Pro/DESKTOP 'Tutorials for Schools' CD-ROM

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Reviewed by David Spendlove, Liverpool John Moores University

Whenever writing a review, I attempt to write it as soon as I possibly can after using the product so that I may capitalise on my enthusiasm and excitement. I have done this in the past with products that have literally changed the way I teach and which have added new dimensions to pupil learning. Unfortunately, in reviewing Pro/DESKTOP 'Tutorials for Schools', I am unable to be enthusiastic or excited.

The reality is that there is a desperate need for additional materials to support Pro/DESKTOP; it was after all a piece of software that was designed for industry and not designed with children in mind. The unfortunate feature with this Suregrave publication is that it contributes little to what is currently available and I feel this was a wasted opportunity.

Visually the package is very poor and amateurish. It uses an explorer browser to locate tutorials, which unfortunately are in word format. This makes both aspects clumsy as, when working through tutorials, you have to keep going back to the main contents page rather than using shortcut buttons. Of course the word files are useful if you want to print them out, but word is not a sufficiently dynamic interface when on screen. You therefore have squiggly lines under words that the spell checker doesn't like, such as 'Autoscale'.

Another criticism is that the introduction of Pro/DESKTOP was an opportunity to move the subject forward. In the past we often didn't design well because we couldn't communicate well. Now we have an excellent communication tool that enhances design efficiently, but still we see poor examples that are predominantly two-dimensional. Visually some of the

products look awful (the mechanical coat hook, architectural model, racing car) and do little to validate CAD as an activity in design and technology. This also brings into question the conflict that exists between 2D and 3D. The CD-ROM is about using Pro/DESKTOP, which is a 3D tool, yet many of the examples are ultimately 2D. Even the video clips with Year 11 pupils are all about 2D work, this ultimately creates misconceptions when we are meant to be challenging them.

Essentially, it is clear that a lot of hard work has gone into this material but, unfortunately, I feel it is misguided as it does little to inspire. This is because it is predominantly training-orientated, rather than learning-orientated, and therefore does little more than provide a series of tasks. It does provide tutorials for pupils to work through, but so much more could have been made of these by careful consideration of learning, differentiation, progression and assessment. Visually the package is poor and sadly teachers hard pressed for time will probably use it.

Suregrave have made a valuable contribution to the computer aided manufacture educational market, however their publication Pro/DESKTOP 'Tutorials for Schools' significantly fails to impress.

Pro/DESKTOP 'Tutorials for Schools' CD-ROM
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Appropriate content	✓✓	Generic use	⇐
Pupil/student use	✓✓	One of a series	
Teacher resource	✓✓✓	Photocopiable	⇐
Visuals	✓	Pupil/student activities	⇐
Overall style	✓	Cross-curricular	