Collocations Extra is one of the recent volumes of work within the field of vocabulary instruction that aims at developing language learners’ competence of collocations. The book, primarily published for the teacher’s use, highly features in the EFL/ESL pedagogical syllabus in the sense that it affords great opportunities for the production of natural-sounding speaking and writing, hence contributing to the students’ greater linguistic, metalinguistic, and cultural intelligibility. The book is intended to serve as a supplementary resource to prime students from elementary through advanced levels to become fluent English speakers and writers. It has been designed by the authors as a template for providing the students with the language they really need to produce with confidence.

This volume appears in 18 three-module units framed by topic and designed for three different course levels, i.e., elementary/pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced. It opens with a clear table of contents followed by a map that outlines the main sections throughout the book and closes with photocopiable word lists of collocations arranged in alphabetical order and by topic/level. The book is equipped with a CD-ROM packed with printable worksheets that allow teachers and students to create games adapted for further practice of the collocations. A table is also included right after the wordlists to facilitate game search and selection in the CD-ROM. The lessons are each presented for circa 45 minutes and according to a set of step-by-step plans and with a range of miscellaneous tasks and materials incorporated into photocopiable worksheets.

Collocations Extra is proud of its presentation model, offering the lessons in four developmental stages (Warmer, Input, Practice, and Follow-up). The Warmer stage, also referred to as the warm-up stage, introduces the lesson topic highly building upon the pupils’ declarative knowledge, seeking to engage students through pair or group work in a number of problem-solving activities typically based on the ready-made worksheets. The Input stage exposes students to a set of 10 to 18 common collocations throughout lessons, aiming at raising the students’ awareness of the situations where these linguistic combinations are used, especially through certain teacher-directed activities. The Practice stage means to help students to enrich what they have already taken in by engaging in activities through controlled processing, where, as Ellis (2003) put it, the students’ conscious attention is normally required to perform within the instructor’s mediation. Finally, the Follow-up, or output, stage is assumed to involve automatic processing of the tasks; that is, the teacher provides a variety of contexts where the students go through a number of engaging activities to restructure the learnt knowledge over trials and reorganize the knowledge into new ideas and forms while minimizing his/her mediation. An important feature of all the stages is that the presentations vary in complexity as the level advances in modules.

Collocations Extra has a number of strengths. The salient feature of the book is its diversity of task types and activities through lessons, which not only permits a great deal of cognitive involvement from individual learners, but also helps them to take more roles in the construction and co-construction of meaningful performances. Provision of a CD-ROM full of adaptable activities aimed at maximizing students’ awareness of the target language conventions has made it a useful material of its own kind. Another strength of the book is that the collocations appear in themes. Such a thematic approach to teaching word chunks, which serve multiple interests and needs of students, can also meet multiple objectives. It can, for example, develop students’ L2 vocabulary skills, contribute to their language growth in specific topics, help them to accelerate the learnt knowledge over trials and reorganize the knowledge into new ideas and forms while minimizing his/her mediation. An important feature of all the stages is that the presentations vary in complexity as the level advances in modules.

The book also has its own drawbacks. Most of the collocations, such as watch a film, big family, play football, late for work, go to school, best friend, etc., are predictable to the learners of the elementary/pre-intermediate level and do not need any attempts in the input stage to ‘teach them in a thorough way’, as the authors (p. 9) claim. These collocations can be acquired in pre-elementary coursebooks popular in English language schools worldwide. The second shortcoming is that the authors have structured the lessons with tasks that focus only on the psycholinguistic processes inducing learners to engage in certain types of language use and mental processing in the classroom. Therefore, contrary to the authors’ belief (p. 10) that students can use the collocations “in a free way”, the non-real-world performances cannot lead easily to the automatization of the collocational use because collocations are culturally-driven and therefore demand more socio-cultural contexts to take effect.

Shortcomings aside, Collocations Extra still has the potential for meeting students and teachers’ needs and objectives in different ELT programs. It can foster students’ native-like linguistic and communicative competence of the co-occurring lexical items. Moreover, it can offer English teachers opportunities to contextualize the classroom activities with collocationally-structured tasks, creating a motivating and pleasing atmosphere of instruction. Since the recent corpus-based research stipulates practicing collocations in ELT classrooms (see Stubbs, 2004), it is strongly suggested that the language schools include this user-friendly volume in their regular language programs.

References

1. It is explicitly acknowledged that the present review has not been previously published or is not being considered for publication elsewhere.
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Category: Book Reviews, Main (quarterly) Journals
Over the last 30 years, a growing number of studies have concentrated on the correlation between second language teachers’ beliefs and their pedagogical practices.