



Computer Software Helps Children Develop Language Literacy Skills

Austria

Customer Profile

The Kindergarten of the Future in Linz, closely connected to the University of Linz, works on language literacy and incorporating Information and Communication Technology into the daily activities of the children. The kindergarten has close to 100 students and 5 teachers.

Situation

Kindergarten teachers were not aware of the many possibilities for using ICT for playing and learning with their kindergarten children.

Solution

"Smart Mice—Children Discover Language" educational initiative

Benefits

- 170 kindergarten teachers trained (as of November 2006)
- 143 kindergarten classes involved
- 10,010 children positively impacted

"Our aspiration is to provide an exciting and intensive exchange of experiences and ideas within the education field and in particular within the kindergarten community."

—University Professor Dr. Manfred Pils, Head of the Smart Mice Competence Center at the University of Linz

Custom-designed software developed by Microsoft Germany and partners helps four- to six-year-old children in Austria improve their language skills.

Situation



The Kindergarten of the Future in Linz, located in Upper Austria, has a long history of working on language literacy and learning skills. In recent years, it had worked on incorporating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into its classrooms. To this end, the kindergarten was the first to join the "Smart Mice—Children Discover Language" educational initiative. Originally developed by Microsoft Germany and several partners in 2003, the educational initiative uses modern media technology to promote linguistic competency in pre-school children.

Fortunately, Microsoft Austria was already investigating using the program in kindergarten classes across the country. From meetings with Microsoft, a partnership arose. The outcome was to jointly introduce in September 2006 the "Smart Mice—Children Discover Language" educational initiative in Linz.

“The Smart Mice Initiative is a brilliant example of the intelligent use of new technologies and great software to enhance learning outcomes such as media and literacy skills.”

—Yuri Goldfuss, Academic Program Manager,
Microsoft Austria

Solution

The Smart Mice program uses custom-designed software containing different characters such as smart mice and friendly ghouls to help children between the ages of four to six strengthen their language skills, improve their speech and diction, and prepare them for learning how to read. Because the program is game-oriented, the children can interact directly with the software, which helps improve their language literacy and computer skills.

With the city of Linz helping, Microsoft established the Smart Mice Competence Center at the University of Linz, which serves as the scientific partner and researcher for the nearby kindergarten. The center studies children's literacy and ICT use. It also provides a one-day mandatory training workshop to educate kindergarten teachers about Smart Mice software and child language literacy. The workshop trains the teachers in using ICT and its possibilities in pre-school. The Microsoft® Partners in Learning Initiative sponsors ICT training for teachers around the world. The goal is to improve learning standards by integrating ICT skills within the classroom.

Every participating pre-school receives a Language Competence Workbook specifically designed for kindergarten teachers and the Smart Mice learning software. Once teachers complete the workshop, they can begin to effectively incorporate the software program into their kindergarten setting.

Benefits

By the end of 2006, more than 170 teachers in 143 public and private kindergartens had participated in training for the Smart Mice software program. From Linz, the program spread to major cities such as Vienna and Innsbruck as well as the state of Burgenland. More than 10,000 kindergarten children have been impacted by the incorporation of this program into daily kindergarten childcare activities.

Working at their own pace

The Smart Mice program is geared towards the individual child, accounting for the different skills in every child. Each child can experiment with possible answers and progress at their own learning pace. The software more or less thinks along with them, assisting them according to their answers as well as the amount of time involved. In a German poll, 75 percent of participating educators in that country's program contended that their children learned to read and write more easily because they used the Smart Mice program. “The Smart Mice Initiative is a brilliant example of the intelligent use of new technologies and great software to enhance learning outcomes such as media and literacy skills,” says Yuri Goldfuss, Academic Program Manager for Microsoft Austria.

Motivated to learn

One of the keys to any learning environment is motivating the student. The Smart Mice software program motivates children by creating a fun, self-paced educational challenge instead of a less stimulating, forced learning situation. This also helps children learn computer skills faster because they want to learn how to succeed in the program. "Our aspiration is to provide an exciting and intensive exchange of experiences and ideas within the education field and in particular within the kindergarten community," says University Professor Dr. Manfred Pils, Chairman of the Department of Data Processing in Social Sciences, Economics, and Business and Head of the Smart Mice Competence Center at the University of Linz.

Future of Smart Mice Program in Austria

The Smart Mice initiative continues to grow in Austria. In the next few years, all of the kindergarten classes in the state of Burgenland, approximately 170, are expected to participate in the initiative. In addition, more than 100 kindergarten classes in the state of Styria are also expected to join the program. The state of Salzburg is currently researching a plan to participate. "The initiative is unique," says Goldfuss. "It opens up partnerships to academia, schools, local and federal government, and many other stakeholders in society."

The program is also spreading to other countries as well. In Hungary in the city of Sopron, Microsoft is helping set up a Smart Mice Competence Center. Many Hungarian kindergarten classes are planning to enlist in the program.

For more information

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