

In this article, originally printed in *English Teaching professional*, Clarity Director Andrew Stokes examines the options for the under-resourced.

ICT The one-computer classroom

ICT has made more of an impact on education than most teachers realise. It goes much further than the specialist ELT software we have installed in our computer labs: students are using word processing software to write their assignments; they are keeping in touch with family and friends by email; and they are finding goods, services and entertainment on the Web, often, in the last case, in English. Not all students are online, by any means, but the percentage is growing in an increasing diversity of places and social strata.

Many teachers feel that it is time to bring this reality into the classroom, but the reality (even the thought!) of handling a PC in front of a class of ICT-literate students is often just too daunting. In the last issue we looked at some activities for breaking down this fear; this time we'll address another common problem. One of the most common challenges faced by ICT-motivated teachers is a lack of computers. How practical are ICT-based activities in a one-computer classroom?

ACTIVITY

Providing information

Perhaps the first trick is to look at the computer as an additional resource rather than a threat. Just like a cassette recorder, or a video, a computer makes an excellent change of focus in a lesson, and as something new and different it is a resource which consistently stimulates and motivates students.

One of the computer's strengths is the ability to store and retrieve information, so why not make the computer the "knower" for certain activities? When students need to check the spelling or meaning of a word or need to find a grammar rule, why not let them consult a dictionary or grammar program on the computer? In whole class activities, nominate a student to check; in groupwork let them have access as they need it. If you need to find facts, for example for a quiz, get a student to consult a CD-Rom encyclopaedia, or better still the Web. Use of the Internet provides a window from the classroom into a real world of English, and, incidentally, promotes learner autonomy by giving students confidence to operate in that world.

ACTIVITY

Preparing homework

An extension of this idea is to use your one computer to encourage students to use their own Internet access outside the classroom. One has to be careful to avoid discriminating against those students who do not have computers or who are ICT-reluctant, but homework activities can include a positive ICT alternative. A class I visited in Hong Kong was doing a project on Turkey in which students had to research the country and produce a written and spoken presentation. In preparing the students for the research, the teacher used her one computer to access one of a number of sites about

Turkey she had found. Some students handed in work produced through traditional library-based research; others included pictures they had found on the Web; and one even submitted the project as a Powerpoint presentation complete with multimedia.

ACTIVITY

Drilling

Back in the classroom, the computer is an ideal tool for drilling: it is, in fact, more consistent and much more patient than a living teacher. *Pronunciation Power* is a program designed to help students recognise and produce the individual phonemes of English both in isolation and in the context of a word (for example in minimal pair activities). I have seen it used extremely effectively in whole class settings, and even once in a lecture theatre with over a hundred students. The best results were achieved by hooking the computer up to a projector and using a large screen, enabling the teacher to engage the students both visually and aurally. The program replaces the teacher as the model, which can be particularly useful for less confident non-native speaker teachers, and drilling proceeds as normal.

What are the advantages of using the software for this type of activity? Firstly, all teachers know how difficult it is to keep model pronunciation consistent in these activities, especially given the tendency to over-emphasize when students have got a sound wrong. Secondly, students get tremendously motivated by the use of the technology. The added bonus is that for each sound there is a large number of pre-prepared activities, considerably reducing teacher preparation time.

ICT Tip

Register with the publisher when you buy new programs. This will ensure that you are kept informed, and can entitle you to discounts when upgrades or new versions are published.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMS FOR THESE ACTIVITIES

Encyclopaedia:

www.wikipedia.org

Grammar:

Tense Buster

Program for whole class use:

Pronunciation Power or *Sky Pronunciation Suite*

Search engines:

www.google.com

www.yahoo.com

Clarity has a mission to help teachers integrate ICT successfully into their teaching. Please contact us at any time for advice on which programs to use and how to use them effectively with your students.

