer games, etc., so they have become more sophisticated in what they expect from coursebooks. Furthermore, children can stay in contact with English without the need for a teacher or a coursebook, all of which makes the teacher's job more challenging.

Cunningsworth mentions how coursebooks are a resource for material, ideas and activities, a reference for students and a support for teachers: “(...) the coursebook is there to aid students and teachers in numerous ways but it is not there to dictate a rigid predetermined method by which the language shall be taught and learnt” (1995, p.109).

In the early days in Catalonia, the only materials were the Teacher's Book, the Pupil's Book and the Activity Book. Nowadays, teachers and students have much more material available. The three books mentioned are still the core items, but they are now commonly supplemented by learning journals, online courses, extra books to practice the four main skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), CDs and DVDs, flashcards, extra activities and tests, etc.

As our aim is to analyse the evolution of writing skill instruction, we have focused on the main books that most schools use, which are generally considered the cornerstone of the teaching and learning process: the Pupil's Book and the Activity Book. It is common to find that the Pupil's Book has activities for oral expression and comprehension in class and the Activity Book has extra writing activities.¹

Teachers also have their own material. Most likely they have an annotated edition of the Pupil's Book and an Activity Book with solutions to activities. They will also have the Teacher's Book, with information about the course, the content, the objectives, and detailed lesson plans. As Cunningsworth (1995) mentions, the Teacher's Book should be seen as the starting point for the teaching and learning process, not as a complete, single pathway for teaching the foreign language. Teachers should adapt this guidance because the Teacher's Book is for the general case and cannot take into account specific factors involved in learning: the school context, the knowledge and needs of the children, the relationship between the teacher and the pupils, etc.

Most schools in Catalonia nowadays introduce the foreign language at the age of 6 as part of the obligatory education curriculum, if not at the age of 3 or 4. As Criado and Sánchez (2009) state, "The emerging 'globalisation' all around the world helped to consolidate the principle that languages had a communicative function and should therefore be learnt with the same purpose and aiming at communicative goals" (p. 3).

One of our aims is to see how the skills are worked on in coursebooks, focusing on the writing skill. Cunningsworth (1995) states how "we need to check if the coursebook deals adequately with all four skills, taking the level and overall aims into account, and if there is a suitable balance between the skills" (p. 64).

2. The Catalan primary school syllabus

The Government of Catalonia establishes the curriculum for each subject area of obligatory education in Catalonia. We have focused on the curriculums published by the Catalan Department of Education in 1992, 2009 and 2017, in particular the stipulations for foreign language instruction.

In the 1992 curriculum, foreign language instruction was introduced in Year 3 or Year 4 and schools could choose if the first foreign language was French or English. By the end of primary

¹In my opinion, both for language practice (grammar and vocabulary) and composition, the focus on writing in the Activity Book is because, of all the skills, writing can most easily be organised as an individual activity.

education children were to comprehend and express short texts in a clear context. Most foreign language instruction focused on speaking. With regard to writing, children in Year 5 were expected to be in contact with different types of texts (comics, stories, game rules, etc.) and be able to produce short written texts following a model (postcards, letters, descriptions, narrations, etc.).

The 2009 curriculum introduced the concept of basic competencies that children need to participate actively in a plural, diverse and changing society. As for the writing skill, children were to work on everyday situations, produce texts (descriptions, dialogues, narrations, poems, etc.) following models that have been worked on in class, use technology to communicate with people from other countries to elaborate texts in the foreign language, use correct language in writing and show interest in written communication. The curriculum emphasised the plurilingual, pluricultural world to encourage students to learn other languages. Children would start learning English at the age of 6, or even earlier, and French would be introduced as a second foreign language in Year 5 or 6.

The 2017 curriculum develops the competency model to ensure that children achieve eight basic competencies when they finish school. A competency-based curriculum focuses on how to learn and achieve skills for lifelong learning.

Writing is considered as a component of communicative competence, helping students communicate, organise, learn and participate in society. By working on competencies, written production takes place in phases and allows children to see how it is a process which takes time. The specific content for Year 5 is broadly the same as in the previous curriculum with some additions. Students should use the strategies and resources acquired in Catalan and Spanish, apply their knowledge of the foreign language (lexical, spelling and grammar) and apply rules for good presentation of written texts.

In October 2018 a further supporting document came out (*El model lingüístic del sistema educatiu de Catalunya L'aprenentatge i l'ús de les llengües en un context educatiu multilingüe i multicultural*). It focuses on the Catalan education system and how languages are learnt and used in a multicultural, multilingual educational context. The linguistic model proposes a plurilingual education where all languages have a role in the development of the communicative competence of students. This model aims to raise awareness among students of the range of languages and cultures around them and provide tools so they can build communicative competence on their own. The document also emphasises the importance of learning how to use languages to communicate, create, learn, etc., in a meaningful, practical

learning environment. To be able to do this for the writing skill, students should practise writing frequently.

3. The writing skill

Writing is often considered the most difficult skill to teach in English as a foreign language (Cunningsworth, 1995 and Milian, 2011). It is hard for students and it can be a long process. Furthermore, the complexity of writing means that we need to write to learn how to write (Camps, 2017).

Knowing how to write means being able to communicate coherently (Curriculum 2017). Writing is not merely copying because it requires reflection and knowing about the subject of the text. It is not an innate capacity. It requires a process and a great deal of practice to become proficient, allowing us to organise our ideas and arrange them in a well-constructed text. Compared to oral expression, writing has the capacity to fix a message and maintain it over time.

