

Reviews

Richmond Vocabulary Builder B1 and B2

by Elizabeth Walter and Kate Woodford
Richmond 2013

978-84-668-1528-4 (B1)

978-84-668-1528-7 (B2)

Both these books are subtitled *Vocabulary usage and practice for self-study*, and this is exactly what they are. Each book has 50 units, which introduce language on a variety of topics, such as 'Describing appearance', 'Computers and the internet' and 'Polite language' at B1 level; and 'Social problems', 'Art' and 'Trying, succeeding and failing' at B2. It is noticeable that the language in the books is organised not just around topic areas but also around functions (eg 'Making and accepting offers', 'Arranging to do things' and 'Advice and information') – a really valuable addition for learners. Both books also have units that introduce phrasal verbs, collocations and idioms and explain these concepts in an accessible manner. Obviously, phrasal verbs and collocations come up in the other units throughout the books, making for a well-balanced, varied and practical set of words in each section.

Each unit in the books has two pages in a format familiar to learners: the lexis is introduced with images or clear definitions and then practice exercises follow in the form of familiar-looking gap-fills and matching tasks. Each unit also contains a nice section called

'Putting words together', which introduces collocations with some of the target language and provides examples of use. More useful phrases on the topic of the unit come in regular sections devoted to speaking. These teach language in whole sentences, such as *What are you having?* (B1 'Eating out') or *It was a complete nightmare!* (B2 'Problems and accidents') which are then practised in exercises. Each unit closes with a section called 'Use the words you've learned' and offers freer and more personalised practice of the target language – these tasks will be useful for getting the students to write short texts for homework. All in all, the selection of lexis at both word- and sentence-level seems very appropriate to the ability of the target students and is consistent in both books. There are also revision units, answer keys and – very helpful – word lists and lists of irregular verbs.

And here's the best part: each unit of the book includes audio, easily downloadable from the Richmond website (the links and instructions are on the back cover). The first track for each unit is always a list of new words, allowing the students to read, listen and repeat – ideal for self-study and effectively solving the problem of pronunciation and dealing with phonemic script! Each unit then includes at least one dialogue or text with the target language alongside, with exercises on the page. The fact that the recordings use different speakers means that students get good exposure to a variety of

accents. At the same time, at both levels, the tasks with recordings are perfectly manageable for students working on their own.

Although classroom use is mentioned in the text on the back cover, from the organisation of the material it is clear that the books are more suited to self-study.

However, the list of topics will fit in well with most commonly-used coursebooks, allowing a teacher to easily assign a unit or two from *Vocabulary Builder* for homework – and the listening material that comes with both books is a wonderful idea for homework, too.

Straightforward and learner-friendly, *Richmond Vocabulary Builder B1 and B2* provide varied self-study material for students – and for teachers, a reliable source of vocabulary and listening homework practice.

Masha Andrievich
Moscow, Russia

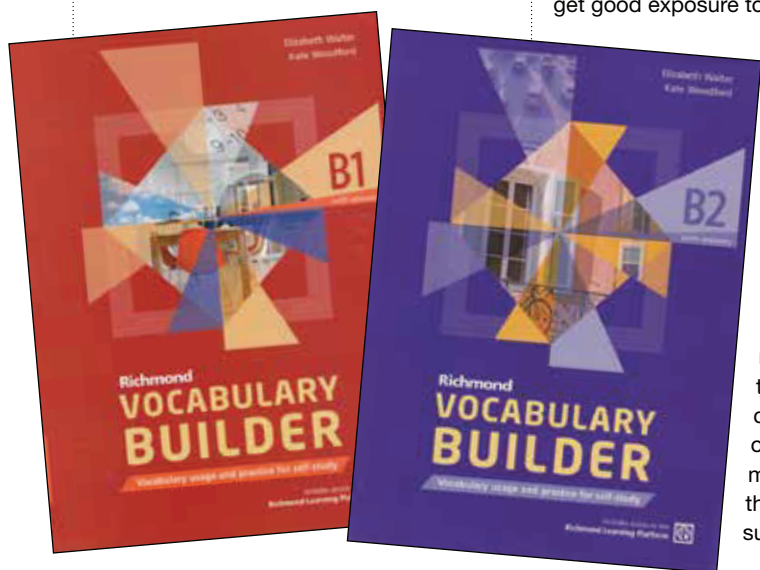
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Something to Say

by Tessa Woodward
and Seth Lindstromberg
Helbling Languages 2014
978-3-85272-780-6

Something to Say is a photocopiable resource book of fun speaking activities aimed at older teens and adults from upper-elementary to advanced levels. The activities include some which are material-free, but the majority have A4-sized class handouts with detailed teachers' notes. The activities cover a wide range of themes from pronunciation to interviews, and from riddles to grammar questionnaires. There are also different versions of each to cater for different levels. At first glance, the handouts looked rather dull: only black and white text with no images, illustrations or variety in fonts. The format also seemed very 'samey', with the majority having quite long numbered or bulleted lists, and my initial reaction was that they might not be particularly accessible or motivating for students. However, taking a closer look, the content really made up for the appearance. The activities are funny, engaging, surprising and really get students talking and laughing.

