



## THEORY AND PRACTICE IN COMMUNICATION COURSE BOOKS

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**Abstract:** The textbook is an essential individual studying and learning tool which helps the student gain insight into the theoretical system as well as the practical issues of a particular field of study. It can also raise interest in and develop a commitment to a discipline with the aid of appropriate tasks and exercises. However, most importantly, the textbook offers a learning strategy for the study of a particular discipline, which facilitates the acquisition of learning and studying strategies for life. This article presents content-selection principles that can be derived from the nature of scientific learning, from the organisation and operation of the personality and from the psychic nature of learning. These principles, which are introduced through examples of teaching and learning communication, can form the basis for the effective selection of textbook theory and textbook practice.

**Key words:** modern scientific approach, postmodern scientific approach, action psychology, competences, teaching and learning communication

### 1. The Quality of Course Books

Debates surrounding the quality of course books have developed along the lines of a series of problems since the liberalisation of the Hungarian course book market. At times, it is the paradigms which define the course books, whether they are based in pedagogy (e.g. the Meixner Method) or in theory of science (e.g. literary hermeneutics), have become the focus of attention. On other occasions, the course books' suitability to facilitate competency development has come to the fore. Furthermore, the timeliness of concepts related to the course book as a medium has featured in the discussions, as has the role of course books in facilitating the learning process. Fischerné Dárdai for example, classified the areas of course book research taking these debates into consideration, and differentiated four categories: the course book as a vehicle of knowledge, the course book as a medium, the course book as a product, and the course book as a learning tool (Fischerné Dárdai, 2002).

However, the pedagogical literature pays little attention to the problem of course book writing, and in Hungary the practising course book writer can only rely on the regulations and a government statute.<sup>1</sup> Some theories of education usually present the course book as an educational tool, and derive the criteria of a good course book from the currently prevailing educational theory paradigm (Ferenczi & Fodor, 1997; Nagy, 1993; Natalka, 1998; Adey, Shayer & Yates, 2001). Other theories of education

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Education Statute "OM 10/2006. (III.27.)" amended the previous Ministry of Education Statute "OM 23/2004. (VIII. 27.)" on the designation of course books, financial assistance on course books and the school distribution of course books. The amendments were extended to include a system of factors regarding the pedagogical assessment of course books.

Ministry of Education Statute OM 23/2004. (VIII. 27.),  
[http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=a0400023.om](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=a0400023.om) [2013.02.10]

Ministry of Education Statute OM 10/2006. (III.27.),  
[http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=a0400023.om](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=a0400023.om) [2013.02.10]

do not even raise the problem, as if it did not even exist (Falus, 1998; OECD, 2007). In a parallel development, the last fifteen years have witnessed an abundance of publications appearing on the Hungarian course book market and, what is more, sometimes several course books have been printed not only for the same subject but also for the same year. It has also occurred quite frequently that two teachers giving the same course on the same subject in the same year at the same school were using different course books (Radó). Having examined the accessible resources providing a theoretical base for writing a course book as well as the publications designated as course books available on the Hungarian market, a rather blurred yet colourful picture emerges. Therefore, it seems necessary to formulate a number of professional criteria and to substantiate them on a theoretical basis in order to establish what the proportion of theory and practice should be in a course book and how they should relate respective to each other. In the current study I will examine the particular case of a Communications course book.

## 2. Defining the learning content or “What shall we teach?”

Learning content, according to the most straightforward definition, is “the material taught, that is, the aggregate of those elements of knowledge which the school delivers, whose transfer is planned by the teachers and which the children must learn” (Nataalka, 1998)<sup>2</sup>. The concept of learning content has gradually been extended since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to comprise abilities, proficiencies, skills and attitudes, in other words, as regards the definition of learning content a knowledge-centred approach has been replaced by a personality-centred approach (Nataalka, 1997). The Hungarian Cyclopaedia of Pedagogy defines learning content as the realisation of the educational objective, and as a system of knowledge, information, cultural resources, objects and applications, as well as their processing, selected and arranged for the purpose of learning (Báthory & Falus, 1997).

Devising the learning content is the responsibility of the syllabus which specifies the knowledge accumulated in the individual areas of education as information, skills, abilities and attitudes (Hungarian National Curriculum, 2012).