According to Milian (2011), writing is the only skill involving practice of the other skills (listening, reading and speaking) during its acquisition and use. This is because any weaknesses students have in speaking and listening will transfer and affect their written work. For example, it is unlikely that a student could write a text involving words that they are not able to pronounce. This idea is reinforced in Cunningsworth's research. He states that "reading can be linked to other skills work, particularly listening and writing" (1995, p. 73). In this case, reading texts can be useful because they become models for writing. Camps (2017) also discusses the connections between writing, reading and speaking.

Writing also involves many other factors: the characteristics of the written language, the literary genre, word choice, grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, suitable cohesive forms, etc. (Cunningsworth, 1995, and Camps, 2017). The writer has to bear in mind many interrelated aspects throughout the writing process.

Furthermore, writers need to have an objective in mind, a reader and a context (Camps, Guasch, Milian and Ribas, 2000 and Cunningsworth, 1995). Students need to know why they are writing, who they are writing to and what they want to achieve with their texts (Camps, 2017). Students should also know which type of text they are writing and the main idea that they want to transmit (Arboleda, 1997).

Writing is a not linear process (Camps, 2017, Arboleda, 1997). It takes time and it involves different stages, which makes it even more complicated because the steps can be different for

each written production. Camps, Guasch, Milian and Ribas (2000) mention that “writing activities are to be considered as a goal and as a means to learn how to write”.²

The writing topic is also crucial. It can affect children's motivation, making writing more enjoyable or more boring. Teachers should provide topics that students can easily relate to their own real experiences (Arboleda, 1997). As is stated in *Competències bàsiques de l'àmbit lingüístic: llengües estrangeres*, “The process of learning writing in a foreign language should be based on communicative situations experienced or imagined by the student, which they can feel involved in” (2015, page 62). For example, people they have met, birthday parties, school events, family holidays, etc. Milian (2011) also mentions that “the tasks that give best results are those involving real recipients or a high degree of motivation among the student writers” (page 108). Children need to feel secure and confident while writing, so teachers should provide topics which they can easily relate to, situated in their own context.

By coming into contact with a variety of texts, children will be able to see how they are organised and how texts are structured. As Cunningsworth (1995) explains, coursebooks should provide a range of written texts because each literary genre has its own organisation, structure and expression. Thus, children will learn the characteristics of each genre and they will learn how to adjust their own texts to their discursive purpose (Camps, 2017).

Previous research has indicated that writing activities are less common in EFL materials (Díez, 2016). Teachers want children to develop their writing ability fast, although they provide them with relatively few opportunities for practice (Arboleda, 1997). Furthermore, teachers tend to organise writing activities as individual work where the teacher is the only reader of the texts produced. Normally, corrections focus on grammar and spelling and the comments are short (Camps, 2017). After a time, when children realise this, they tend to focus their written production on careful spelling and grammar and pass over other important aspects involved in writing.

Writing activities should be sequenced in a progression of difficulty. They should cover various situations and topics to make them richer and more attractive. Moreover, writing activities should be frequent and varied rather than isolated activities. But as Cunningsworth (1995) mentions, “writing activities in coursebooks are normally of the controlled or guided kind, where a model is given and the student’s task is to produce something similar, usually based on additional information given” (p. 80).

²All the quotes not originally in English have been translated by the author.

All too often, in coursebooks and in lessons, we find that writing focuses on learning vocabulary, spelling and grammar in written practice exercises. Working this way does not prepare students to learn how to compose longer texts. It just focuses on local language aspects, leaving aside the creation of texts. Díez (2016) states that this means that most literary genres are not well studied, and texts are just exploited as vehicles for grammar or vocabulary.

There are several types of writing activities in coursebooks. Based on the findings of Cunningsworth (1995), Camps (2017) and Milian (2011), we have made the following list.

- Based on pictures that tell a story. The students have to describe them and write about what is happening.
- Based on templates. Students observe writing models and create their own texts by imitating the model but changing the content, based on a topic.
- In a group. The children create a text together.
- Based on jumbled sentences or paragraphs.
- Finishing stories.
- Reviews, newspaper articles, recipes, game rules, instructions, etc.
- Notes to each other, a diary, formal and informal letters.
- Creating drafts, schemes, conceptual maps, etc.
- Summarising texts.
- Correcting model texts. The children reorder the text, correct spelling mistakes, correct structural errors, etc.
- Free writing.

As we have seen, written composition is a complex task involving several aspects. The best activities focus on these items step by step, making it easier for students to learn how to carry out each and then put them all together in their future work.

Traditionally, coursebooks attach more importance to oral skills than to writing, with fewer writing practice opportunities. Teachers need to find coursebooks that promote controlled, guided and free writing, with a variety of writing activities, where coherence, cohesion and accuracy are worked on and where editing and revision are part of the process (Cunningsworth, 1995). Coursebooks play an important role in EFL education, since they are often the first major contact students have with the foreign language.

4. Method

The educational paradigm of this research is constructivist and the study is based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative subjective analysis. As Blaikie (2000) states: “Social researchers can only collect data from some point of view, by making ‘observations’ through spectacles with lenses that are shaped and coloured by the researcher’s language, culture, discipline-based knowledge, past experiences (professional and lay), and experiences that follow from these, etc.” (p. 120).

The research questions which guided the study are:

1. How has the writing skill evolved since EFL was introduced into Catalan primary schools?
2. How is the writing skill worked on in EFL coursebooks? How is it related to the curriculum?

To analyse the evolution of writing instruction by focusing on the coursebooks used in Catalan schools and the curriculums at each moment in time, we have classified the writing activities in the Activity Book and the Pupil’s Book. We have analysed the foreign language components of the Catalan school curriculum in 1992, 2009 and 2017, together with the *Competències bàsiques de l’ambit lingüístic: llengües estrangeres*, published in 2015, and *El model lingüístic del sistema educatiu de Catalunya. L’aprenentatge i l’ús de les llengües en un context educatiu multilingüe i multicultural*, published in 2018. Coursebooks give an indication of how writing has been worked on in schools. Bearing in mind the dates of the curriculums, we chose three widely used EFL coursebooks from a single publisher. Ideally, we wanted to focus on coursebooks with the same authors, but that proved impossible. Instead, we chose coursebooks from the same publisher, Macmillan Heinemann. For each year of our study, we analysed the Activity Book, the Pupil’s Book and the Teacher’s Book.

