

'Survival'

A Classroom Management Reading Maze for Teacher Trainees.

C.A.L.L. Assignment 1993

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'Survival'

'Survival' is a reading maze intended for use with teacher-trainees. Quite a large proportion of the non-native speakers who wish to acquire a high standard of English are motivated to do this because they intend to teach English, and quite a large proportion of these intend to work in schools. Therefore, they need to learn the skills of classroom management. In fact, classroom management may well bulk large in their minds at this time.

There should therefore be a strong motivation for reading anything which may enhance this skill. There are books on the subject, but the advantage of a reading maze over a book is that the book will tend to deal in generalisations, that is, unless it is fiction or reminiscence, whereas a reading maze puts the student in a particular situation in which he has to make decisions. This particularisation, though, is also a limitation, which is why I have added some some frames generalising the lessons to be learnt at the end of the program.

As well as being intended to give some practice in reading, I also hope that the program will actually prepare teacher trainees for some of the problems to be encountered in schools.

So far as use by a wider readership than teacher trainees is concerned, the public, I think, is interested in the skills of particular professions, and enjoys an opportunity to test its aptitude. At any rate, my own reaction to 'The Salesman' was that I appreciated the authenticity of the situation and the author's intentions.

The Program

'Survival' shows a typical classroom situation involving a disruptive pupil or pupils. A choice of solutions to this problem is offered, and the probable consequence of each course of action is described, plus the further possible courses of action which this new situation offers. Thus the reader works his way through the maze. There are four terminations to the maze, but only one of them is deemed satisfactory. At the less satisfactory terminations the reader is offered the choice of continuing through the maze or exiting.

There are a number of loops in the maze, both small scale, involving only three frames, and large scale, in which the reader repeats a considerable part of the program. As well as this the reader could, by a making inauspicious choices, wander about through the frame, visiting most of the frames.

Using the maze is easy. Once the reader has summoned up the first frame, the only operation he has to perform is to use the mouse to click on the sentence describing the course of action he has chosen. Instructions for exiting are given. Ease of use was one of the factors affecting the design of the maze. My intention

was that the reader should be able to give all his attention to the imaginary situation.

Most of the frames contain a fairly short text. The aim was to give the reader, who anyway would be reading much more slowly than a native speaker, only the minimum amount of reading necessary to enable him/her to make a decision. This is in accordance with current methodology, which recommends that the reader, his schemata fully activated, should press ahead with his reading without being too conscious of what he is doing.

Problems

A problem facing the writer of any maze is that, since he cannot continue to make branches indefinitely, he must sometimes make several frames lead into one. One frame therefore serves as a continuation for several branches of the story, and it is necessary to make it a logical continuation. I have done my best to do this. In particular I wanted, in one branch of the maze, George, the troublemaker's, place to be taken by another boy, after George had been expelled from the form, which I think is a totally realistic occurrence. Thus, I had to prevaricate over which boy was referred to at a later stage in the program. Also, since a reader may take a very devious route through the maze, logical continuity is hard to guarantee. Again, the reader may find himself repeating parts of the maze, but I think this is not a bad thing, and in some cases it makes an important point.

The greatest problem, which was brought home to me by trialling the program, is that it one must inevitably limit the courses of action which are given, and none of them may be what the reader would have chosen for himself. I hope that the reader will accept that he is to some extent involved in a fiction, which aims at entertainment rather than total realism. Nevertheless I have modified some of the choices according to the advice given. The same understanding will, I hope, cover the fact that many of the events are more dramatic, and some of the terminations more disastrous, than one would normally expect in a teacher's first term. In particular the headmaster is even more unhelpful, and the troublemakers more temperamental, than one would hope for, but I think it well for the student to be prepared for the worst. Obviously there are also great cultural differences in what may happen in schools, but I think there are underlying principles.

Although the text includes some difficult words and some idioms, I decided not to give expansions of these, firstly because expansion buttons are highlighted, which disturbs the appearance of the text, and secondly because providing such information in mid flow is not in accordance with the best reading methodology. I am sure the reader will be able to infer sufficient of the meaning to be able to continue with the maze.

I have not given instructions for exiting the program at mid point because I did not want to include these in every frame, nor could I expect the naive user to

remember them from the first frame. A student who wanted to exit would have to appeal to the teacher.

Lesson plan

This maze, like any reading text, is ideal for self access. To use it with a group of students, it would be necessary first of all to load 'Guide' into the central network. With a group of stand-alone machines 'Survival' would be loaded individually from the floppy disk. With networked machines, 'Survival' would be loaded into the drive which gave access to all the machines, Drive U as it used to be in Room 4.2, Drive T as I believe it is now. Students would be instructed to obtain the appropriate drive, and 'Survival' from the file menu. If there were too many students, or if it were their preference, they could work in pairs, which of course would add the extra dimension of spoken language to the skills which were being practised, but silent reading is also an important skill, so this feature is not necessary. If the students were as interested as I hope they would be, the last part of the lesson could easily be occupied by class discussion led by the teacher. Since the students would not all finish at the same time, those who finished early could spend time reading the extra frames. Sample discussion themes are listed below:

- * Why did one of the other boys begin to make trouble as soon as George was absent?
- * Why did the headmaster react so strongly to the use of physical punishment by the teacher?
- * What is the advantage or disadvantage of referring discipline problems to the headmaster?
- * What kind of interest do other members of the class take in the teacher's treatment of offenders ?
- * What is the effect of praising pupils?
- * How much should a teacher respect a parent's wishes concerning his child?

Conclusions

A reading maze is an ideal use of a computer. The computer handles the otherwise troublesome business of going from one point to another, nor is it possible for the reader to get any foreknowledge of the consequence of this choice. Choices, once made, cannot be rescinded. A certain glamour is given to the exercise of reading, and at the same time, certain features of real living and real decision-making are imitated. As far as an author is concerned, a disadvantage is that he writes some text that any given reader will not read because it will lie off his route through the maze, but hopefully a good maze will so interest the reader that he will wish to explore all its possibilities by repeated explorations.

'Survival' Abstract

This is an assignment for C.A.L.L. in which a reading maze intended for use by teacher trainees, showing a typical classroom management problem, and giving insight into the power structure of a school, was created. It was programmed in Guide 3.1. The software, the discussion, and a flow-chart of the maze are presented.

As a reading maze, it can be used by the single learner working alone. A small group of students could also use the maze, discussing the choices. In a session following use of the maze, whole-class discussion would be natural. The program thus has four aims 1) reading practice 2) evoking small -group talk 3) evoking class discussion. 4) training prospective teachers in managing their classrooms and their position in a school.

The level of English used in the maze, as suitable for teacher-trainees, is authentic, that is, not deliberately restricted

Appendix

Flow chart of the maze.

