



**Interactive Language Learning:**  
Ohana and the IT Revolution

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# Interactive Language Learning: Ohana and the IT Revolution

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In the era of globalization, which has facilitated international commerce, travel and communications, the value of language skills has never been greater. Having the facility to communicate in more than one language is an invaluable asset, bringing enhanced employment opportunities and the chance to experience in depth the rich variety of cultures around the world. The information technology revolution has brought many new and exciting opportunities for language learners. It has brought the world to the learners' fingertips, offering convenient learning environments; a wide range of support tools in tackling the challenges of learning a language; and low cost solutions to the delivery of programs. The Ohana Foundation has played a pioneering and significant role in the development of multimedia language learning programs to meet the challenges of the new era.

The Ohana On-line English Language Program is an exciting development in learning English. Grounded in contemporary theoretical understandings of how languages are learnt, it views language as a social phenomenon, serving various functions in society, such as maintaining harmony (e.g., greeting friends and neighbors), exchanging information, transacting business and reflecting on life experiences (through storytelling, jokes, poetry, confiding in friends, etc.). The program presents a wide range of contexts in which English is used in daily life, and teaches authentic English so students can apply the new language in a practical way.

The social nature of language is extremely difficult to reproduce in a traditional learning environment. Most foreign languages are learnt in a classroom that is far removed from the actual contexts in which communication in the target language usually occurs. The teacher may attempt to inject some realism through role-plays, or by organizing fieldtrips to environments in which the target language naturally occurs, but these cannot fully compensate for the rather sterile classroom setting. The Ohana On-line English Program, on the other hand, brings these real-life contexts to the learner via the computer screen. Through the multi-media approach adopted by Ohana, learners can enjoy and study English being used in real social contexts that are brought to life before their eyes.

The most effective way to learn using the Ohana On-line English Program is to make the most of the opportunities afforded by this multi-media approach. This allows the students to use the learning style that is individually best suited to their needs. For instance, some students prefer a visual approach to learning. For such students, watching the ac-

tions and body-language can help to make the meaning clear. Other students may prefer a more auditory approach: they can listen carefully as many times as they wish. The Ohana On-line English Program does not neglect the study of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Grammar and vocabulary are the main building blocks of language: together they create meaning. Pronunciation is essential in conveying meaning. The program offers a structured curriculum covering the major points of grammar, extending student's vocabulary and practicing the most significant aspects of pronunciation. To make this curriculum more effective, it is closely linked to the social use of language. The grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation that are learned are immediately put to use in the real life situations.

One great advantage of the Ohana On-line English Program is its flexibility. Most traditional language learning occurs at an educational institution, in a place, at a time and using materials chosen by the course provider. This arrangement might not suit the learners, who have to travel to the lesson, who might not be mentally or physically refreshed at the time of the lesson, and who might not appreciate the selected materials. The virtual learning offered by the Ohana program removes those barriers, by allowing the individual learners to learn what they wish in comfort, at their convenience and at their own pace.

Traditional language learning involved minimal resources. The teacher was the main resource, offering the language model and instruction, supported by a textbook and maybe a few pictures and a tape recorder. However, Ohana's innovative multi-media approach allows learners to engage with the target language through high quality visual and aural stimulation. With all these tools and choices, learning is no longer a simple linear progression: it is multi-dimensional and multi-directional, which corresponds to researchers' understandings of the natural language learning processes.

A further benefit of the Ohana On-line English program is the low cost delivery. Traditional language learning is teacher-intensive and carries significant overheads, such as room hire. The flexibility and the relatively inexpensive hardware and software of the technological revolution make language learning more affordable to more people. As language learning is the key to personal empowerment in the era of globalization, the increasing accessibility of information technology—with Ohana at the cutting edge—makes it a tool for social justice.