Table 1. EFL coursebooks

Coursebooks	Authors	Year	Publisher
Big Red Bus 3	María José Lobo and Pepita Subirà	1997	Heinemann English Language Teaching
Bugs 5	Carol Read and Ana Soberón	2005	Macmillan Heinemann English Language Teaching
Tiger Tracks 5	Carol Read and Mark Ormerod	2014	Macmillan

We counted the number of writing activities in each coursebook and classified them. This list would help us see which activities are most frequent. We also counted the number of activities for other skills and other types of activities in order to gain a more complete view of the data.

Types of writing activities identified in the three coursebooks:

- With a written model in the activity
- With a written model elsewhere in the unit.
- Without a written model in the unit.
- Short texts about the topic studied in the unit.
- Focusing on parts of the writing process.
- Writing process activities leading to a final version.
- Putting sentences, dialogues, pictures, recipes and instructions in order.
- Based on a song in the unit.

5. Results

The results of the study are divided in three sections: the number of writing activities in each coursebook; the type of writing activities in the three Activity Books and Pupil's Books; and the number of writing activities compared to the other three skills (listening, speaking and reading) and other activities in the coursebooks (sentences, vocabulary activities, complete texts and other activities, such as games and manual activities).

The first research question relates to the evolution of the writing skill in EFL coursebooks in Catalan primary schools. In order to answer this question, we analysed the writing activities in the Activity Book and the Pupil's Book of the three coursebooks.

Table 2. Number of writing activities

Book	Writing activities in Activity Book and Pupil's Book	Activities in Activity Book and Pupil's Book	Percentage
Big Red Bus 3 (1997)	16	190	8.42%
Bugs 5 (2005)	40	327	12.23%
Tiger Tracks 5 (2014)	44	460	9.56%

Table 2 shows that the total number of activities has increased over the years, from 190 in Big Red Bus 3 (1997) to 327 in Bugs 5 (2005) and 460 in Tiger Tracks 5 (2014), and the number of writing activities has increased too, with a large jump between Big Red Bus 3 and Bugs 5,

going from 16 to 40. Tiger Tracks 5 has more writing skill activities than Bugs 5, going from 40 activities to 44.

The number of writing activities has increased, but the proportion of writing activities in the total does not. The emphasis on writing skill activities in each course is given as a percentage. In all three coursebooks (Activity Book and Pupil’s Book) the figure is around 10%. In Big Red Bus 3, 8.42% of the activities focus on the writing skill. In Bugs 5, the figure increases to 12.23%. In Tiger Tracks 5, the figure is 9.56%.

We grouped the writing activities into eight categories, as shown in Figure 1 for Big Red Bus 3. Five activities have a written model to follow, and two have a model in the same unit in the Pupil’s Book. There are five other activities without a written model for the children (see Appendix 1, Illustration 1). Three activities consist of putting sentences, pictures or dialogues in order. One activity includes different stages in the writing process, where children first choose vocabulary, then write sentences and finally write a composition (see Appendix 1, Illustration 2).

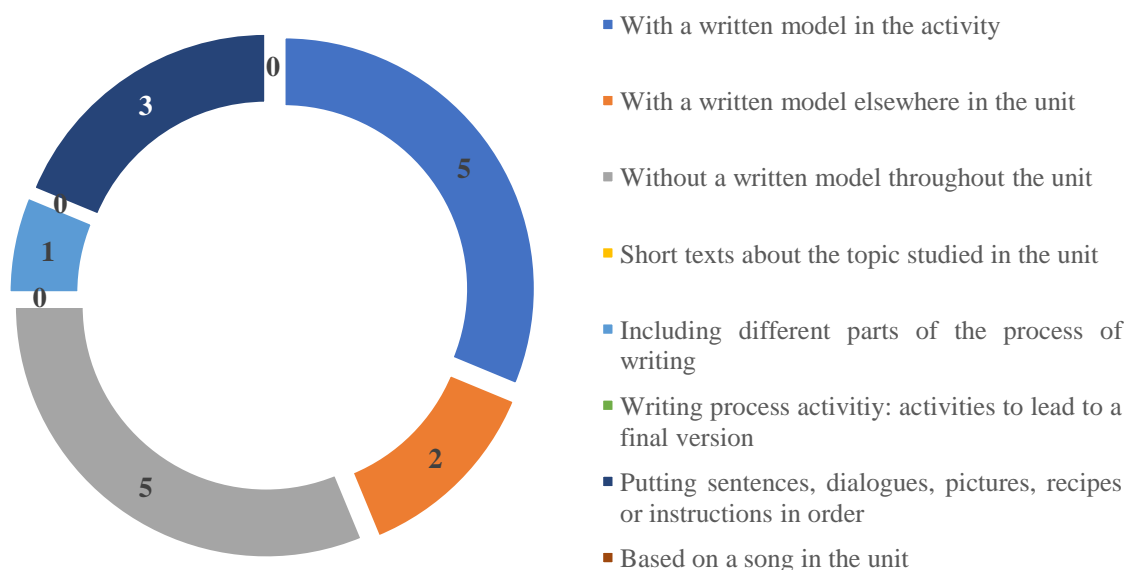


Figure 1. Big Red Bus 3 writing skill activities (Activity Book and Pupil’s Book)

Figure 2 shows the different types among the 40 writing skill activities in Bugs 5. 14 activities focus on parts of the writing process. They include information research, written examples, information tables, etc. (see Appendix 2, Illustration 4). 11 activities have a model text in the unit, in the Pupil’s Book or Activity Book. Ten activities consist of writing a poem relating to a song in the unit. Three activities include a written model in the activity for children to refer

to (see Appendix 2, Illustration 7). Two activities consist of putting sentences, pictures, dialogues, instructions or recipes in order, which helps children understand the organisation of texts.

