



Investing in the Future

ESL and Computer Literacy for Grades 1 and 2





Investing in the future

A child centred program for village communities



It is the formal start of a three-week residential teacher training course in ESL to be conducted by PIMD, and the place is the Teachers' Resource Center in the grounds of the 1000-student Maha Vidyalayam (a Grade 1 to Advanced level cluster high school) in the remote village of Ramanatapuram, about six kms from Kilinochchi, in the Vanni District in the North East Province of Sri Lanka. Teachers from twenty-seven village schools from the surrounding districts have come to Kilinochchi for the course, sponsored by the education authorities of the North-East province. The venue is typical of the rural environment for which our program is designed.



Our goal

Partners In Micro-Development Inc. is an association of volunteer professionals from the education and ICT sectors, who are committed to improving access to education and ICT in developing countries and communities.

Our focus is the development of educational capability at a grass-roots level, to assist village communities, using the school as a hub, in becoming sustainable as a social and economic unit.

We have developed a program for countries where English and Computer skills need additional focus and accelerated learning. The program integrates learning English as a second language with learning computer skills and is targeted at Grades 1 and 2 as an investment in the future generation. The two subjects complement each other – English assists with using the computers, and the educational software, with its audio content, provides an English immersion experience for the children. Other programs in this field are focused on improving English in the higher grades. These programs are addressing the immediate vocational needs of older children. PIMD believes that it is essential to start embedding the core skills of English and Computer Literacy at as young an age as possible to avoid the high cost of addressing skill gaps in later years.



Why Village Communities?

In many developing countries, rural village communities rely on local village schools to provide the educational opportunities that they desire for their children. If these schools are not effective due to a shortage of trained teachers and / or lack of resources, parents may not send their children to school or be faced with the time and expense of sending them to more distant schools in larger centres. By investing in village schools with a focused program, it is hoped that parents will be encouraged to send their children to school and in so doing support the local village school. Our ultimate goal is sustainable village communities and our strategy is to work from the schools outwards to the community.



Children and Second Languages

The teaching of a second language to young children is commonplace throughout the world. Throughout Europe, English is commonly taught from kindergarten. In America, the large number of Hispanic-speaking children has necessitated the development of programs to teach English as a second language from a child's first years at school. Similarly, in remote parts of Australia, where indigenous children begin their schooling without English, the same situation has had to be addressed. Two consequences have been:

- The seeming success of students learning to speak English at such a young age, coupled with the advantages of being bilingual, has prompted the development of immersion programs in languages other than English. These programs have been developed for very young children. For example, in Sydney there is a preschool that teaches French to the children and the parents desire that the children continue to be taught French when their children commence their formal school education in Kindergarten. In California at Claire Lilienthal Elementary School, the school's language immersion program means that instruction is mostly in Korean.¹ And in Tasmania, Australia, at Lindesfarne Primary School, children are taught Japanese from their earliest years in primary school.² In Sri Lanka, preschools operate in English medium. In our global society and age of rapid information development and exchange, parents appreciate the necessity for their children to be fluent in more than one language.

- This has not only generated research into immersion programs in languages other than English (LOTE) and bilingual education, but has also led to a popular belief that the earlier a child learns a second language, the better.

However, the research has highlighted some important aspects of language acquisition in childhood development. Most significantly a second language needs to be built on the first language. Secondly, there is a right of people to their first language. This was highlighted when the Northern Territory in Australia attempted to phase out completely, at all levels, bilingual education for indigenous children. The United Nations' "Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People" states that indigenous people have the right "to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages".³ And thirdly, more recent research is suggesting that the primary advantage of studying a second language at a young age is an aural and oral advantage. Children will develop pronunciation more easily if they learn at a younger age.⁴



Why ESL for grades 1 and 2 ?

The critical issue for children acquiring a second language is how to be orally and aurally functional in that second language. For example, it is not uncommon for children to learn a second language from 3rd grade to 12th grade but still need a six-month intensive English course in order to undertake University studies in English. Why do school courses not sufficiently equip students for University studies in English? Why are students not confident to speak and listen in English at the end of their ten years of English lessons?

Where the medium of education is not in English, but rather in that of the first language, two critical factors can be identified. The first is the lack of English in the general environment. The second is insufficient practice speaking and listening in English.

This lack of practice is related to the lack of a general English environment. However, it is also related to an individual's confidence and self consciousness in speaking and listening to a second language. Children in their first years of school are generally free of inhibitions that can be an obstacle to practice. Thus, not only will students have better pronunciation the earlier they commence their language study, but also the confidence they gain in listening and speaking at this young age will give them a readiness to practice using English throughout the years they study the language, thus ensuring a greater proficiency.

Further, in childhood development, the acquisition of a child's first language proceeds by first learning to speak and listen. Only once a child can communicate orally and aurally in their first language, are they introduced to reading and writing skills. The relationship of the spoken and written word is itself a stage in a child's development. Formal English syllabi traditionally have a high emphasis on reading and writing skills as these are highly important for academic purposes and formal business communication. It is important therefore that these reading and writing skills should rest on a solid foundation of oral and aural skills.



¹ San Francisco Chronicle Friday, June 6, 2003, E4

² <http://www.discover.tased.edu.au/ote/teaching/bestprac.htm>

³ www.ntu.edu.au

⁴ Paul Shoebottom "Are young children the best language learners?" at Frankfurt International School <http://www.fis.edu/eslweb/esl/parents/advice/myth.htm>. Shoebottom cites for further reading Marinova-Todd, S; Marshall, D and Snow, C Three Misconceptions about Age and L2 Learning TESOL Quarterly Vol 34/1 2001.

