

Sony Digital Language Lab helps MSIT to improve migrant's English.



MSIT is one of Brisbane's leading providers of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) and Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) training programs. The programs play a vital role in helping new immigrants to learn English as well as everyday skills with the aim to integrate them into society. It is important that their English skills are brought up to speed as quickly as possible, particularly speaking and listening skills.

These programs present a number of unique challenges to both teachers and students. Karina Von Itzstein, an ESL tutor at the Logan Campus of MSIT, explains: "The majority of our ESL students at MSIT are refugees from war torn/trouble spots all over the world. Currently my class has refugee students from Laos, Sierra Leone, Congo DR, Burundi, Burma, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Thailand, Afghanistan (100% vision impaired student), Gambella and Sudan. They vary in age from 17 – 65. Some have also had very limited and disrupted schooling. Computer skills amongst the students range from excellent to non-existent".

When MSIT began investigating ways to improve their student's listening and pronunciation skills they were introduced to the Sony Digital Language Laboratory as an option to provide teachers with the tools to achieve this goal. After evaluating several other options it was decided that the Sony Virtuoso™ and Soloist® Solution had the features they required to help students work on their listening, speaking and comprehension skills.

Since the Sony Language Laboratory was installed last year the controlled lab environment

has proven itself to be an important addition to their open class sessions. Karina has found the Language Laboratory to be very useful: "I think both modes of teaching have their place in regards to language learning. However, for teaching and learning/practicing more discreet skills such as specific pronunciation points, general speaking and listening, the controlled language lab is a great environment. Teachers are able to focus on specific students and diagnose individual problems. This is great in our TAFE environment as our students are not from one homogenous background" Karina said.

The Sony Digital Language Laboratory has also been beneficial to both teachers and students in other ways. Karina notes : "I think the lab provides a great environment for shy students or those lacking in confidence to participate in speaking activities. It is also great to be able to give listening assessments to a whole class or individuals as required as well as being able to capture student speaking for evaluation or assessment – not possible in an open classroom. The lab also enables teachers to more readily set individual work to students than in a regular classroom".

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Listening and speaking assessments are also easier thanks to the Sony lab. MSIT are currently using the lab for formal assessment for listening comprehension. Karina says “The lab enables teachers to assess, pinpoint and provide feedback for pronunciation errors. It allows students to self-assess pronunciation and to provide feedback to one another during pairing exercises such as “Sorry I can’t understand your English. Please say it again!”. Teachers can record and listen later to evaluate student work although we are not yet using the lab to its full potential. We plan to use more and more as we gain confidence and expertise”.

When asked about the most popular features in the lab Karina identified pairing students, the recording capabilities and the telephone pairing as both key functions and also functions that are difficult to do without a lab environment. Karina explains : “The student pairing feature is great for enabling the students to practice gap exercises. We have put together quite a few paper based gap activities, at different levels, where the students have to exchange information. The record function is also great for

students to record and then listen to/assess their own pronunciation. It is also useful for students to practice oral presentations and then of course for teachers to capture voice recordings for pronunciation analysis as well as speaking assessment. However, the telephone function has been the most popular. For CSWE 1 and CSWE 2 there are modules which require the students to understand, give and write telephone messages. The telephone function provides a great, close to authentic way for the students to practice”.

The lab can act as a magnifying glass during class sessions because of the efficient way that teachers can monitor student speaking and intervene to correct them. Karina recalls helping during another teacher’s class “after the class the teacher approached me and told me that she knew that a particular student had bad pronunciation but she had no idea it was so bad until she spoke privately with the student through the headset”.

One of the greatest benefits derived from the Language Laboratory is how much the students enjoy using the Lab.

Karina says “I feel the lab is a great motivator for the students. They love to interact with one another in this environment. The shy students seem to participate more readily and they get to know their classmates better.

The lab caters for different learning/teaching styles and provides students with some independence – activities range from very controlled to more natural use of speech. Most importantly students look forward to their lab sessions. **The lab is fun**”.

The feedback from the students themselves is also encouraging. They like practicing on the phone “It helps me when I talk to people outside class” said one student. “I like to record myself and listen” said another student referring to the ability to work individually at their own pace.

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Students also say that another side benefit of the lab is they are improving their general computer skills at the same time.

The addition of the Sony Digital Language Lab has given teachers new ways to help students practice listening, speaking and comprehension. The result is to help the students to be better, more accurate and more fluent in English.