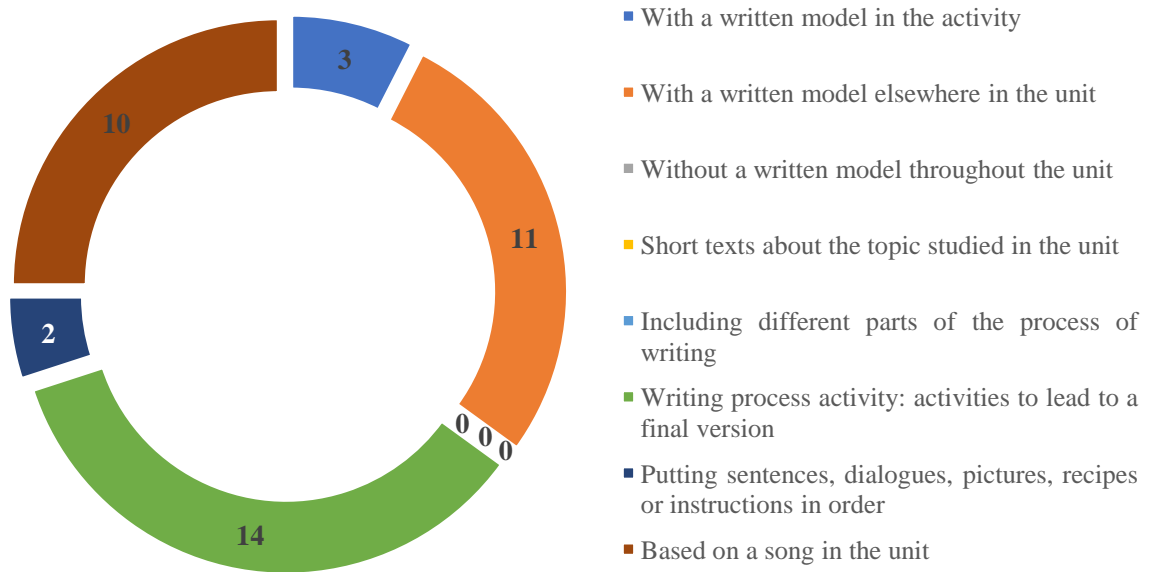


Figure 2. Bugs 5 writing skill activities (Activity Book and Pupil’s Book)

Figure 3 shows the five different types of writing activity among the 44 in Tiger Tracks 5. Of these, 22 consist of preparation stages for composition activities, focusing on the stages in the writing process (see Appendix 3, Illustration 8). Eight activities relate to reading material in the unit. In this case children write a composition connected to the text they have read. Eight activities exploit a written model in the unit, in the Pupil’s Book or the Activity Book (see Appendix 3, Illustration 10). Five activities include a written example in the activity, which children can use as a model. And one activity consists of writing a poem in relation to a song in the unit.

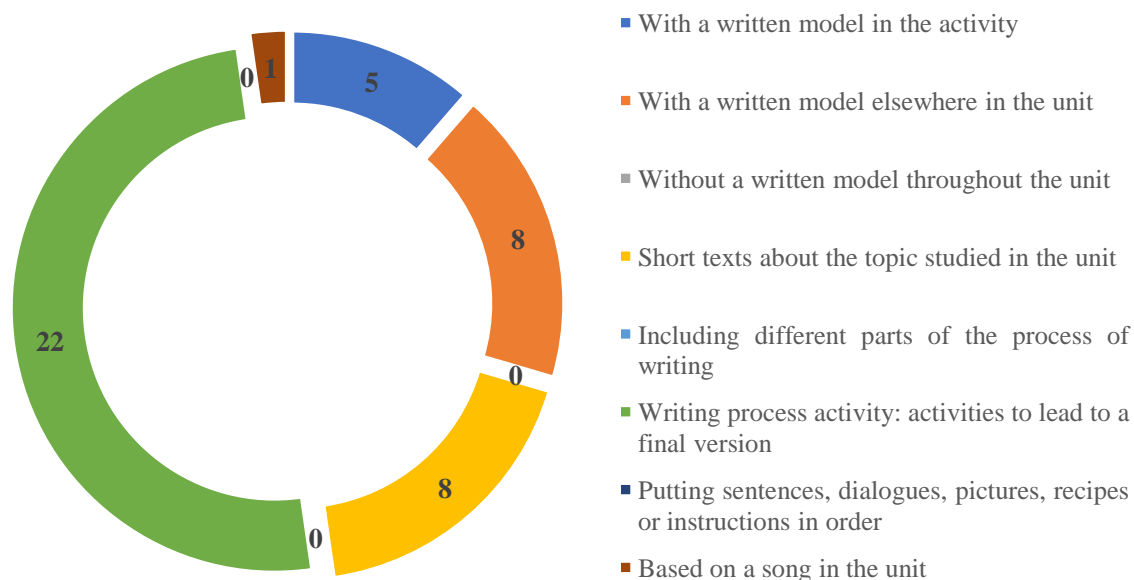


Figure 3. Tiger Tracks 5 writing skill activities (Activity Book and Pupil’s Book)

