
Talking Together

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TALKING TOGETHER. Marc Helgesen, Amy Parker, and Kevin McClure. Hong Kong: Lingual House Hong Kong, 1993. Textbook \$9.95; Cassette \$37.95.

Talking Together is a beginning-level laboratory text/workbook aimed at the student who has had "little experience with the spoken language." (*Talking Together*, p. 6) Although *Talking Together* is for the beginning level, it is not aimed at a specific age group. ESL/EFL students from upper elementary to post-university could benefit from the content. This book is also not background bound. The 15 units are universal with room for discussion if the teacher or students so desire. Topics range from personal information and dates to frequency and processes—all of the classics with special practice on beginning-level verb forms thrown in. After Units 5, 10, and 15 there is a short review of the previous units in each section. The back of the book contains a section for the teacher. This part has general suggestions about how to use the various units, tape scripts, and expansion suggestions for the teacher to use with each unit. Concerning methodology, *Talking Together* bills itself as having one that is unique and two-step:

The first part of each lesson provides pronunciation, selective listening, and dictation exercises which build up the students' vocabulary and grammar. The second part of each lesson offers a graded series of short pair work exercises which the students carry out together, using the language that has been practiced. (back cover)

The pair work and group work exercises allow for a springboard for expansion. This gives the teacher room to work with specific grammar, pronunciation, and other problems as they arise and as the class progresses. The flexibility is also good in that it allows the book to be used in an 8-week intensive English program or expanded to be used in a semester English program. Other than the book, the only purchase for the institution is the cassette.

My overall impression of *Talking Together* is one of approval. The activity questions are asked using a variety of forms: multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, etc. The teacher suggestions at the back of the book are also valuable, especially for the teacher who is just beginning or who has never taught a beginning-level laboratory class. This section offers ideas on how to expand upon the activities allowing for teacher and student flexibility. The idea I like most, though, is the "HINT" section within each unit. These "HINTS" are given throughout each unit and offer small

suggestions for the students to use in their questions to the teacher or in their conversations; thus, the name. Hints are given for prepositions, question structures, verb endings, etc. These are also short enough and repetitive enough so as not to confuse the students.

Talking Together does have a few “glitches,” though, that teachers should be aware of. The “Pair Practice” section may be a bit confusing at first for the students. It is set up with one student as “A” and the other as “B.” The tasks for “A” and “B” are on different pages -- “A” asking the questions, “B” answering, and *vice versa*. I do like this concept, however, and the students will too, once they catch on. This section is a great place to supplement by creating completely student-produced conversations. Secondly, some of the directions seem a bit vague, assuming that the student will “know what to do.” However, this can be quickly remedied by preparation on the part of the teacher. Lastly, the general “look” of the units is more difficult than the material actually is—a little cluttered.

All things considered, I recommend *Talking Together*. It’s a classic approach to beginning-level listening/speaking with a little “newness” added. Both teachers and students will enjoy the flexibility and stability because the topics are easily adjusted to our changing global societies.

About the Reviewer

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