

BOOK REVIEWS

## CROSSTALK

Megan Webster  
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Most teachers now recognise that students' need to practice freely and frequently the language patterns or functions they have been systematically taught. However, getting students to 'talk' is no easy task. Exchanging personal information or discussing local or national news is no doubt a worthwhile classroom activity, but many teachers feel uneasy about it. Couldn't it appear to the students as if time were being wasted? CROSSTALK is a very skillfully devised solution to a major language teaching problem - conversation practice.

CROSSTALK provides listening, reading and visual stimuli to encourage conversation in English for adolescent or adult students.

The course is comprised of three books, each with an accompanying tape and one teacher's guide which covers all books and tapes. Each book uses basically the same format but is aimed at a different level - Book 1, elementary, Book 2, pre-intermediate and Book 3, intermediate. According to the introduction, the nature of the topic determines the essential patterns to be used for conversation. Thus, in the elementary book students guessing about objects photographed at unusual angles will use structures such as "What is it? It's..... They're....." While in Book 3, students discussing family life might use "should", "need" and so on.

Each book features 20 different topics. Each topic is introduced with photographs or illustrations which lead to discussion. The discussion in turn leads to the listening material. After the listening section, there is a follow-up activity, either a game, role play or group discussion.

The teacher's guide provides a list of essential structures, a sample conversation and a tapescript for each topic plus some useful guidelines for setting up activities.

CROSSTALK is an excellent supplement to any basic English course. The topics chosen may not be innovative but they are tried and true favourites and are practically guaranteed to get classes talking. A teacher may need to do some selection depending on students interests, but there is enough variety of topics to allow for this.

The presentation of the CROSSTALK books is attractive. Colour is mixed with black and white and charts, maps diagrams and photographs are included. A useful vocabulary list is given with every topic. This list includes new or difficult words and expressions the students may need when discussing.

The tapes are well-made, clear yet challenging and sound effects add interest.

There is a good variety of follow-up activities for every topic. The instructions for such activities are given in a straightforward manner and the role plays and games suggested are simple enough for even a very inexperienced teacher. Teacher preparation time for these activities would be minimal, which will certainly appeal to most busy teachers who do not have time to prepare the cards and other extras so often required by more elaborate books. However, ideas for extra activities, for example using the song "She's leaving home" with the topic family life, are provided for teachers who wish to exploit a topic further. The teacher's role during group work is well defined in the introduction as the "good host at a cocktail party, friendly, flexible and unobtrusive."

Two areas where CROSSTALK fails to provide much help are handling listening comprehension and dealing with student error. It is a pity the teachers' guide doesn't suggest a variety of procedures to use with the listening material. Ideas on how to get students to focus attention on important points and what kind of lead-in or follow-up questions to use would have been helpful. The teacher's guide does provide a short section on handling errors, but since this is an area of considerable concern for teachers more information should be given.

CROSSTALK shows all the signs of having been written by experienced classroom teachers who have tried out their material before committing it to print. For this reason I am certain it will prove highly successful in classrooms around the world.

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