To compare the number of writing activities with the other three skills (listening, speaking and reading) and other types of activities like arts and crafts, we have counted the activities of each type. Many of the activities involve more than one skill. The coursebooks include many instructions like “Listen and read”, “Listen and speak” and “Read and write”. This is particularly frequent with listening and reading activities when the authors let children hear how the words are pronounced in different accents. To classify the activities, we focused on the most prominent skill in each activity. Thus, the types of activity for practising each skill are as follows:

- Listening skill: songs, riddles, poems, chants, pronunciation, listen and circle, listen and write and write and do.
- Speaking skill: role play, reproducing dialogues, asking for information from classmates, games, talking about a text, etc.
- Reading skill: reading passages, searching for information in the book, etc.
- Writing skill: putting information in order, focusing on different parts of the writing process, writing process activity: activities leading to a final version, writing based on a song in the unit, short texts about the topic studied in the unit, etc.
- Writing sentences: putting words in the correct order, answering questions, writing sentences to practise grammar.
- Vocabulary: filling in the gaps in separate sentences, writing down key words in the unit, crosswords, matching.

- Completing texts: completing gaps in texts, listening and circling, listening and writing the missing information, and writing down in order of appearance.
- Others: arts and crafts.

Figure 4 shows that “fill in the gap using the correct word in a full text” and “arts and crafts” activities are the least common in the three coursebooks. In Bugs 5 and Tiger Tracks 5 there are no arts and crafts activities. In Bugs 5 there are some activities where children create materials to play a speaking game, so these activities have been counted as speaking skill games. In Tiger 5 there are also games but, as in Bugs 5, these activities mainly focus on speaking, so we have included them under speaking skill activities.

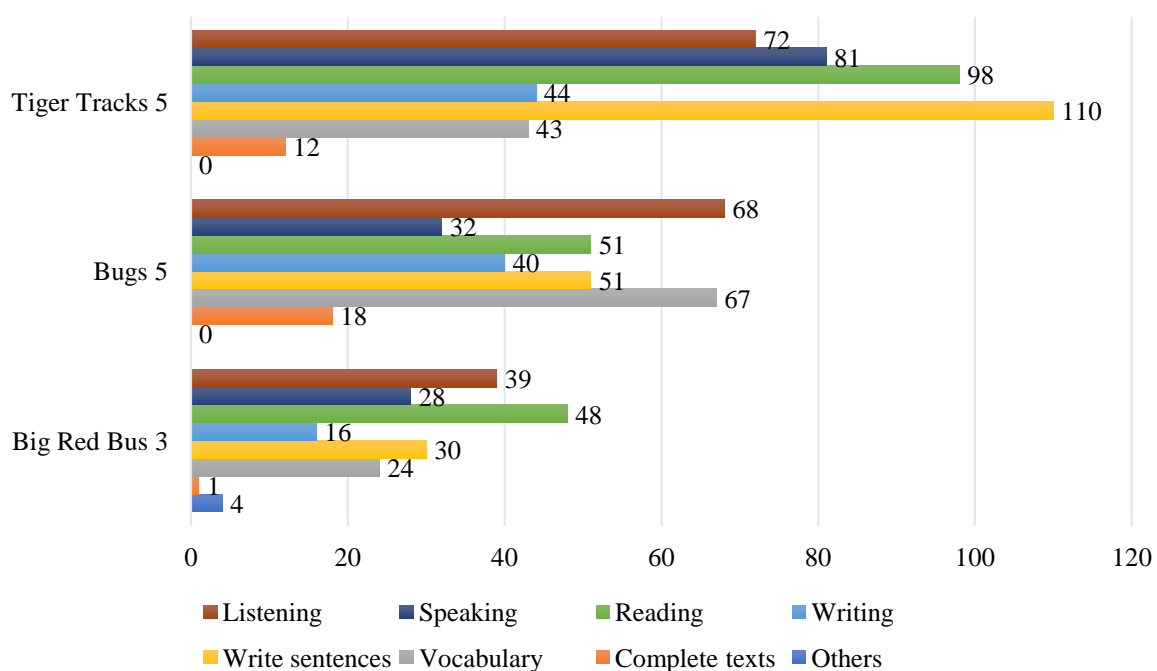


Figure 4. Total number of activities of each type (Activity Book and Pupil’s Book)

In Big Red Bus 3, reading is the skill with most activities (48). Listening activities come next. As mentioned above, some of the reading activities could also be considered listening activities. Activities related to writing sentences, speaking and vocabulary are next. Writing skill activities come sixth out of the eight activity types. Overall, there are relatively few writing skill activities compared to the other skills. There are nearly twice as many speaking activities. Listening and reading activities are about three times more common.

Bugs 5 focuses on vocabulary and listening. In this course there are many activities to learn songs including key words in each unit and also many activities to practise the vocabulary in the songs through matching, crosswords, writing the letters of the key words in order, writing the correct word for each picture and fill in the gap activities. Reading skill and sentence writing

activities come next with the same number of activities. The writing skill is in fifth position with 40 activities. Speaking activities come next. In these activities, children play games related to grammar in the unit or reproduce dialogues.

Tiger Tracks 5 includes a large number of activities (110) where children are asked to write sentences, including answering questions about reading texts, putting words in the correct order, writing sentences related to key words, and practising grammar. Reading skill activities follow with 12 fewer activities. Tiger Tracks 5 Pupil’s Book includes many reading texts about the topics in each unit and about the characters that appear throughout the books. Other activities relating to this skill are searching for information in the book and reading sentences related to the reading texts and deciding if they are true or false. Speaking activities come third. Throughout the course there are activities where children speak to their classmates to complete tasks, role play situations, discuss reading texts and play games related to each unit. Listening skill activities include work on songs, riddles and poems, listening to a dialogue or watching a video to fill in gaps, and pronunciation exercises. Writing skill activities are in fifth place, followed closely by activities to work on vocabulary, where students write the correct word for pictures or match words to definitions.

