

Course Book Review: *Tiger Time Levels 1-6* by Carol Read and Mark Ormerod, Macmillan

Reviewed by Nayr Ibrahim

Introduction

Tiger Time is a six-level primary course, which includes the following components per level: Student's Book, Teacher's Book, Activity Book, Flashcards and CDs. In terms of print components, this reflects the myriad of coursebooks on the market. However, what I found really interesting and innovative in this series is the online feature of a Student's and Teacher's Resource Centre, and interactive Presentation Kit for each level. This takes the whole course to another level: it gives the teacher access to interactive digital resources in the classroom and allows the student to develop digital competence while playing, reviewing, and learning with the online resources at home or on any digital device. The course is therefore flexible; it can be exploited in a classic print version if online access is non-existent or minimal; yet it can also integrate the digital component. This multimodal approach to materials development presents benefits for the children and the teacher as it caters for different learning styles, offers multiple presentation media, and allows for more individualised teaching and learning.

The course is based on seven core competences that outline the knowledge, skills and behaviours that children need to maximise their English language learning experience:

- Competence in linguistic communication
- Competence in mathematics, science and technology
- Cultural awareness and expression
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Social and civic competences
- Digital competence
- Learning to learn

The core competences are clearly outlined in the Teacher's Books and expand with each level as children develop in age, cognition and language proficiency. These seven core competences are translated into learning units across seven to eight lessons in the student and activity books. This makes for a whole-child approach, where language, presented and practised in fun and stimulating situations, is interwoven with civic education, CLIL, cultural content and values education. What could have become a patchwork of activities in jam-packed units is seamlessly integrated with engaging activities and an appealing design.

Course Overview

The six course books, while following a similar pattern throughout, are divided into three distinct stages, consisting of Levels 1 & 2, Levels 3 & 4 and Levels 5 & 6. Each stage features age-appropriate content and language activities with a different unit and page layout, and introduces new characters in different settings.

Levels 1 & 2, aimed at younger primary learners, have a cartoon-like approach, with Tiger, an adorable soft toy that comes alive to have fun with Jay and Sue. Levels 3 & 4 introduce Ben, Claire, Ellie and Nassim, members of Tiger Street Club. These children appear in the video material, introduce the units and write for the Tiger Club magazine. In Levels 5 & 6 the children meet twelve characters from different parts of the world, in the Tiger Tracks Social Learning Network. Through these characters, the children discover a wide-range of English-speaking countries (USA and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, India, South Africa and Jamaica); thus embracing the cultural, ethnic and geographical diversity of the English-speaking world.

Course structure and resources

The Student's books in the series are attractive, full-colour resources available in print and digital format, with stunning photographic images. Each level begins with a starter unit, which introduces the characters, the setting and recycles vocabulary or songs from the previous book. Each unit in Levels 1 to 4 consist of seven lessons, with an extra unit added in levels 5 & 6 for extended reading practice.

Lesson one of each unit introduces the theme, the main aims and the relevant vocabulary in audio, video or print format. The main lesson focus is clearly identified, so informing children of what to expect in the unit and creating interest in the themes, becomes a lively and familiar routine across all levels.

I particularly like the use of the characters in presenting the aims: Tiger in Levels 1 & 2; members of the Tiger Street Club pin aims and pictures on the notice board in Levels 3 & 4; in Levels 5 & 6 each unit is introduced, and various aspects of the unit commented on, by a member of the Tiger Tracks Social Learning Network in an insert that resembles a blog post. These posts encourage children to think about the theme, personalise their learning, reflect on their own experience and give their opinion. The Vocabulary Tool online allows for further practice of the key vocabulary, using interactive functions, such as Spotlight, Distort and Quick Flash, as well as Mazes and Memory Games. In Levels 5 & 6 the introductory vocabulary lesson is expanded in Lesson two to include a variety of reading text types. Children develop reading sub skills, such as skimming and scanning, and learn to interact with both fiction and non-fiction texts.