In order to define the learning content we need to answer the following question: What is the function of learning content?

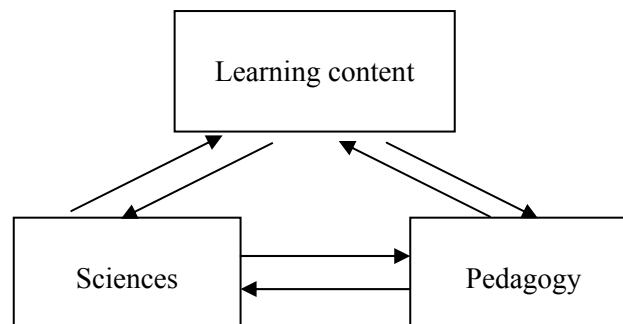
Nahalka presents three possibilities regarding the development of learning content: the first one emphasises the acquisition of cultural knowledge, the second highlights the development of skills, while the third one underscores the value of making students realise the constructed nature of knowledge. The author argues that the content developer needs to make a decision as to which paradigm regarding the learning content he or she follows (Nataalka, 2008).

Reviewing the history of education, the question can be answered in a number of ways. The so-called encyclopaedic school underlines the transfer of encyclopaedic and cultural knowledge, thus, the learning content will be informative from this perspective. The formalist school aims to shape specific personality characteristics, thus, learning content functions as a tool in the service of personality development. This approach led to the designation of subjects aimed at cognitive development, such as Greek, Latin or mathematics. According to didactic utilitarianism, learning content should include the minimal amount of information which is necessary and sufficient to acquire vocational knowledge at secondary level (Ferenczi & Fodor, 1996). Modern didactics considers learning content a means and an end at the same time, in other words, learning content has to be developed in a manner so that it would be appropriate to transfer cultural knowledge and values, while simultaneously aiding the students’ personality development. Thus, the changes in the sciences, scientific learning and development are defined together with the pedagogical concepts regarding personality development in general, and the nature of learning in particular. Therefore, it is helpful to subordinate the various aspects of learning content development to this principle so that it could fulfil its social and pedagogical functions at the same time.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation of quotes also by the translator of the article.

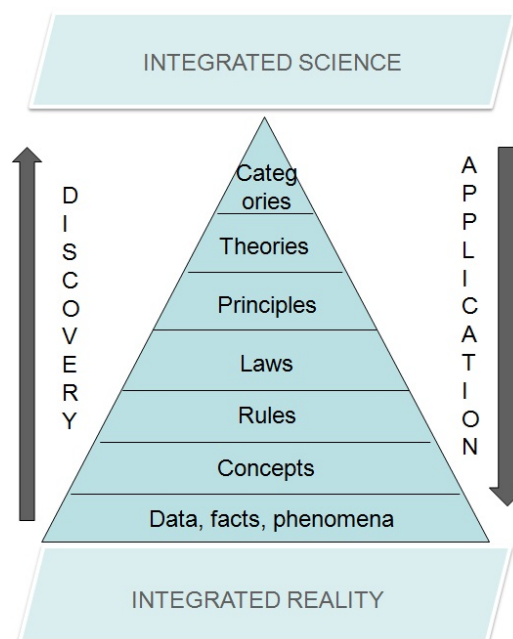
As a next useful step, I will examine the systemic relationship between learning content, sciences and pedagogy which mutually assume and define each other (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *The mutually interactional relationship between learning content, sciences and pedagogy*

## 2.1. The relationship between reality and science, or “How is science organised and what is scientific learning like?”

According to a modernist interpretation of sciences, science is the result of human knowledge representing universality and absolute rationality. In essence, it can be summarised by stating that the scientific learning process uncovers and describes objective reality: first, it observes the facts, data and phenomena of integrated reality, creates concepts and labels them. Then it establishes regularities between the discovered phenomena and raises these to the level of laws. Afterwards, as a result of learning, it conceives the principles operating and applicable in the given field which explain the phenomena. Finally, it forms the theories which aid the understanding of integrated reality (Ferenczi & Fodor, 1997). According to the above, scientific learning is a special way and form of learning, which proceeds from discovering integrated reality to constructing the structure of integrated science (Figure 2). This approach presupposes an objective, knowable, discoverable reality, a special form of which is science, which is more and more comprehensive, integrated, continually growing, and which describes reality in a more and more perfect way. To this day, this understanding still defines thinking about scientific learning, although new approaches have emerged in various theories of science (Mihály, 2008).



