

Climate Change: Energy and Environment

Focus Educational Software

Unlimited User\Time licence cost: £149.95

Available from:

http://www.focuseducational.com/html/product_overview.php/pid/93

Let's start at the beginning – it's a PC CD-ROM! It's part of the recent drive towards e-learning and brings together a lot of different materials into one easy to use silvery disc. It is very easy to load – and actually works, in the main, on Windows Vista!! Navigation is straightforward – point and click variety. The layout is simple and enables easy navigation around the various menu options

So what are the features of this silvery disc?

- Subject areas:
 - Greenhouse effects
 - Carbon Cycle
 - Energy Cycles
 - Global warming
 - Industrial impact
 - Environmental impact

Key features on the disc that are invaluable:

- **Short Video clips** – well presented, clearly outlining the main thinking in the area it is discussing. A useful addition to this material would be a series of questions for students to focus their attention when watching the video
- **Web links** to external site – very useful feature that provides a lot of additional information.
- **In text definitions** – to provide key knowledge and could be used as part of Question and Answer sessions with the students
- **Animations** – They are fun to watch and are similar to the video clips
- **Activities** – these range from word searches to determining your Carbon Footprint. Small niggle – when I did the “Calculate Carbon Footprint”, every time I answered a question I kept getting an “Unspecified error message”, frankly irritating. Overall a lot of fun to work through but there could be more of them.

What level of student is it aimed at? It claims to cover Upper Primary and Secondary education. In using it, I would suggest that it definitely hits KS2 and possibly KS3 but is not really suited to higher ability students. One major drawback is that on the CD-rom it does not state which parts of the curriculum the various sections do cover. If it did, teachers would be better informed as to which parts they wished to use and for which lessons they would be most suitable. This is a major impediment to successfully using the materials on the CD-rom.

The information in the CD-rom is very wordy but accurate. However this means that it limits the types of learners that will learn most from the materials. It excludes the kinaesthetic and auditory learners. It is this wordiness that makes it an ordinary e-learning tool – where are the levels of interaction that the current generation of students crave? For instance – why do they not have greenhouse effects parameters that you can change to see the effects of the changes upon a global climate map? Now that would be fun and create debate amongst the students about why the change may occur and what the implications are for the climate, life and human activity as the result of the change. This creates a powerful learning environment for all levels of students. Or they could have given students a task to carry out and then answer a series of questions - a missed opportunity I feel.

Teachers will need to look at this CD-rom before they use it, as there is a huge amount of information contained within it. There is no Teacher Resource Pack that supports the CD-rom. Therefore if you are not already familiar with the subject area you may struggle to see how you could utilise it in your lessons. In this day and age, this is a major drawback for this very informative and comprehensive resource.

One caveat – there is a lot of Centre for Alternative Technology materials used prominently in the CD-Rom. Now this may not cause some concern, if you hold with CAT's viewpoint, but it does mean that there is the risk of potential bias creeping in. It is this latter aspect that teachers need to be aware about and ensure that they have alternative materials to provide a balanced perspective for students\learners. The web links can provide this.

Overall, it's a fairly standard CD-rom that is comprehensive in the information it contains. In the hands of a teacher who knows the subject area it is a useful complementary tool. In the hands of a teacher who does not know the subject area with confidence, there is too much information. There is no guide with the CD-rom to enable these teachers to help them to use the CD-rom effectively. It therefore falls between two stools and for me has missed an opportunity to provide teachers with a useful resource that could supplement the subject area as well as making it exciting to learn.

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