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hands on

Sonica
Software (CD-Rom and networkable) for Spanish at key stage 2, created by 3T for the DfES, £299 for site licence (includes one dance mat and ET player)
RM
Tel: 08709 086969
www.rm.com
www.rm.com/sonicaspanish

Fitness for purpose	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Quality	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

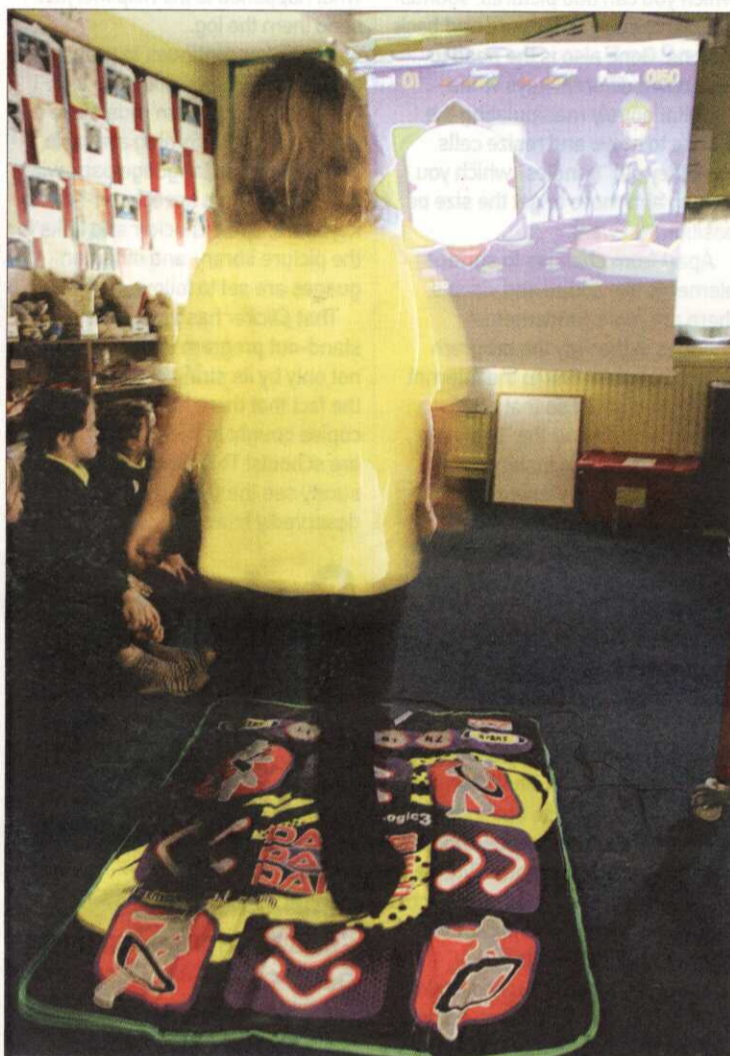
Spain with less pain

Wendy Adeniji finds 3T's impressive Sonica is a real step forward for language learning

From 2010 all key stage 2 pupils should have the opportunity to learn a foreign language. However, the caveat is that not all KS2 teachers will feel confident in being able to teach this. French might seem to be the safe option, but because Spanish is one of the four major world languages, the Department for Education and Skills commissioned 3T Productions to produce *Sonica*, a multimedia software package which covers two years' worth of Spanish teaching for non-specialist teachers.

Content is aligned to the new KS2 Framework for MFL and evenly covers the four attainment targets of listening, speaking, reading and writing. There are 240 activities in all, split into 12 units, based on the QCA scheme of work. What make these very easy to use is the fact that navigation both for teachers and learners is intuitive and the content inspiring. Content starts with the introduction of vocabulary followed by practice and review using a variety of games. The beauty of these is that they are not just a repeated format as in many language multimedia packages, but there is a variety of presentation and practice methods, such as hangman, text manipulation, karaoke and dance-mat activities.

Here's an example of a vocabulary presentation – for parts of the body and face a large person or face appears on screen. When different parts are pressed they move or "wiggle" and the word is both seen and heard in Spanish – visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles all catered for at once. The ideal would be for a teacher to be able to deliver some of this material through an interactive whiteboard, particularly the



Sonica's dance-mat activities and vocabulary exercises in action at St Nicholas Junior School, Dereham, Norfolk

presentation of vocabulary, and for pupils to have some opportunity to practice individually on a PC (with headsets). With the huge influx of ICT hardware into schools, this may not be unrealistic.

A major feature of this package is the fact that pupil groups are created and each pupil is given his or her individual login and password. The teacher then assigns activities to pupils, either the same for the whole class or differentiated according to ability. It is therefore essential that teachers using this package also have regular access to a computer suite through which to deliver the curriculum. Teachers can use the tracking summary to get an overview of their class's progress. They can see a snapshot of signed-off activities and grades

for each pupil, with the option of seeing further details. It is also possible to create reports through this mechanism.

Assessment activities occur throughout the program to test pupils' knowledge. Fortunately, however, it does not look like a test but a continuing adventure game, which takes place in a castle and involves pupils completing five exercises. The whole course is linked to the new "Languages Ladder", the voluntary recognition scheme that is one of the objectives of the National Languages Strategy. A pupil's score on the assessment activities is represented as a grade taken from the Languages Ladder. Pupils have ready access to their own grades and can print off a document which outlines their progress throughout the course.

Support for the non-specialist teacher is embedded in this package, with online support taking the form of an e-mentor to whom one can send email messages and ask questions ranging from how the program works, help with language problems and even classroom management. There are also several items containing suggestions about preparing a Spanish lesson. ICT know-how (such as how to use the interactive whiteboard), case studies and teacher tips. For each activity there are activity support notes, which can be printed. There is also an audio-video dictionary, again, to help develop confidence, where you can actually see native speakers as they pronounce the words.

It appears that everything that a non-specialist teacher could want has been thought of in this package. It is easy to use, supportive, has appealing graphics and is pedagogically sound. It does not quite make the teacher redundant – it still requires someone to present it – but a non-Spanish-speaking teacher should be able to use it confidently and see their own Spanish improve dramatically as well as their pupils'. It has been piloted and the full service is being launched at the BETT show. Used correctly, this package should fulfil its aim to help children develop a love of languages as early as possible.

Wendy Adeniji is a freelance trainer and writer