**Figure 2.** *The structural construction of scientific learning*

Postmodern philosophy of science emphasises the local value of thinking instead of universality. According to this approach, learning is associated with a given culture and language, that is, it does not exist objectively because it cannot be separated from the subject of the learner. At a theory of science level, this is conceived as the idea that science exists in paradigms and an inalienable characteristic of paradigms is that they cannot be measured against each other (Kuhn, 2000). The weight of paradigms depends on how much leverage they have and how much they aid our ability to manipulate the world. Based on the above, the criterion for scientificness is formulated whereby we accept that science is some kind of special form of learning, that is, it aims to consistently meet certain requirements (methodologies) to be fulfilled during the learning process (Mihály, 2008).

Considering sciences and the nature of scientific learning, two principles can be formulated for the design of learning content:

1. to clearly name those paradigms which are transmitted by the learning content and to discover those opportunities which reveal the coherence and the pragmatic nature of the given paradigms;
2. to find the appropriate proportion when selecting data, facts, phenomena, concepts, rules, laws and principles for the learning content.

## **2.2. Pedagogical perceptions of personality development in general and the nature of learning in particular**

Provided that we accept the principle that learning content also serves as a personality development tool, the most significant pedagogical perceptions regarding personality development and the nature of learning deserve to be reviewed.

Without any claim to completeness, firstly, it is helpful to examine the pedagogical learning theory based on the discoveries of psychology of action. Psychological epistemology associated with Piaget considers activity in psychological terms as an essential precondition for the development of mental abilities which, as such, comprises psychological operations or actions. It reveals the similarities between material and intellectual activity, recognises identical aspects in their development, and, in addition, describes the mental operations and their developmental stages. It distinguishes two key processes of mental development: assimilation, as the process of incorporating new elements (piece of information) into the already existing psychological scheme (system), and accommodation as the integration (adaptation) of the existing schemes (structures) to the new elements (pieces of information), which results in the rearrangement of the psychological structure (Piaget, 1997). According to this school of thought, what is important is the learner's activeness, that is, the child's activities aimed at transforming and influencing his environment. At the same time, we need to recognise that describing the process of trying to create a balance between the organism and its environment goes far beyond the realisation of the importance of action, and advances the process of intellectual "construction" which forms the basis of cognitive sciences.

Early cognitive psychology contributed to our understanding of the learning process by looking at how the human intellect functions as a way of information processing. This approach considers the human brain as a being which manipulates symbols, solves problems and reacts to the changes of the outside world in an intelligent manner. The first cognitivist description of problemsolving can be attributed to Newell and Simon who realised the importance of the various stages of solving a problem, such as: recognition and analysis; the collection and examination of the data necessary to solve the problem; the preparation and then testing of solution plans; empirical verification; and finally the completion of solving the problem (Natałka, 2001).

According to this approach which became popularly known as psychology of action, the principles which generate possibilities as well as conditions for effective activation and problemsolving need to be considered when developing learning content.

Another defining pedagogical school of thought concerning personality development and learning is the competence model which has received much criticism to date and is far from want of controversy. As regards Hungary, the model has been developed by József Nagy and it views the personality as a learned organisation, or an organised structure, a finite and quantitatively defined component system

(e.g. language), which is composed of relatively permanent, quantitatively infinite component set (e.g. vocabulary), and which evolves according to particular rules in a conscious or unconscious manner, and facilitates successful adaptation and social integration. Based on the examination of the structural organisation of competencies, the following factors ensure the functioning of the component sets making up personality competencies:

- a motivational system serving decision making processes (such as needs, interests, behavioural patterns, attitudes, attachments, convictions, beliefs and the associated knowledges)
- signalling and motivational emotions (affective apparatus)
- a system of abilities and knowledges enabling behaviour and activity (Nagy, 2000).

