

# COURSEWARE REVIEWS

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The "Courseware Reviews" column will become a regular feature in every issue of *The IALL Journal*. This column will include reviews of audio, video and computer products that can be used for the teaching and learning of second languages, as well as reviews of authoring programs.

I am fortunate to be able to include the work of two guest reviewers in this issue. Mike Ledgerwood, Director of the Language Lab at Rhodes College, has written a review of "À la rencontre de Philippe," an interactive videodisc program for learning French; and Marni Armstrong, Director of Instructional Media at Colorado College, has written a review of "Aspects," a writing tool that allows up to 16 people to work at the same time on documents in a word processor, a drawing program, or a paint program via a local area network. I am grateful to both of them for offering their expertise.

For future columns I encourage and welcome guest reviewers to evaluate materials. In the next issue I will provide a list of criteria to be applied to all reviews. I also welcome any suggestions, comments or questions regarding the content of this column.

## À LA RENCONTRE DE PHILIPPE

The Athena Project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has been working for a number of years on a variety of projects. One of their first projects, and perhaps their best, is the interactive video program called "À la rencontre de Philippe." Until recently, the beta version was available from the MIT Technology Licensing Office for \$200, which included a laser disc, a Macintosh software program, and some documentation. Yale University Press will assume the distribution of "Philippe" next spring for an as yet undetermined price.

To use "Philippe" you must have a laser disc player that is capable of interacting with a computer (almost any laser disc player will be acceptable, except for older models), proper connections, a monitor attached to the laser disc player, and a Macintosh computer with HyperCard installed on the hard drive, version 2.0 or above being preferred. For the most part, DOS computers will be

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unable to use this program. Headphones are also useful, if this program is to be used in a common area.

"Philippe" is easy to install and use. The software comes in compressed form, but even computer neophytes will be able to follow the installation documentation. Once the software is installed on the computer's hard drive, a student merely clicks on the "Philippe" icon and follows clear instructions to launch the program. The quality of the instructions for student use is excellent. The numerous help features include explanations (in English) of how to use a Macintosh, how to control the laser disc player, and some basic hints about the program. Other features (in French) include hints on which steps to take next in the program as well as other types of user advice. The textual guide to "Philippe" is better than most documentation which accompanies computer software. However, it would be helpful for teachers to have more details on precisely what types of paths exist for students to follow in the program and what kinds of endings the students will achieve after using the program.

"Philippe" is intended for French students in the second year or at more advanced levels. In my opinion, third-year students will get the most out of it. The program is ideal for a third-year composition and conversation course as one of its "texts." It can also be used by students preparing to go to France for a term abroad program, giving them a real slice of life in Paris, or by students returning from such an experience who get "homesick" for France.

Even five years after its introduction "Philippe" is still the most impressive interactive video program available on the market. It is a true "game," in which students have to use a French telephone, an answering machine, a Paris map, the classifieds of *Le Figaro*, read French handwriting on envelopes and notices, and travel around the city while always having to remember to be at the right place at the right time. "Philippe" is best used by individuals who are playing the game at their own pace, but it can be played by teams of users as well. It can even be used in a classroom situation (given the existence of the appropriate equipment in the classroom) in a selective way. As the guide accompanying "Philippe" states, a teacher can, for example, use a pre-selected series of sequences which show how people greet each other in Paris. Other possible usages include showing certain sequences much in the way that videotape footage is used; that is, as cultural and visual accompaniment to grammatical and lexical needs.

In conclusion, I can heartily recommend this program. I, myself, have been fascinated by it, and always demonstrate it when giving a tour of the laboratory or have to answer the question, "Why all this technology for languages?" Once a visitor "dials" a French phone, listens to the plumber talking on the answering machine saying how much he hates answering machines, or actually "walks through" a Parisian apartment, this question answers itself.

—Mike Ledgerwood  
*Rhodes College, Memphis, TN*

## ASPECTS

"Aspects" is a tool which allows groups of people to work simultaneously on documents in a word processor, a drawing program or a paint program. (A maximum of 16 students can work on any one correction at a time, but multiple groups of up to 16 are possible.) Communication takes place over local area networks, modem links and/or the Internet, so users can work together within the same room, or across the world from each other. Documents can be open in all three applications at the same time, and can be imported and exported among the three. This allows graphics to be created by a group and then imported into a group's word processing document. This review will focus on the collaborative writing environment offered by "Aspects."

"Aspects" allows a user to work on a document alone or together with other users. When it is used by a group, one person (a moderator) opens a conference, which the other users join. The moderator chooses one of three mediation levels: Free-For-All, Medium, and Full. In Free-For-All, everyone can edit the same document at the same time, though each paragraph can be edited by only one person at a time. This level works well for brainstorming. In Medium Mediation, only one person can edit a document at a time. When one person gives up editing control, the next one who requested control automatically gets it, and so on. However, several documents can be open in a single conference (this is true of all three mediation levels), so several participants could be working at the same time, and could see each other's work, as long as they were each editing a different document. In Full Mediation, only one person can edit a document at any given time and the conference moderator controls who gets editing power when. This level is most similar to a traditional classroom

discussion in which the professor calls on students who raise their hands.

