



Background

We're living in an era of unprecedented change. The 21st Century is one of constant innovation, in every imaginable field. The past few decades have seen the very fabric of our world's business and social landscapes revolutionized by travel and technology, and the extraordinary advances we're witnessing in the communications arena remain an enduring force of social change. As our world shrinks and becomes increasingly international, forward thinking societies have been re-drawing their old social and cultural references in order to keep up.

In response to the changing face of today's world, a new breed of expert has established its credentials in the international education arena, challenging the traditional roles of education as they look for the best ways to prepare children successfully for whatever life throws at them. The work they've already done and the transformation in 21st Century education tells a story that affects an enormous international community, including students, teachers, parents, government organizations and media from every corner of the world.

The message these innovators are sending out is clear: there is so much about today's schools, no matter which country you focus on, from the facilities themselves to the systems under which they operate, that needs to be rethought if we are to succeed in preparing our students in the best way for the challenges of the 21st Century. It's time to focus not on what goes on within the confines of the school building and grounds, but to shift that focus outwards so that our definition of school as a bricks and mortar building is reshaped in order to meet the needs of current and future students. Connecting, communicating and collaborating with people around the world – and developing the skills to do these things effectively – needs to be the main goal in education today. Standardized tests that measure only the traditional academic skills are no longer adequate predictors of student success in the global marketplace in which they'll soon be living...

This is the backdrop which prompted the creation of the International Curriculum for Languages and Creative Arts (ICLCA). Meticulously pieced together to emphasise both language and creative arts, what it delivers is one possible better alternative for pre-school aged children in order to help them engage efficiently in our increasingly multi-cultural and constantly evolving world.

The ICLCA

The ICLCA is a pre-school curriculum that provides a structured syllabus for children from two to six years old.

Quite different from other Early Years programmes, what the ICLCA offers is a new mix of best educational practices. This combination delivers a contemporary education for our 21st Century world. What makes the ICLCA contemporary? The fact that it's designed to feed smoothly into any education system in any country in the world. And the end goal? To show the importance of tapping into the things that really are most important at this age – life skills and holistic development – and to showcase more effective ways of passing on knowledge for children to build on. Ultimately, the ICLCA is all about making a lasting impact on the Early Childhood Education arena by proving that this change of focus delivers the best long-term results.

At the heart of the ICLCA's wider educational philosophy lie five core components:

1. A process-oriented curriculum focusing on languages and creative arts
2. A fresh take on what age-appropriate learning really is
3. Learning spaces that children find both beautiful and inspiring
4. A fully international environment
5. The ongoing monitoring of children who have graduated from the system

This concept has taken over 20 years to hone, integrating the most successful models from many internationally acclaimed educational philosophies and curricula used at many of the best and most progressive pre-schools from all over the world.

The ICLCA was first rolled out in 2005 at The Children's Garden (TCG), under the auspices of Taaleem, a leading UAE-based school management organization, run by a group of international education experts. Dubai was chosen for the launch of the ICLCA in order to harness the rich mix of nationalities that make up the residential population, and the success of TCG has captured the attention of the local community, of Early Years specialists and of pioneers in the wider field of international educational best practice.

Philosophy

The ICLCA mantra is simple: 'Childhood should be a journey, not a race'.

This emphasizes the importance of allowing children the time to develop holistically and at a pace that suits them, instead of allowing only academic assessment pressures to dictate the nature of our programme. Once their confidence and social and emotional skill sets are firmly established, children will be far more capable of coping successfully with the more rigorous academic pressures and expectations of Primary/Junior School.

School Context

Context-wise, there are three defining characteristics of the ICLCA pre-school environment which help make it unique:

1. Both student and staff bodies must be international
2. The pre-school itself must be a stand alone
3. The building and its grounds must be beautiful and aesthetically inspiring

Cultural awareness and true internationalism lie at the heart of the ICLCA, and these concepts are delivered through the multilingual language programme. To understand a language is to achieve a deeper understanding of its culture, so an international, multilingual environment opens children up to wider world concepts and sets the tone for a more creative approach to life.

As a stand alone pre-school unattached to a larger primary or secondary school, the ICLCA's approach guarantees that all energies are focused on this age group alone and can therefore deliver a truly age-appropriate experience, both in terms of environment and curriculum.