The development of personality component sets is a fundamental responsibility of education, that is, every educator and every expert wishing to work on learning content must have the development of motives, emotions, knowledges and abilities on his or her agenda (Szöke-Milinte, 2005). The acceptance of the competency model offers at three principles for the development of learning content:

1. the learning content should be appropriate for the development of a system of knowledge;
2. the learning content should provide for the development of skills, proficiencies and abilities;
3. the learning content should facilitate the development of motivation and emotions, and the evolution of attitudes.

### **3. The relationship between science and the school subject or “What shall be included in the learning content?”**

So far we have considered the principles on which the learning content could be based from a theory of science or pedagogical perspective. In general, it can be established that when devising the learning content, one has to beware of approaches which consider the school subject a miniature version of science. As a consequence, one has to try to develop a curriculum along the lines of the principles presented above, and, thus, succeed in transferring cultural knowledge and developing the personality. It is the structural construction and the factual / conceptual system of the school subject as well as the paradigms and learning methods selected with their associated tasks and exercises that essentially differentiate learning content from science.

The most obvious and concrete form of learning content is the course book, which presents us with another transformational level of learning content depending on the stage of education (primary or secondary level), the year (e.g., primary level senior cycle or secondary level in the Hungarian system) and the course philosophy (if it is an integrated subject, e.g. citizenship or specialised subjects, such as thermodynamics). The correct proportion of theory and practice may be achieved by considering the principles discussed above when developing, writing and devising the main body of the course book. It would be mistaken to give either one priority over the other. Similarly, it would be mistaken to view theory as a mere opportunity to acquire knowledge, while practice as nothing more than a means of developing abilities. The role of course book theories is not only to expand understanding and to increase cultural knowledge but also to help students experience the ways and methods of learning. At the same time, they provide an appropriate framework for skills development, as in the absence of theoretical foundations the exercises cannot fulfil their role with regard to developing skills, proficiencies and abilities. The theory of science paradigms featured in a course book – exactly by means of the worldviews they advocate – can shape the students’ interests, motivation, emotions and attitudes in a particular way. Independent learning activity is a cornerstone of all modern course books, as this is the only way to ensure individual rhythm and style, personal involvement, and an understanding based on realisation and discovery. Simultaneously, while activating students, not only the development of skills and proficiencies come into focus, but also the testing of scientific

paradigms and learning schemes in addition to formulating new theoretical realisations and the “construction” of new knowledge<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.1. Modern and postmodern scientific approach in a Communications course book

Following the theoretical introduction, I will examine Chapter Four of the course book *Üzleti kommunikáció* (Business Communications) by Judit Raátz and Enikő Szőke-Milinte (Raátz & Szőke-Milinte, 2010)<sup>4</sup>. It is apparent that when discussing communication problems the course book mentions several paradigms, and, accordingly, several theories (the Coordinated Management of Meaning, Interpersonal Deception Theory, Social Penetration Theory, Transaction Analysis, Constructivism, interactional perspectives, etc.). These theories are not presented in contrast to one another rather they complement each other, thus, allowing for the interpretation of communication problems from a variety of perspectives. One important principle is that the course book does not aim to be a miniature version of science. Furthermore, the content only features as much theoretical background and only presents the paradigm to such an extent that is sufficient for the student to experience and understand the particular concept under examination (i.e. communication problem), and which ensures the coherence of the paradigm. The two basic principles for selecting the paradigms were expedience and multidisciplinary: the authors decided on those paradigms to be included in the course content which help the students orientate themselves in the world most (and which they themselves apply), and which can be applied to other areas of knowledge. In this respect, the course book content follows the logic of the postmodern scientific approach.

In the following sections, I will present the subchapter titled “A megtévesztés alkalmazása” (“The Use of Deception”) (Figure 3). It is evident that, apart from presenting a paradigm in a coherent manner, the subchapter also features concepts (deception, falsification, etc.), rules (“if you realise that someone has deceived you... you will be more careful with him/her”), as well as laws. The latter appears in the form of an exercise, whereby the law is formulated under the teacher’s supervision, (for example, the teacher can elicit that we all use deception during in-class oral examination: that is, there are situations when everybody uses the same communication strategies, even though it may not be a particularly fortunate choice of behaviour).