Over the three coursebooks, activities for working on the writing skill are in fifth or sixth position. Activities where children have to write individual sentences or work on key words are more common than writing skill activities.

Table 3. Percentage of the four skills in each coursebook

Book	Activities in Activity Book and Pupil’s Book	Writing skill	Listening skill	Speaking skill	Reading skill	Others*
Big Red Bus 3 (1997)	190	16 8.42%	39 20.53%	28 14.74%	48 25.26%	59 31.05%
Bugs 5 (2005)	327	40 12.23%	68 20.79%	32 9.76%	51 15.60%	136 41.59%
Tiger Tracks 5 (2014)	460	44 9.56%	72 15.65%	81 17.61%	98 21.30%	165 35.87%

*(Write sentences, grammar practice, vocabulary, complete texts, and arts and crafts)

Table 3 summarises the percentage of activities for each skill across the three courses. We observe how activities to work on vocabulary and grammar are the most common. We have also added an arts and crafts category but, as seen above, there are very few activities of this type.

This table shows us how in two of the three coursebooks (Big Red Bus 3 and Tiger Tracks 5), the writing skill receives rather less focus. Across the three courses, reading is the skill with most activities (except in Bugs 5, which has more listening activities).

6. Discussion

In relation to the first research question, we have seen how this publisher's coursebooks have changed over the years. In Tiger Tracks 5, the most recent course, there are more writing skill activities and more contextualised activities, which Arboleda (1997), Camps (2017) and Cunningsworth (1995) emphasise as one of the most important factors when writing a composition. Children are asked to elaborate texts in relation to reading material. This course follows the guidelines of the Catalan curriculum of 2009: the writing skill should be taught with contextualised situations and presented in a variety of everyday forms (dialogues, newspapers, postcards, etc.). Students are put in contact with different literary genres and work with written models which they can use as examples, to get information, to have an idea of what they have to do and to connect their knowledge of the topic with other information.

Writing skill activities generally include a model or refer to other material in the unit, mainly the reading text. Five of the sixteen writing skill activities in the Big Red Bus 3 coursebook (1997) do not have a model in the same activity. Of the 44 writing skill activities in Tiger Tracks 5 (2014), none lack a model in the activity or elsewhere in the unit. This seems to indicate how coursebooks have changed over this period and nowadays they focus more on providing examples and models. Authors like Camps (2017), Cunningsworth (1995) and Milian (2011) point out how the writing skill tends to combine all the other skills, so authors should provide examples and materials to help children develop their writing skills.

Another change is that coursebooks nowadays seem to include more writing process activities. Children read models, talk about the topic they are going to write on, search for information and create a list or table to summarise it all, and then they make a first draft of their final composition. As Camps (2017) and Arboleda (1997) mention, writing is not an innate capacity but a non-linear process, including many steps. These ideas are reflected in Tiger Tracks 5 (2014), where we observe a great variety of activities that students go through related to the final composition, which should help them organise and develop their own writing.

The use of groupwork also seems to have increased. Writing has traditionally been seen as an individual activity. In Tiger Tracks 5 (2014), we observe more activities where children talk about what they want to write about, sharing their ideas and creating cooperative texts, etc. Working in groups or pairs during the writing process can be beneficial for the children by

helping them share knowledge of the topic. Furthermore, during this process children are working on the competency of autonomy and personal initiative, learning to learn and social skills, as the Catalan curriculum (2009) mentions.

Nonetheless, writing skill activities are the least common (except in Bugs 5, where speaking is less common) among the four skills. This overall low degree of focus on writing could reflect beliefs and approaches that give primacy to oral communication, as a more natural and motivating skill. Although the Catalan curriculum (2017) mentions how we need to develop writing as a useful communication skill, it is evidently less present in coursebooks, in terms of the number of activities.

Many of the writing activities we have found are contextualised by making connections with the children's situation and their interests, but most of the writing activities are related to the reading texts. This brings us to the second research question: how the writing skill is worked on in EFL coursebooks and its relation to the curriculum. As mentioned above, generally speaking writing activities follow the curriculum guidelines, working on competencies and specific content for Year 5. Activities are well contextualised, and they are intended to be enjoyable and motivating for children (they are more realistic, they connect the topic with the children's environment, writing postcards to their family, etc.), but in my view more emphasis could be put on this aspect.

My own belief is that students need more writing activities that are linked to their own context: writing letters to the council, writing postcards to other students at school, writing articles about an outing they went on, writing blogs, etc. Children are protagonists in these activities because they create texts from scratch. However, it is difficult to incorporate these types of activities into coursebooks, because every class environment is different. As Cunningsworth (1995) mentions, coursebooks should be used as a guide, as a platform for teachers, but too often nowadays teachers cling to their books and end up following a more traditional teaching approach.

It can be an easy path to follow for teachers because the Teacher's Book provides so much information on activities, including all the steps to follow. They even include questions that teachers can ask during the activity, sentences to say and how long the activity should be (see Appendix 1, Illustration 3, Appendix 2, Illustrations 5 and 6, and Appendix 3, Illustration 9). Nevertheless, I believe that teachers need to feel confident about their ability to introduce meaningful situated activities of their own.

Another factor influencing the approach to writing is that authors and teachers may believe that basic writing skills are directly transferrable from Catalan and Spanish to English and therefore do not need to be focused on separately. This belief could underlie the fact that coursebooks tend to focus more on listening and reading skills than writing and speaking. The emphasis is on learning English as an oral communicative tool, primarily through listening. It could also be that schools and teachers believe that an oral approach to EFL is more motivating for children.

