

## **River Street School: the world in our street CD-Rom Manchester Diversity and Inclusion Team**

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This new CD-Rom from Manchester's Diversity and Inclusion Team is intended for use with early stage EAL learners in KS2 & 3 and aims to introduce them to 'some of the language, concepts and skills' they will encounter in NC Geography. It covers topics such as locating places on a map of a local area and using simple directions to get from one place to another; using four figure grid references and common map symbols to identify the locations of places; it introduces a world map, continents and particular countries and cities; and it explores the connections between things we see in our local environment and their connections with other parts of the world. It relates loosely to a QCA Y6/7 transition unit on 'Making Connections' and encourages students to make links between their local area and other places in the world.

The basic set up is that we are introduced to 8 students (Mariam from Iran, Jack from Wales, Firaz from Libya, Mai Ling, whose family is from China, Zahir from Pakistan, Liban from Somalia, Rabia from Bangladesh, and Tyrone from Montserrat, and their geography teacher, Mr Haynes who is mixed heritage, Irish and Ghanaian. They are all in class 7H at 'River Street School, located in a fictional area of Manchester called Millfield. We follow them through a series of four lessons. Here is a description of the first one to give you a flavour of what's involved.

### **Lesson 1: Where is River Street School?**

In this lesson, we are introduced to each of the children in turn. They describe where they live using simple statements and prepositions. The text appears in a bubble on screen and also on an audio-text, '*I live in a house on Market Street. I live opposite the bank. I live next to the mosque.*' The user passes the mouse over the locations and if successful Mr Haynes says, 'Well done!' and if not, 'Try again!' So, the exercise is very straightforward at both the linguistic and technological levels. The children then identify the locations of various places on the map. Again, there is an audio track and a speech bubble that contains the text. The street name and preposition are in different colours and when the mouse is passed over them arrows appear on the map to show the location and illustrate the preposition. In the final part of the lesson, 'Using directions', one of the students' houses is highlighted on the map and a jumbled set of directions appear on screen. The user

clicks the mouse on the statement and if correct an animated character follows the direction until another is needed. There is no audio-text for this exercise, which seems a shame. It would have been good if once the whole sequence of directions had been successfully given the animation ran again from start to finish with a description of the route on audio. Something to consider for the next version.

The other lessons are:

### **Lesson 2: an ordnance survey map of Millfield.**

This lesson introduces OS maps and some common symbols (footpath, river, railway, etc.) In the course of this lesson, students have to identify symbols on a map and features on a map using four-figure grid references.

### **Lesson 3: How is 7H connected to other places?**

In this lesson, we hear about which countries and cities around the world the 7H students are connected with, we learn about the continents and match up disoriented segments of the map to their actual location; we find out about where relatives live and what they do there, and do a job quiz to check that we were listening carefully! This latter activity requires you to type the job title accurately into a box. If you get it wrong you can't move on. Attention to form and content then! That should reassure the Strategy Team.

### **Lesson 4: What links Millfield to other places?**

This is an interesting activity requiring you to identify objects in the landscape, shops or school and link them to another part of the world, thus showing the global village in action, with a mere click of the mouse! It can be quite tricky as the connection isn't always obvious. Thinking Skills!

In addition to the CD-Rom activities, there are also a series of other resources in pdf format. These include a series of games including: *lost property* (using directions and sequencing skills); a *map barrier game* (pair-work involving four-figure grid references); *find the country* (a group activity for four involving identifying a country from cards containing descriptions of its location, population, resources, etc.); and the *River Street board game* which involves moving around the board as one of the characters collecting various tokens on the way. A set of chance cards keeps it lively and random. There are also bilingual word lists of all the key vocabulary in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, English, Farsi, Somali and Urdu.

So, you get a lot of stuff for your money and it has been carefully structured so that the language and

keyboard skills demanded are relatively straightforward (though I must admit that I did get stuck on the map symbol game as I hadn't realised you had to click and drag the symbol to the appropriate box, but then again, I never had the advantage of the KS3 ICT strategy). From an EAL perspective, there are lots of opportunities to replay the audio texts and go back over the lessons, thus cleverly exploiting the computer's excellent talent for infinite patience that no teacher could approach. The range of activities, from reading, listening, and simple writing are pitched at an appropriate level and whilst the demands do gradually increase over the four lessons they are set at an appropriate pitch throughout and there are useful help screens if you get stuck (which is how I finally discovered the click and drag secret). So congratulations to Jackie Barrow and Janna Welsby who created the content.

Another striking thing about the program is the excellently drawn figures of the children and adults that manage to look like real people that you might actually meet in a school or on the street as opposed to the rather depressing parade of 'amusing' aliens and hybrid Simpsons and Pokemon characters that are commonly used to sidestep the diversity 'problem' in commercial software and books designed for children. So congratulations also to the designer, Tristram Rossin. The voices of the children and adults (one of whom I think I recognise but won't embarrass him here, Mark) are authentic, clear and reassuringly unprofessional.

In considering any piece of software for use in language development in the classroom, it's useful to consider issues relating to the design of the software, how learners are expected to interact with it and how teachers will organize its use. I've covered the first two to some extent but the third is trickier and arises, perhaps, out of the interaction of the first two. For example, the fact that there is little feedback in the program to the learner's input (restricted largely to 'well done' or 'try again' as opposed to more detailed feedback that might comment on the use of prepositions, say or correcting misconceptions about four-figure grid references) is not necessarily an issue if there are other ways of providing effective, formative responses. The additional resources that come with this package may serve this function here, with students practising the use of appropriate language and displaying content knowledge in live interaction with their peers which they and the teacher can monitor and attend to.

This is an unpretentious piece of software that sets out to do a specific job and does it very well indeed. There are no whiz-bang sound effects, no nausea-inducing visual pyrotechnics, just well-thought out and presented content at an

exceptionally reasonable price. There's a quote from a teacher on the cover that describes it as, 'Bright, colourful and the pupils love it!' That's perfectly true but it's also rather more than just that. How much more? Well, you'll have to buy the pack to find out.

Frank Monaghan

River Street School: The world in our Street is available from:

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