In this sense, the selected subchapter represents a modern scientific approach where the students are introduced to both the deductive (the application of rules and laws in practical situations, e.g. the discussion of the literary piece by a Hungarian author or of a personal example) and the inductive (arriving at the general conclusions by observing practice first) ways of learning. Both postmodern and modern scientific approaches have consequences regarding the proportion of theory and practice that feature in the learning content. A postmodern scientific approach results in so much practical and empirical content in each subchapter which is exactly sufficient so that the function and the coherence of the paradigm under examination could be recognised and experienced through the content. The proportion of theory and practice in this case is defined by the relevance of the paradigm with reference to the concrete situation. Following the logic of the modernist concept of learning, when establishing the proportion of theory and practice it is helpful if the course book content follows the proportion of the individual levels according to the structural organisation of science. The course material should include a few important theories with their associated principles, laws and rules

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<sup>3</sup> When writing this study I made a conscious decision not to discuss the influence of constructive learning theory and the constructive pedagogical paradigm with regard to learning content. The subject here is a lesser known and developed theory of learning and knowledge, which has already been considered and included in the theoretical framework of didactics, however, which has been cautiously approached by specialist didacticians and educational content developers.

<sup>4</sup> This course book is mostly aimed at students at a vocational secondary school specialising in economic whose curriculum includes communications as a specialist subject, although the first four chapters could be useful for communications training at any secondary level institution where communications features as an individual subject for at least a semester.

without any claim to completeness as well as so much factual material as is necessary and sufficient for the formulation of concepts, the recognition of the relationship between the data, the facts and the phenomena and the generalisation of rules and then laws.

### The Use of Deception

**Deception** is a message which aims to intentionally mislead the other person so that he or she would construct false notions or draw incorrect conclusions.

The communicator can achieve this by using any of the following three strategies:

- **Falsification:** he or she lies, creates a fictional event which could serve as the subject of communication later on.
- **Suppression:** he or she tells part of the truth but avoids the details incriminating him or her.
- **Distortion:** he or she gives evasive answers consistently, avoids the subject, and if he or she is a clever communicator, can manage to steer the conversation in a different direction without the interlocutor noticing it.

If during the communication you realise that your partner has applied any of the deception strategies, next time you will be more careful with him / her, because you will only accept what you hear conditionally, and will pay more careful attention to the message.

Determine which form of deception is used in the following situation?

JO

Lt. Kendrick, do you think Santiago was murdered?

KENDRICK

Commander, I believe in God, and in his son Jesus Christ, and because I do, I can say this: Private Santiago is dead and that's a tragedy. But he's dead because he had no code. He's dead because he had no honor. And God was watching.

*A Few Good Men, 1992, dir. Rob Reiner*

Give an example of deception and identify the strategy used!

Tell someone what deception strategy do you normally use to cover up your lack of preparation when called for an in-class oral examination or during other tests!

Read the short story "A rossz tanuló felel" ("The bad student tested") by Frigyes Karinthy! What type of communication problem can you detect? Discuss!

Figure 3. *The Use of Deception*

### 3.2. Action and activity in communications course books

In this section I will analyse the subchapter titled "Technikák a kommunikációs zavarok kiküszöbölésére" ("Techniques to resolve communication problems") (Figure 4).

At first sight we are presented with unusual course book content: images, music and exercises comprise the section titled "Kommunikációs készségek fejlesztése" ("Developing communication skills"). We, the course book writers, found ourselves in a special situation where we had to invite the students to participate in the development of communication skills through the process of writing the course book content. We believed that the concrete forms of the learning content can only serve the development of communication skills if they comply with the principle of making the students carry out actions and becoming involved in activities. Thus, while the students complete the exercise, they


actively participate in a number of ways: mentally (e.g. by inventing a story) and/or materially (e.g. by presenting the story) and/or in a materialised way (e.g. by writing a poem).

**Techniques to Resolve Communication Problems**

**Developing communication skills**

Listen to *Piano Sonata No. 11 in A, K. 331 „Alla Turca”* by W. A. Mozart! Tell someone the story that you thought of while listening to the music! Here are a few questions to help you create your story: Where does it take place? What’s happening? Who’s it happening to? How do the characters feel?  
There is no good or bad story. All stories are good as long as they are inspired by the music!