Finally, the emergence of the World Wide Web means that nowadays there is access to a huge range of authentic, educational, audio-visual material, for example on YouTube, whose use in class could reduce focus on reading and writing. The use of such material can support authors and teachers who believe that an oral focus is more natural and appropriate for learning.

7. Conclusions

EFL coursebooks for children and the Catalan primary school curriculum tend to give rather more emphasis to text composition writing activities nowadays. There are many references to this skill in the literature and many types of activities have been proposed. But at the same time there are many writing activities in coursebooks without any context, which merely involve creating isolated sentences. Writing is still the least emphasised of the four skills.

The texts that children have to write are mainly for just the teacher to read, so the children focus more on aspects that will be graded, like grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc., and not so much on drafting a coherent text, organising their ideas and thinking about other important aspects of an effective written composition.

Is there too little writing and of the wrong kind? The low focus on writing skills in the coursebooks we have studied could have a negative effect on children's composition skills in English. Further research is needed, with a larger sample and analysis of children's work, in order to see if they can indeed transfer writing skills effectively from their mother tongue or if in fact the writing skill in English is being somewhat overlooked and children are under-achieving as a result.

The Teacher's Books provide suitable guidance for teachers. They are comprehensive and supportive. They are full of steps to follow, questions to ask the students and detailed lesson plans, but they tend to omit culture-specific information and grammar explanations. In general, they provide detailed guidance, but this does not mean that it is the only possible way of teaching. The learning atmosphere in each classroom will not always be fully aligned with the

Teacher's Book guidance. Therefore, I believe the Teacher's Book should be seen as a starting point, but never as a fixed pathway for teaching. It would be interesting to carry out a study on how teachers interact with the Teacher's Book: how they use it, if they find it useful, if they use other activities, etc.

Coursebooks have an impact on the content taught. They tend to define the evolution of the teaching and learning process. If the topic worked on is of interest to both the teacher and the students, the lesson is more likely to progress successfully. With this in mind, an interesting line of future research would be to study if the topics in the units (sport, professions, the environment, cities, etc.) that are linked to writing activities are actually of interest for the students.

As for the limitations of this research project, clearly the sample is too small, which makes it difficult to arrive at any conclusion with confidence. There is no evident trend over the three courses for the writing skill but all three have a greater oral focus. Furthermore, it is difficult to count activities separately because many activities involve a variety of skills to some extent.

As the Catalan primary school curriculum (2017) mentions, all classroom writing activities need a learning objective, a clear context with all necessary items and a clear composition purpose. This is a path we still need to develop as teachers. We need to try to focus more on creating activities where children can be the protagonists of writing activity. For that, as a future teacher, I believe we need to create more activities that require authentic language use in context (blog entries, magazine articles, informative posters, etc.).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Big Red Bus 3

Read and tick (✓) What do the newspapers say?

the News

Halley's comet. This evening at eight o'clock. Only once every 76 years. Don't miss it!

THE SUN

Take your binoculars and go to Mossy Hill. Halley's comet visits us again.

the Comet

After 76 years, Halley's Comet arrives again. See it from Mossy Hill today at 8pm.

Do the newspapers say these things?	the News	the Sun	the Comet
The name of the comet	✓	✓	✓
How often you can see it			
The time you can see it			
Where you can see it			
What to take with you			

Write about Halley's comet


the Star ★

..... 199

18 ♦ eighteen

ACTIVITY BOOK p18

Illustration 1. Activity Book. Activity 10, page 18 (Unit 2)



8 Choose your own adventure You are going on an excursion.

Tick (✓) one box in each section.

Where are you going?
 I'm going ... to a cave to the forest to the beach
 to a lake

How are you going?
 I'm going ... by bus on foot by bicycle
 by train

Who's going with you?
 I'm going with ... my friends my family my brother
 my dog

But ... I see a snake there is a storm
 I see a strange house I see an old woman

And I

Write your complete adventure here:

34 ♦ thirty-four

ACTIVITY BOOK p34

Illustration 2. Activity Book. Activity 8, page 34 (Unit 4)

8 Choose your own adventure

1 Anuncieu a la classe que aniran d'excursió i que han de decidir el lloc que visitaran, la manera d'anar-hi, etc., d'entre les opcions donades a l'activitat 8. Els nens/es escullen solament una de les possibles respostes de cada pregunta, o bé n'inventen i n'escriuen una nova per a la línia de punts. Després de les primeres quatre opcions, han d'imaginar un final per a la seva aventura. Comencen les seves frases amb *And I...* i l'acaben a la línia de punts.

2 Pregunteu a nens/es diferents per les seves aventures:

*T: Where are you going? How are you going?
Who's going with you?*

Convideu els nens/es a explicar la seva història. El professor pot explicar primer una aventura pròpia que serveixi de model, com per exemple:

T: I'm going to the forest on foot. I'm going with my dog, but I see a snake. (I'm afraid and) I run home.

3 Demaneu a la classe que escrigui una versió completa de l'aventura a la línia de punts que apareix a peu de pàgina. Moveu-vos per la classe ajudant en cas necessari.

4 Els nens/es es fan preguntes entre ells utilitzant les preguntes com *Where?/How?/Who?* que apareixen a l'activitat.

Illustration 3. Teacher's Book. Instructions for Activity 8, page 34 (Unit 4)

Appendix 2: Bugs 5

Lesson 6

15 Find out about a country.

Country: Portugal
Where is it? In the south of Europe
Size: small
Colour of flag: red and green
Weather: hot in summer, cold in winter, rains a lot in the north, dry in the south
Food from the country: potatoes, tomatoes, grapes

Country: _____
Where is it? _____
Size: _____
Colour of flag: _____
Weather: _____
Food from the country: _____

16 Read and complete.

summer country America winter bananas flag

Brazil is in South (1) America. It's a very big (2) _____. The (3) _____ of Brazil is green and yellow. It's very hot in (4) _____ and it's warm in (5) _____. It rains a lot in the Amazon. Mangoes, papayas and (6) _____ are from Brazil.