For these reasons the primary goal of the English program for Grades 1 and 2 will be for the student to acquire confidence to practice the use of spoken English. This will of course necessitate the acquisition of some vocabulary and the emphasis in skills will be primarily on speaking and listening.



Why Computer Literacy for grades 1 and 2?

The focus on Computer Literacy is important for two reasons.

First, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) education is a significant contributing factor to the ability of a country to develop as a knowledge economy and participate in the global knowledge economy. For developing countries it is also essential to tap into resources for development, in areas such as agriculture, village based industries and community projects.

Second, the use of ICT in education enhances learning in other subject areas and can adapt the learning process to the individual student level. This flexibility enables educational development to be accelerated.



Introducing computers at such a young age can be a very useful and enjoyable activity for young children. It is also at this young age that children develop dexterity skills and hence it is a valuable time to begin to develop and practice the finger dexterity required for keyboard use. The more proficient they are at keyboard use, the more readily they will be able to use the computer as a word processor. The attractiveness of using computers is often an encouragement in itself for students to learn.

Because of the attractiveness of using computers for students, it is also important that they learn good ergonomic practice and habits. These, combined with teacher-controlled access to computers, will help to ensure safe and healthy lifelong use of this technology. Good practices and habits are best learnt early in life.



Combining ESL with Computer Literacy for enhanced educational outcomes

Where the general environment of children is not English, and the medium of education is not English, computer programs can be used to create a learning environment in English. Computer literacy will involve the use of application programs to provide tuition in other subjects via the English medium. In this way numeracy, literacy and graphic skills will be developed and hence this curriculum addresses competencies in communication. This will help to create a greater environment of English. Thus technology is integral to fostering some English environment.

Finally, computers can very effectively be used to assist the development of reading and writing in the child's first language. The development of a child's first language is essential for the acquisition of a second language. It is in their first language that concepts of the connection between the written and the spoken word are established. For example, in North-East Sri Lanka or Southern India, the keyboard used in First Grade should initially be a Tamil keyboard. An English overlay can be used at a later stage to facilitate learning the English alphabet.



The PIMD Program

“However, in a growing number of countries, policy makers and educators are still launching new pilot education technology projects..... In fact, the experiences of the countries included in this study [Belize, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Chile] would suggest that affordability is a relative concept, not an absolute one..... A main tenet of this study is that the introduction of information and communications technology in education in developing countries should not wait until a country has reached some predetermined state of economic or educational development.”¹

The PIMD program consists of:

1. An integrated curriculum with supporting lesson plans for ESL and Computer Literacy for Grades 1 and 2.
2. A ten day teacher training course on “Oral / Aural and Activity Based Teaching Methods for ESL and Young Children”.
3. A four day teacher training course on “Computers in Education for Grades 1 and 2” based on a selection of off the shelf educational software (English, cross-curriculum, and computer skills related).

The aims of the PIMD curriculum for ESL and Computer Literacy for Grades 1 and 2 are:

The student ...

- gains oral and aural skills in the English language;
- develops confidence in communicating orally in a second language;
- develops confidence in using a computer;
- develops good habits in relation to computer use;
- is able to access computer programs for additional tuition, via English medium, in other subjects;
- develops an interest in the pattern, sounds, rhymes, rhythms of the English language;
- enjoys using another language to communicate orally;
- enjoys the tuition support of computer programs; and
- develops a love of learning something new.

The objectives of the curriculum are:

The student ...

- acquires the vocabulary used in the themes discussed in each unit;
- distinguishes between sounds of the language and produces them clearly and without loss of meaning;
- acquires listening skills and responds appropriately;
- acquires a knowledge of the English alphabet;
- develops keyboard skills on the computer;
- is able to effectively use a computer “mouse”; and
- is able to start up a computer, run a program for tutorial purposes, exit and shut down the computer.

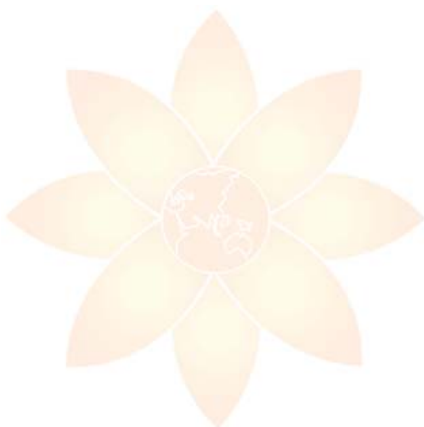
¹ Potashnik & Adkins, Cost Analysis of IT Projects in Education : Experiences from Developing Countries, Education and Technology Series Vol 1 No. 3 1996, World Bank Human Development Department Education Group

The program has been designed on the basis that the principle resources are people, in particular students and teachers. It is highly dependent on teacher creativity and active learning. The requirement of material resources is kept to a minimum. While it could be said that ideally there would be at least one computer per every four students, research also suggests that at the early age of Grades 1 and 2, children should have limited access to computers for reasons of health and physical development. Hence, with flexible school policy, the encouragement of independent learning skills, and teacher imagination, this program can still work with a much larger student-computer ratio.

“One thing that none of the teachers attending the Kilinochchi course in January 2004 doubted, was the importance of giving the children they teach the tools necessary to communicate within the global village that their small rural villages were fast becoming part of.” Helen McLeod, Education Consultant and Trainer, PIMD



If you are interested in knowing more about our program please contact us.



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