Have a look at the picture below!  
At the same time, listen to the “Winter” concerto of the *Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi!  
You could find a colour version of the picture among the uploaded materials. (IV/5)



Write as many answers as possible to the following questions:  
What is (the landscape, the road, the avenue, etc.) like?  
What is happening (during the winter, on the road, to the snow, etc.)?  
Write a non-rhyming quatrain using the words you have collected!

*Snowy road.* A photograph by Albert Égető.

**Figure 4.** *Techniques to resolve communication problems*

During these activities they partake in analysis, synthesis, comparison, abstraction, generalisation, recognition, evocation, application, etc., that is, they activate mental processes. In order for them to be able to carry out real activities they need to know a sufficient amount of facts and information at a sufficiently high level. Therefore, the exercises must build on theories, or personal experience or personal discovery through the factual material found in the course book. Thus, the proportion of theory and practice is also defined by what knowledge-base is associated with the skills, proficiencies and abilities that need to be developed. In our case – in the first part of the chapter – the students learn about communication problems through ten communication paradigms from ten different perspectives. As we have seen in the subchapter “A megtévesztés alkalmazása” (“The use of deception”), activation, or involving the students in activities, features when presenting each paradigm, however, these problemsolving exercises and applications are much more straightforward. On the other hand, in the section “Technikák a kommunikációs zavarok kiküszöbölésére” (“Techniques to resolve communication problems”) the emphasis shifts much more towards practice, since students must experience the techniques first and only then can they successfully recognise them and build an awareness of them. Therefore, when devising learning content, one has to clearly understand the objective of studying the educational material: the process of learning and, in general, competency development should receive more attention. In addition, how much factual material should be used in skills development also depends on the skills and proficiencies content. In the case of deception, the concepts of deception, falsification and suppression had to be formulated in a deductive manner, and only then could the opportunity be presented to the students that they recognise the type of problem in



a film extract or short story. In the case of techniques, students first and foremost need to experience that the basis for avoiding and resolving problems is flexible, open and creative communication. As a result, the course book content offers four complex exercises one after the other. It depends on the teacher's competence how he or she manages to coordinate the completion of the exercises: thus, the students could remain at the simpler (skills development) level purely doing the exercise, or they could translate the process into a problemsolving task. In this latter case, they can transcend the level of mere skills development and even acquire new proficiencies, recognise new knowledges or development their motivation with the aid of the exercises (e.g. dramatisation of the stories or editing a volume of poetry). In other words, we can establish that competency development can also be completed through the exercises. We are not talking about simple, template-like exercises, rather a series of tasks devised by the course book authors to speak to the students involving them in the adventure: so that they would in fact recall and follow a so-called internal "movie" and would actually be able to write a quatrain having been motivated by the music and the landscape in the current example. Thus, when doing a task well and completing communications exercises, the students' emotions and attitudes are also functioning actively.

In addition, during sharing their stories or writing their poems they are using such basic communicative skills as description, specification, narration or verbal creativity. They can acquire new knowledge with regard to the composer, the composition, the photographed landscape, the location, the photographer, the nature of the specifically applied communications skill, or the ways of "how to make someone see something." According to the competency development approach, the proportion of practice is determined by the compliance with the principles originating from the structure of the competence: practice cannot be defined in a single sentence or question, rather the so-called background materials (such as image, music, location, other props, etc.) need to be provided for the processes of emotional involvement, training and discovery, as well as the "script" or procedure for the completion of the exercises has to be clearly outlined.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study has introduced two principles with regard to the selection of learning content which are deduced from the nature of scientific learning. Furthermore, it has been argued that both principles can mutually co-exist and feature when selecting and arranging course book theory and practice (such as coherent paradigms and modern scientific structure). In addition, the paper has defined two further principles, this time stemming from the organisation and functioning of the individual's personality and the nature of learning. It has demonstrated through the presentation of specific course book content that their application is effective with regard to course subject theory and practice (or activation (involving the students in activities) and problem solving as well as competency development). When devising course book content it is helpful to consider other educational organisational factors (e.g. age), general didactic aspects (e.g. whether the course in question is an integrated subject or a specialised subject) and further specialist feature (e.g. the appropriateness regarding subject-specific objectives). However, these issues currently fall outside the scope of the current study, and shall be considered in detail in future theoretical enquiries.

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