7. Integrating New Technology in the Classroom

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Abstract

Multimedia in the form of CD-Rom language-learning programs and Internet offer very powerful tools for teaching and learning. They need to be understood and then integrated into lesson plans, classroom procedures and learning strategies. But practical questions such as deciding on software and hardware must be addressed before this integration can become a reality. This article traces the history of technological developments in language teaching, then asks some of these practical questions and finally openly discusses the fears of language teachers.

The practical issues of adopting and integrating multimedia and Internet resources into the language classroom to enhance and enrich the teaching (and learning) of English as a foreign language must be addressed. In our experience at the UTT (Université de Technologie de Troyes), students have a very positive attitude to the multimedia resources which are part of their daily student life: constant use of e-mail for delivering homework and contacting teachers (and friends), creation of websites, learning English with CD-Roms and net-worked resources, using these resources as part and parcel of project work in the various branches of engineering studies offered on the campus.

Our history of integrating media

As English language teachers, we have had to accept and use the following (technical) equipment over the years since the seventies.

- Tape-recorders: **Moving from reel-to-reel recorders to cassette recorders was one of the first steps and adaptations that we had to make.**

- Language laboratories: **(70s and 80s)**

- Video: **(late 70s and the 80s)**

- Satellite TV: **(late 80s and 90s)**

- Computers: **(late 80s and the 90s)Computers brought in the era of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) or EAO in French** *(Enseignement Assisté par Ordinateur)*

- Multimedia: **(the 90s)**

- Internet: **(from 1992?)**

Educational Technology

The concept of educational engineering came as the result of integrating all these tools and resources into a homogeneous teaching approach allowing learners to use and exploit them to full benefit, either as a classroom + teacher-driven experience or on a largely autonomous basis.

It is vital to establish a clear and comprehensible definition of the term multimedia. The public's definition ranges from simply CD-Rom to the interactive use of sound and text on a computer screen.

The basic defintion is that multimedia is a resource for learning or for pleasure (=EDUtainment) encompassing the use of text, images, video, and sound on a CD-Rom for use in computers.

Good blending

refers to the intelligent use of multimedia and Internet in a language learning environment so that all the elements available to assist the learner in the learning process are presented in the most effective way.

Hardware

This concerns the computers, CD-Rom drives, and the Internet connection, and where these are to be found e.g. in a Multimedia Room or in a language laboratory containing computers instead of cassette decks.

The software

available on the market has to take into account the foreign language to be taught, the language level of the students, the type of software (tests, MCQs, exercisers, tutorials, simulations, storyboards, gapfills, games,...), the variety of software

(dictionaries, grammar, vocabulary, tests, exercisers,...) and technical features (type of computers, CD-Rom drives, speed, network,...).

Among extraneous factors, the technical assistance available is vital. Training the teachers and the students in the use of this new technology is essential. Learning strategies will change and need to be addressed.

Fear, but not phobias!

TEFL or ESL teachers share a number of fears which should not become phobias:
* Will the computer replace me? Yes, for boring, repetitive tasks.
* Will the computer change my teaching? Yes, by offering more scope for learning and leaving the teacher with more time to get on with the teaching.
* Will the computer change my teaching style? Yes, in a more structured manner with a much wider variety of tools to dispose of.
* What's my role now? To be an advisor, an organizer, a resource person.
* My students know more than I do about computing! Some do, and some think they do.

The advantages for our learners

1) Autonomous learning strategies develop.
2) Variety is the spice of learning (and teaching): students can use a wealth of learning tools to correspond to different learning styles.
3) The teacher is more accessible, more available.
4) Motivation for learning is sparked.

Final thoughts

The *New Technologies* as the French refer to multimedia and web resources are a new culture which has been largely developed in the English language and which offers powerful possibilities for our students. The arrival of new technology will make our task even more interesting and stimulating, bringing with it a sense of adventure in teaching.

Learning a language is an on-going process, or a life-long process. And the resources we are coming to use will be constantly updated. Today's resources for learners are already enormous.

Like our students, we need to face these resources and start learning how to exploit them to the best benefit!

Biodata

As the "Chargé du Multimédia" at the Université de Technologie de Troyes, **Roy Sprenger** trains the teaching and administrative staff in the use of these modern tools (CD-Roms, Internet, e-mail), tutors students in multimedia, follows students in their projects, suggests appropriate purchases in terms of computer and software resources. The UTT provides the following facilities in terms of modern technology: e-mail accounts for each student, Internet resources available in several workrooms and in the library, two multimedia language-learning laboratories, two multimedia rooms in the library, a multimedia development room for project work.
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