

REVIEWS

School Talk – An introduction to School Talk

CD-ROM

Manchester Diversity and Inclusion Team

Images by Tristram Rossin

This is a further addition to Manchester's Diversity and Inclusion Team's growing collection of multimedia resources, which includes 'River Street - The World in Our Street', reviewed previously.

This time, the focus is on basic classroom vocabulary and aimed squarely at beginners.

The CD is divided into 5 'lessons' covering:

- Our school
- In Class
- People
- Clothes
- Food

In lesson 1 the students drag their mouse over a plan of the school and the name of each space (library, playground, cloakroom, etc) is pronounced for them. I actually found this screen the least successful as there is no obvious connection between the 2D plan and the function of the rooms, nor does it relate to any specific school, so I'm not sure what a beginner could make of this.

However, things improve rapidly from then onwards.

In the second lesson the student is introduced to the classroom. Again, they drag their mouse over objects in the attractively drawn screens and if they are active they suddenly come alive with shooting stars and the word is pronounced (door, chair, white board, etc.). Subsequent activities involve the students dragging single words from a list of three or four to match it with the appropriate image. Then this becomes more complex as simple sentences are built up.

In the 'People' lesson, the students are introduced to people who work in the school and in addition to doing simple drag and drop exercises at the one-word level they also have to complete short sentences about some of the characters they meet, e.g. 'Omar is a boy. He is six. He's short'. Interestingly, it won't allow you to put numbers in for the age; you have to spell out the word. It's also worth mentioning at this point, that a correct answer is received with a cheer and the words 'Well done' and a wrong answer is met with a very sympathetic 'Ahhh' and the words 'Try again'.

Clothes involves using the present continuous 'He's wearing trousers and trainers' (subtly introducing simple clauses!) and you can have fun dressing the outline figures of the boy and the girl however you wish.

Food covers a fair range of stuff found in school canteens but it's not exactly diverse (unless you still think of pasta and rice as Italian and Indian!). This seems a shame as it might have been a good opportunity to make students feel more at home if some of the foods they find there had been reflected in the CD-ROM. This also applies to the clothes section because although the children in the illustrations are not all wearing western dress, these items are not covered in the vocabulary lists or sentence making exercises. I also had some problems doing the exercises as you are introduced to a number of children and given a list of the six foods they like and six they don't like. In the exercises you are expected to remember these in order to complete the sentence grids. I know I'm getting on a bit these days and my short-term memory isn't what it was, but that's an incredibly taxing feat unless you are prepared to skip to the relevant page using the back button!

In theory, the student can work alone with the CD but I would imagine that they would need some help at the start to get used to how they move through the screens. It is, however, very straightforward in its screen design - my compliments to Tristram Rossin for his excellent illustrations and to the team for the choice of natural sounding voices. There is a familiar menu screen (so long as you are 'familiar' with the genre!) or the student can use the drag-down menu for ease of navigation and to save returning to the starting screen during lessons.

This is a useful and attractive (and highly affordable!) resource that students can get stuck into straightaway and learn some valuable survival vocabulary as well as being introduced to the basic points of English sentence construction. I'd certainly recommend it.

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