17 Write about a country.

Check your work. Then prepare it to go in your Bugs project file!

nineteen

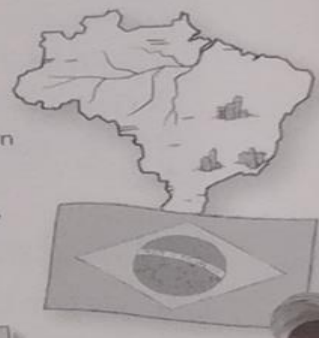


Illustration 4. Activity Book. Activities 15 and 17, page 19 (Unit 2)

Find out about a country (AB page 19, activity 15)

- Centra l'atenció dels alumnes en la *fact-finding sheet* completada de Portugal. Explica que no cal que escriguin frases completes al *Fact-finding sheet* de la dreta. Només hi han d'apuntar la informació rellevant.
- Demana als infants que facin servir els seus deures de la lliçó 5 com a base del treball. Haurien d'investigar més sobre el país que han triat a classe, fent servir llibres de geografia i de consulta, o Internet abans de completar els *Fact-finding sheets*. Si els alumnes usen Internet, segueix les directrius suggerides a la pàgina 18.
- Quan els alumnes hagin completat els *Fact-finding sheets*, fes preguntes, p. ex., *What's your country? / What's the weather like in summer / winter? / Is there a difference in the north and the south? / Tell me some food from the country you've chosen*. Els alumnes responen donant-te la informació rellevant de la seva *fact-finding sheet*.

Illustration 5. Teacher's Book. Instructions for Activity 15, page 19 (Unit 2)

Write about a country (AB page 19, activity 17)

- Digues *Now write about your country. Look at the descriptions of Brazil (see Activity Book, page 19) or Portugal (see Pupil's Book, page 16) to help you.*
- Els infants escriuen coses sobre el país que han triat.

Check your work. Then prepare it to go in your Bugs project file!

- Quan estigueu satisfets amb els esborranys, els infants preparen el seu treball per al seu *Bugs project file* (consulta la pàgina 47).

Illustration 6. Teacher's Book. Instructions for Activity 17, page 19 (Unit 2)

20 Read and write an e-mail to Dracula.


Dear Dracula
Please can I have a single room in
your hotel on Friday 13th July. I'm
going to arrive at midnight. Please
can I have a room in the dungeon if
possible. Thank you.
From
Ted

Dear Dracula,
Please can I have _____
I'm going to arrive at _____
Please _____, if possible.
From _____

Now do the Unit 9 Test and complete your Learning Diary.

Illustration 7. Activity Book. Activity 20, page 77 (Unit 9)


Project: Do I get enough exercise?



23 Read Duncan's project and complete his exercise diary. (See Pupil's Book page 23.)

Get ready for your project

	Activities	Approximate time
Monday	walk to school and back home	1 hour
	play in break time	30 minutes
Tuesday		30 minutes
	play in break time	30 minutes
Wednesday	walk to school and back home	30 minutes
		30 minutes



24 Complete your exercise diary.

Prepare your project

	Activities	Approximate time
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		

25 Read your exercise diary and write a report.

Think!

- Use a new sentence to write about each day or place where you do exercise.

Remember!

- Use the present tense to write about what you do every day.
- Use the present continuous tense to say what you're doing in the photos.

Writing Tip!

- Use *on* for days of the week; use *at* for break time and the weekend.

Write your project in your notebook

Every week, I get

21

Illustration 8. Activity Book. Activities 23, 24 and 25, page 21 (Unit 2)

Activity Book

Activitat 23

Get ready for your project. Read Duncan's project and complete his exercise diary. (See Pupil's Book page 23.)

- Els alumnes tornen a llegir el treball d'exemple de la pàgina 23 del *Pupil's Book*, activitat 29. Després completen el diari d'exercicis del Duncan amb les activitats que fa el dilluns, el dimarts i el dimecres.
- Després comparen les seves respostes.

Respostes:

	Activities	Approximate time
Monday	walk to school and back home PE play in break time	30 minutes 1 hour 30 minutes
Tuesday	walk to school and back home play in break time	30 minutes 30 minutes
Wednesday	walk to school and back home play in break time	30 minutes 30 minutes

Activitat 24

Prepare your project. Complete your exercise diary.

- Individualment, els nens escriuen les activitats que fan i el temps que hi dediquen cada dia.
- Poden completar el diari a classe, al llarg d'una setmana, o com a deures.

Activitat 25

Write your project in your notebook. Read your exercise diary and write a report.

- Demana'ls que es fixin en els quadres *Think!*, *Remember!* i *Writing Tip!*
- Els nens escriuen un esborrany de l'informe sobre el seu diari d'exercicis al quadern o a l'ordinador.
- Després preparen la versió final del treball, en la qual poden incloure fotos seves fent diferents tipus d'exercici físic.

Project presentation (Optional)

- Els nens presenten els seus treballs. Ho poden fer com s'explica a la pàgina 23 del *Pupil's Book* o seguint els suggeriments per fer els treballs que hi ha a la pàgina 32 d'aquesta guia.

Illustration 9. Teacher's Book. Instructions for Activities 23, 24 and 25, page 21 (Unit 2)

3 Write what you want to do in the holidays.
Talk to a friend. Write what they want to do.

I want to _____	My friend wants to _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
I _____	He /She _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Look and circle: My Tiger Tracks song score.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Reason: _____

80

Illustration 10. Activity Book. Activity 3, page 80, (Songs unit)

