



A Little Bridge ... for everyone to learn English!

INTRODUCTION

Little Bridge is a cross-platform, games-based resource for young learners of English, including those in the UK who have an urgent requirement to develop language fluency and literacy skills. A Little Bridge licence provides access to both web and mobile platforms.

With the emphasis on play and fun, Little Bridge offers high quality and effective pedagogical content. It covers all the key skills and guides each user, step by step on a personal pathway to measurable success.

Little Bridge has a uniquely broad application, providing effective learning to a wide audience. With its inclusive representation of ethnicities and its disability-awareness, it is increasingly used in UK classrooms, but also in a number of successful out-of-hours clubs and Family Literacy projects, thereby making a significant contribution to the current challenges of social cohesion and integration.

Case Study : Shireland Academy, West Midlands

Sir Mark Grundy (Executive Principal)

Kirsty Tonks (Principal Designate, Shireland Technology Primary)

Deanne Howe (Learning Support Lead Teacher)

Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative feedback and results:

Qualitative:

'Over 8 months, every child using Little Bridge made progress... Little Bridge is unique in that it truly crosses [the home and school] divide.'

Quantitative:

Using the Salford Reading Test, a literacy test used in UK primary schools to determine children's reading age, the school found that all the children improved their reading age. Most notably, in the 8-month test period:

- 5 pupils made 18 months progress
- 1 child (spent 25 hours on LB at home and school) made 35 months progress

Why do Shireland use Little Bridge?

With almost 60 different languages spoken at Shireland, we have to be really selective about the solutions we provide to our learners who have English as an Additional Language. We need them to improve their literacy skills quickly and effectively.

Having observed the continued impact over time that Little Bridge has had on these students and their families, we have seen that widening the use of the program beyond this cohort has also benefited those students who may not have language barriers but need extra support with their literacy skills.

Using the 'higher' Levels of Little Bridge and the emphasis on developing grammatical knowledge and spelling skills, we see this as a platform upon which to build a program that touches an ever-wider cohort, by bringing it into our mainstream teaching. It provides a smooth transition of vulnerable students to full integration with their peers and can be successfully incorporated into whole class literacy sessions.

What we have seen is Little Bridge become a far more comprehensive solution to a range of issues we need to address within the Academy and with our feeder Primary Schools. Little Bridge provides continuity and helps address problems of stigma. It is also an extremely cost-effective solution providing a platform for use, not just in school, but also at home – and, with school budgets in mind, means that we can show absolute value for money.

How did Shireland get started with/implement and what support did we get from the Little Bridge team?

Just under 3 years ago we introduced Little Bridge to Shireland Learning Support Department and to our feeder schools.

Little Bridge's 'open' Level approach was ideal, allowing us the degree of flexibility and personalized learning we required. It allowed us to support a wide variety of students, at various levels of competency in English. We can focus on particular skills, submerging the children in the spoken word, then introducing reading and writing as and when required. The skillful use of repetition (that is never 'boring') and consolidation ensures that practice is regular and effortless and really solid foundations are laid for all students.

Of course, one of the key factors of a successful implementation of a digital program such as Little Bridge is the support provided by the company involved. The team at Little Bridge has been fantastic, from the initial training to regular updates and refresher sessions. The supporting materials are first rate. The fact you can blend digital and paper resources is great. And the quality is superb. The Little Bridge team have thought of everything and they are continually innovating, always with a view to improve the child's experience and outcomes!

We needed a solution that students could relate to and become 'emotionally' involved with. Little Bridge is the sort of visual and tactile solution that enables these students to excel and feel confident about using.

What makes Little Bridge stand out from other products?

From the start, Little Bridge engages. We have found that students 'get it' straight away and are immersed in the world immediately. They want to continue, explore and learn for themselves. Little Bridge allows interaction and independent learning in a very natural and unforced way.

Students are in control of their learning, but we as teachers can still monitor and guide, where necessary. The ability to track progress is vital and the fact that both as a learner and as a teacher you can do this, makes monitoring very easy to do. Moreover, our students can continue learning at home (and they do this often without being prompted and voluntarily spend much more time on it that you would expect). This is really important. What is truly interesting is that we have been able to draw a clear correlation between the amount of time spent on Little Bridge and attainment. And the Little Bridge LMS is a hugely powerful tool, allowing us to see how much time each learner has spent on Little Bridge, and where they have focused.

Overall, we have seen a significant impact: following 8 months' use of Little Bridge, independent results show 18-36 months improvement (Salford Reading Tests).

Family Engagement with Little Bridge

One year on, and the Family Literacy project created by Shireland Academy in the West Midlands has been recognised as an outstanding success - and offers itself as a national template for encouraging life-long learning, community cohesion and integration.

Born from a need to support newly arrived families to the UK, this initiative has helped them to become empowered and able to support their children in their learning. It was also about allowing students and their families to learn together. Regular sessions using the Little Bridge online program, where they come and learn alongside their children, provides such an important message to their children; that these parents value learning.

In fact, they prioritise it so much that often it comes before other things that they do on a weekly basis, including job centre visits and shopping!

The families 'love' Little Bridge; to them it is a way of learning not just English, but what England is like. They had already seen their children using it at home and at Parent's Evening and were keen to learn about it themselves. In the Family Literacy session they identify with the personalities of the characters in Little Bridge and discuss the 'real-life' scenarios between themselves. They do get very competitive sometimes and this also further engages the students! At home where some of them have internet access only through the Smart TV, all the family get to learn about Little Bridge! It's become a family event!

The Family Literacy Project for them is central to their week and all other activities fit around it. How powerful a message is this to their children!

The project has seen unexpected benefits, including genuine friendship groups and a support network between the families that previously did not know each other. All involved gain from it. Families feel included. They have a better understanding of what their child is learning and how school works. They are building those all-important relationships with staff and at the same time are learning English alongside their children.

This is one of the few projects we have been involved with where the positives and benefits just keep growing and Little Bridge is absolutely central to its success. In these times of tension and cross community misperceptions, it would be great to see this kind of project, born in the heartland of our country, replicated successfully across the United Kingdom.

Please see below some of the feedback from young learners of English at Shireland and from their parents:

For parents, this experience has been life-changing:

“I am so happy to be coming to Little Bridge English classes. It makes Parents’ Evening so much Easier”

“I have been in this country for 32 years and never learnt English - until now!”

“I got 10 out of 10 in the spellings! My son will be so proud!”

“I can help my daughter with her homework now!”

“I now have a part-time job thanks to the Family Literacy Project!”

For students, they know that by their families attending it shows that they care about learning; they get the chance to act as ‘teacher’ themselves, by supporting their parents. There’s even an element of ‘reverse pressure’ on parents from their children :

“Sometimes, I didn’t understand the work in lesson. But when I started to teach my mum, I knew I had to know it really well. It made me work really hard. I understand it now!”

“I’m really glad my mum comes... I don’t speak my mother tongue that well so now I can speak to my mum in the language I am comfortable in.”

“Miss did my mum come? How did she do on the spelling test? We studied on Saturday and Sunday!”

“I’m glad my mum comes and gets homework. Now she gets what I have to do!”