Other features help keep the chaos of group work to a minimum. Users can choose to synchronize their screen display with that of one or more other users, or unlink their view from the others. A small window called a Chat Box allows users to write short comments to each other that are independent of the document itself. This is especially useful if the users are not in the same room. A Clipboard allows movement of segments between documents. By copying the Chat Box to the Clipboard, and then to a document, you can also print out the Chat Box.

"Aspects" does not try to compete with full-blown word processors; some more advanced features like paragraph numbering, footnotes, columns, tables, etc., are not included. After the group has used "Aspects" to work on the basic text, the resulting document can be imported into a robust word processor where additional formatting options can be added. Basic features like *cut, copy, paste, find and replace*, etc., function as expected. Accented and non-Roman characters work the same as in any Macintosh word processor; but the arrow keys do not work, and even though the mouse makes them unnecessary, we missed them.

Installation is accomplished through a simple program, and the instructions are as clear as they could be, considering the various hardware configurations possible (network, serial connections, modems, etc.). "Aspects" comes with 90 days of free technical support via telephone (not toll-free), CompuServ or AppleLink. After 90 days, e-mail messages are still answered free, but each phone call costs a flat \$15, or you can buy an extended support contract for \$65 annually.

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The documentation is excellent: a convenient 3-ring binder holds detailed instructions for the advanced user. However, we hardly needed it after installation, because the program is quite easy to figure out. We did use it to investigate a few features whose modes of operation were not immediately obvious, and the instructions resolved our confusion easily. A one-page, fan-fold brochure provides basic instructions for student use. It works well as a reminder of how various features work, but does not substitute for a personal introduction to the program.

Facility with a mouse and word processing is a prerequisite for using "Aspects." Once this is obtained, the faculty member will need about an hour's introduction to the program, and ideally would have several hours to play with it in a group of peers, to explore how it could be used to support various course objectives. One class session of at least an hour should be dedicated to familiarizing students with the program. Working with a group of people necessarily adds confusion to the normal process of writing with a word processor. The professor should decide on certain conventions to avoid confusion. Then the group needs to devote one session of about an hour or so just getting acquainted with "Aspects" and the conventions decided upon. For example: we focused on one problematic paragraph at a time, so we separated that segment from the rest of the document with carriage returns. Then we entered a carriage return for each student below the original passage. We numbered each student's paragraph to facilitate discussion. You could use the students' names or different fonts to accomplish the same thing. Once students are used to the program and the conventions, they can focus on the content of their work in succeeding sessions.

"Aspects" was originally intended to be used by professional writers and graphic

artists creating text and graphic documents for the business realm. However, it can be used to advantage by any group wishing to write collaboratively, or edit each others' work. This would include classes or small groups of students working on writing skills whether in their mother tongue or a foreign language. It could be useful for student use both in and outside of the classroom; any group could easily work without supervision once they understand how the program works. Too many members in one conference might create more confusion than it's worth. But given enough computers, an entire class could be divided into several conferences, and a professor could move in and out of each conference easily.

We used this program at Colorado College for peer editing exercises in a freshman writing emphasis course (a course focusing on a theme within any discipline, but including lots of writing practice as well). Small groups of students (no more than six at a time) were brought in to use it to edit each other's writing. The advantage "Aspects" offered in this case was that instead of five students watching passively while one at a time showed how he/she might change a passage, or ask clarifying questions about it, everyone actively entered their comments before the faculty focused on the comments one at a time. This was not an exercise in collaborative writing, as no one here currently teaches or uses that in the classroom. This program may change that.

We have only scratched the surface in considering how to use this program. Imagine a French composition class in the U.S. working collaboratively with an education class in France on a paper about the American education system. If several IALL members begin using "Aspects," we might consider setting up a LISTSERV to discuss ways of exploiting it and perhaps set up inter-institutional activities.

"Aspects" is available from :  
Group Technologies, Inc.  
1408 North Fillmore Street, Suite10  
Arlington, Virginia 22201  
Phone (703) 528-1555  
Fax (703) 528-3296

Prices: Individual copy: \$299; 5 Users: \$695; 10 Users: \$995; 20 Users: \$1990; 30 Users: \$2985. (Call to see if any special prices are in effect at the time you are buying. I got 5 copies for \$395 during a special offer period.)

Hardware requirements: Macintosh Plus, Portable, or any Macintosh in the SE or Mac II families. For AppleTalk connections: System 6.0.3 or above and Finder 6.1 or higher. For other communications methods: System 6.0.4 or above and Finder 6.1.4 or above. To conference over a network: an AppleTalk-compatible network. To conference over a modem: an Apple, Hayes, or Hayes-compatible modem with a minimum recommended baud rate of 2400. To conference over a serial link: a serial cable.

The documentation claims that "Aspects" automatically imports documents created in Microsoft Word versions 3.0 and 4.0, MacWrite 5.0 and MacWrite II, ASCII text files, PICT and MacPaint files. We frequently ported text-only documents to and from Word 5.0 and had no problems.

—Marni Armstrong  
Colorado College

*Suggestions/comments for the "Courseware Reviews" column may be sent directly to John Huy. Mailing address: Ermal Garinger Academic Resource Center, 4069 Wescoe Hall, Lawrence, KS 66045-2167; phone (913) 864-4759; email: huy@kuhub.cc.ukans.edu, or HUY@UKANVAX.BITNET. If you are interested in reviewing materials, contact John for details. Submissions for this column must be made by prior arrangement with the columnist.*