The proven impact of environment on a person's state of mind means that aesthetics play a signature role in ICLCA philosophy. Ordinary classrooms can make children feel pretty ordinary. The programme therefore demands creative thinking about how to deliver the most aesthetically beautiful and inspiring learning spaces in order to help tap further into a child's potential.

Teaching Methodologies

The ICLCA is most concerned with promoting life skills, primarily by drawing children's attention to and helping them make sense of their world. To do this most effectively requires a real understanding of the developmental level of each age group. Effective teaching methodologies demand a range of approaches, and what makes the ICLCA unique is its emphasis on:

1. Having real fun and engaging the children's emotions in the learning process
2. Teaching all core disciplines in two main languages of instruction
3. Teaching all core disciplines with a creative and artistic approach
4. Emphasising the process more than the end result.

Learning two languages simultaneously opens up a wider understanding of and respect for different cultures – a pre-requisite of effective communication in today's international world.

The long-term retention of knowledge guaranteed by 'doing' and through play is what underpins the ICLCA's focus on art and creative activities as the perfect teaching medium; by understanding processes better, children will understand the world better, function in it better and be better at the jobs and activities they'll face in the years to come.

Content

There are three defining characteristics which distinguish the content of the ICLCA from that of other curricula:

1. It is internationally-relevant, enabling students to graduate into any school offering any curriculum in the world.
2. It is totally tailor-made, fitting the region of the world in which the host pre-school is operating and constantly evolving to reflect the nature of the teachers and families who make up the school community.
3. It is truly age appropriate, in two ways. Firstly, it matches appropriate activities to the child's current age and stage of development. Secondly, it's appropriate to the age in which we're living. i.e. it is designed to lay strong foundations that children can build on to help them meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Materials

The ICLCA demands school resources that are different in two ways:

1. They must come from a variety of international sources
2. Teachers are required to create some of their own materials and games.

As a curriculum that prides itself on its global relevance – international in vision, in philosophy and in materials – the ICLCA requires a range of resources, both from around the world and created by the professionally qualified educators who teach the student body. This mix supports the ICLCA's creative approach and ensures that cultural understanding, appreciation and variations are all part of the learning process.

Goals

It's this specific mix of best practice goals that makes the ICLCA unique:

1. To ensure that both children and teachers learn through having lots of fun so they love coming to school
2. To instill a real sense of international awareness in young children
3. For children to be at least bilingual by the time they 'graduate' at the end of KG 2. (NB children will need to have completed at least two years of the three-year language programme.)
4. To lay strong foundations that prepare all the children to think so creatively and holistically that they can continue to build on their skills to deal effectively with the challenges that lie ahead.
5. To encourage real parental understanding and appreciation of the benefits of a holistic approach to Early Years Education in order that they actively support it in the home environment.

Skills

The three key skills the ICLCA promotes are:

1. A creative approach to life
2. Curiosity
3. An appreciation of processes.

While a wide range of skills should always be encouraged in children as they develop, creativity is all important with the ICLCA; not just in terms of drawing and painting, but in terms of instilling a whole creative mindset. The programme recognises that children must be inspired by and have constant exposure to creativity. The ICLCA therefore encourages them to think laterally, exhibit, develop and enjoy the benefits of their own creativity and to reflect on the processes employed to reach their end goal, all within the safe and supportive environment of their school community.

Assessment Techniques

The ICLCA does not believe in written assessments for pre-school children. This demands a new mix of assessment procedures:

1. **Portfolios:** teachers maintain student portfolios where they document each child's progress.
2. **End of Topic Celebration:** lessons are taught according to pre-defined school topics, which last between four and six weeks. At the end of the topic, the parents are invited in to school to celebrate the knowledge gained within the topic. The children present their work to their parents both collectively and individually.
3. **Parent-Teacher Conferences:** teacher assessments of the child are shared with the parents twice a year to keep the parents informed and ensure expectations and opinions are shared and agreed on.
4. **End of Year Progress Report:** designed by the school for its parent community and delivered in the two languages of instruction. This report covers all core disciplines delivered within the ICLCA.
5. **Annual Art Exhibition:** this showcases a child's ability to admire, to analyze, to explain, to feel pride, to register the effort, to appreciate reactions, to identify materials, techniques, artists, colour choices and much more. As such, it's a very important assessment tool for a holistic system.
6. **Ongoing contact with families of school leavers:** this is what underpins and gives credence to the ICLCA's claim that its methods best prepare children to meet the social, emotional, physical, academic and life challenges presented to them on leaving the security of their pre-school environment.