

Action leads them to world of English

Anasuya Menon

COIMBATORE: "Boys and girls, please stand up," the teacher's voice trailed into the open classroom in a lilting American accent. The small group of students sitting around her promptly jumped to their feet.

"Boys and girls, now touch your head," she continued. Peals of laughter filled the air as they gleefully obeyed her.

These students were from tribal villages scattered in the foothills of the Poondi. They did not know English and some of them had not even heard it being spoken before.

Yet, they understood their teacher perfectly. Through actions, pictures, songs and short stories, they were initiated into the world of English.

"I don't speak their language. But, they are able to grasp the essence of mine," said Shelley Thomas, Associate Professor, Middle Tennessee State University.

At the Isha Vidya Foundation to provide training in this method of teaching to the faculty members, she described



FUN WITH LANGUAGE: *Shelley Thomas, Associate Professor, Middle Tennessee State University, USA, explaining a concept to a group of children from tribal villages at Isha Foundation near Coimbatore on Monday.*

her method of teaching involving the five senses of students. "Total Physical Response (TPR) extracts the best possible results from a student when he or she learns a new language other than the mother tongue," she said.

"Through hearing the words over and over while the teacher acts them out, the

words become familiar to students. They learn the way it sounds, the way it feels when it is spoken and have a complete picture of the word in their minds." It was clearly not an academic exercise where in students enriched their vocabulary by mindless mugging. The experience-based method focused more on involvement of all the five senses in the learning process.

"They are not made to memorise rules of grammar or sentence construction. Through repetition, they slowly develop the ability of comprehension."

With no textbooks, the responsibility on the part of the teacher was huge in arresting the attention of the children. This is where pictures played their part. They depicted actions, such as a person walking, sitting or eating in order to make it easier for the child to understand concepts better. Gradually they would understand the use of prepositions too. "The child's response to the method is instantaneous. The teacher can immediately sense if it has grasped the concept or not," Ms. Shelley said. The brain learned best when it employed the senses.