Story time is a regular feature in this series. These story-based lessons, cartoon illustrations or photo stories, are spread over two pages. The stories are also available online, via the Story Tool, with interactive ordering and matching activities, sound and the option of hiding the dialogue. Stories may be invented and closely related to the topic and include the characters, for example, Tiger in Levels 1 & 2. They also feature historical figures and events, for example, the Earl of Sandwich in Level 3 or the Gold Rush in California in Level 5. Sometimes the stories are set in different parts of the world, for example, The Jetboat and the Crocodile in Level 5 is set in The Victoria Falls and the Hurricane and the Coconut Tree in Level 6 is set in Jamaica. In other instances the stories are traditional stories, such as, Stone Soup in Level 3 and The Piper of Hamelin in Level 4.

Lessons three and four exploit and practise the language in a variety of fun activities; Story Activities and Speaking in Levels 1 & 2, Grrr...is for Grammar in Levels 3 & 4, and Grammar Tracks in Levels 5 & 6. Phonics, in the lower levels, and pronunciation activities are also fully integrated into each unit.

Each unit culminates in a CLIL and Culture lesson, for example, Kid's Culture in Levels 1 & 2, which are key features of the series. The CLIL pages touch on a wide range of subjects, and give the children a taster of the subject matter, which is impossible to cover fully in the series. However, at the foot of the CLIL page children are given specific Internet tasks, which encourage further exploration of the subject and develop children's ICT skills. Project work is an integral part of every unit as children work towards a final outcome. In Levels 5 & 6, a whole page is dedicated to developing a project; a small text serves as a model and a step-by-step flowchart guides the children as they create their own projects. Each lesson ends with a Review Lesson for consolidating, reviewing and recycling.

At each stage there are links to the activity book, which extends and reinforces the learning in each unit. Each activity book contains a full-colour reference section at the end, with Picture Dictionaries, Word and Verb lists and Grammar References, cut-out cards and stickers or extra reading and speaking activities.

The teacher's book is an excellent, comprehensive resource, which is easy to navigate. The lesson-by-lesson overview pages are very effective in showing how each lesson covers the seven core competences. The double spread landscape layout of each lesson plan is very practical, as one full lesson fits in an A3 format, so no need to turn pages.

Key Features

The Key features that I found outstanding are the Tiger Values inserts, the Learning to Learn Progress Journals and home-school links. This course takes children beyond foreign language learning to include a social and personal element. The Values inserts encourage children to reflect on issues raised in the story and to produce a personal response; for example, in Level 4, children are prompted to reflect on respecting rules in the countryside and the importance of being kind and not making fun of people. Even though at first glance this feature seems sidelined by the main linguistic input in the story, it gains prominence, and becomes a welcome routine, as the children work through the course books. It could have been given more prominence in the Unit overview page in the Teachers Book, as values and attitudes appear mixed together in the same block. Space may have been the issue!

Besides the Unit review and Self-assessment in the Activity Book, the teacher can download a four-page Progress Journal from the Teacher's Resource Centre. The first two pages enable the children to recall and review the unit and personalise their learning. The next two pages focus more specifically on how the various activities helped children learn and the strategies they prefer to use; children evaluate their progress and prepare an action plan to develop learner autonomy.

This Progress Journal is one of the features in the course that encourages home-school links. The other one is obviously the Student's Resource centre that children can access at home, and work on with the family. However, what I appreciate in this course is the regular and direct references to home-school links in the Activity book where the family is invited to participate in the child's English language learning.

Conclusion

Overall, an excellent coursebook series with interesting innovative features, which encourage learner autonomy, personalisation and offer a truly stimulating learning experience.

Reviewer's Bio



Nayr Ibrahim is Head of Young Learner and Bilingual Section at the British Council in France. Nayr has been teaching English for over 20 years and has worked in Portugal, Hong Kong, Cairo and Paris. Nayr has written various articles on bilingualism, and co-authored course books for the local market: Hullabaloo 1 and 2, and the Book Box, published by Hatier. Her latest publication is *Teaching Children How to Learn*, Delta Publishing, with Gail Ellis. Nayr is working towards a PhD at the University of Reading where she is exploring the link between trilingualism, trilliteracy and identity. You can contact her at nayr.ibrahim@britishcouncil.fr