I used the 'Expressive intonation' tasks with a teenage group and they loved it. They were soon producing really great language, with a range of intonation and expression I hadn't heard before.



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As a bonus, they had a great deal of fun! Similarly, I used the 'Surprising questions' activity with an adult class and they were both challenged and motivated, producing spontaneous and natural utterances with minimum input from me. There really isn't much more a busy teacher could ask from an extra speaking skills resource.

In addition, *Something to Say* includes very comprehensive teachers' notes, with ideas for adapting the material, correcting the students and for follow-up activities or lessons. All of these ideas were incredibly practical, easy to understand and really seemed to maximise the output of the minimalist handouts. As stated in the introduction, the demand placed on students is relatively low, as written prompts form the basis of all handouts. This provides a lot of support for weaker and less confident students and is a useful building block for classes whom you may want to challenge further in follow-up lessons or activities.

On the whole, *Something to Say* provides material to boost students' speaking skills that is entertaining, original and very well-thought-out. In their introduction, Woodward and Lindstromberg state that the material's fundamental aim is to 'engage students in lots of meaningful talk while saving time for teachers' – which is exactly what it does.

Jenny N Wilde
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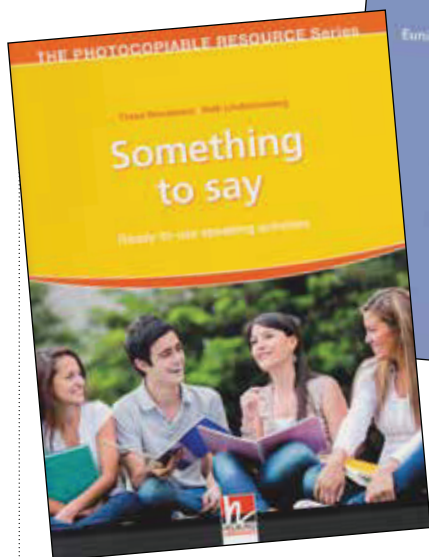
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Focus on Assessment

by Eunice Eunhee Jang
OUP 2014
978-0-19-400083-3

This book is part of the *Oxford Key Concepts for the Language Classroom* series, edited by Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada. The series aims to make research topics which are relevant to second language teachers more accessible. It is designed primarily for teachers of English in primary- and secondary-level contexts.

Focus on Assessment centres on reminding teachers of the pedagogical



purpose of language assessment and using the results of assessment to plan future lessons and help improve student learning. The research discussed aims to guide teachers in their planning, activities and assessment of their learners' progress.

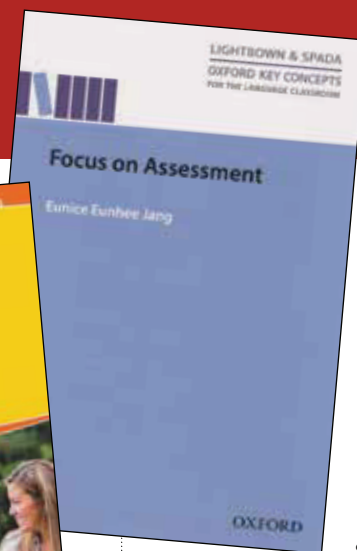
The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 begins by laying the foundations for the reader in terms of the uses and purposes of assessment. The author highlights that for effective teachers, assessment is an integral part of their teaching and not just an add-on.

Chapter 2 discusses the theories of language development and the academic language proficiency that is expected of school-aged learners. It also gives details of research that explores the students' language development in content-based instruction.

Chapter 3 focuses on assessing young language learners and discusses the assessment approaches and issues that are associated with them, while Chapter 4 is dedicated to the principles of assessing adolescent language learners.

The final chapter provides a summary of the main points discussed in the previous chapters. It also invites you to reflect on your own ideas about issues raised in the book.

Each chapter contains *Classroom Snapshots* which are authentic classroom situations and interactions between teachers and students, or students and their peers. Each snapshot is accompanied by questions or key concepts to reflect on while reading.



There are also *Activities* in each chapter which provide the reader with the opportunity to reflect or to have more in-depth discussions with colleagues.

The *Spotlight Studies* give details

and results of case studies which guide the reader in different approaches to help them make decisions on the best assessment methods for their own context.

What I most enjoyed about this book were the *Activities* and the *Classroom Snapshots* because they got me thinking and reflecting on my own practice, and allowed me to make the material relevant to my own situation.

At the beginning, you are invited to complete a questionnaire to raise your awareness of key issues surrounding assessment and what your opinions are. In the final chapter, the author invites you to revisit the questionnaire, having read through the research, to see if your opinions have changed. The book closes with the author giving *her* responses to the same questions and offering some suggestions for further reading.

This book is quite academic and text heavy, but the *Glossary* is a very clear and useful guide to new terminology that arises over the course of Chapters 1 to 4. *Focus on Assessment* also gives plenty of opportunities to reflect on examples, case studies and your own practice, which keeps you engaged throughout.

Although the book is aimed at language teachers at primary and secondary level, I would recommend it to anyone seeking to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the purpose, use and methods of assessment, which in turn will allow them to provide their learners with more meaningful assessment and a better overall learning experience.

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