Technology and Second Language Teaching

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Upon being asked to share my experiences teaching second language using technology, I contemplated how my pedagogical practices as a whole have changed as result of them. From task design to assessment, technology has become a valuable tool in supporting my pedagogical goals. As a graduate student at the University of California in Davis, I am fortunate to have the most excellent mentoring and resources on the subject of technology, guiding me to reflect on what the best practices are regarding its use in the L2 classroom. What follows is a basic account of what technology is, what it is not, as well as my own experience using Synchronous Computer Communication.

Research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) shows that the "Best practices in using technology to support language teaching and learning, see technology as a tool that can enhance teaching and learning by augmenting input, providing additional opportunities for language practice, and serving as a platform for interaction and tasks-based learning activities" (Hoppinager, 2009). Today's language teachers must reflect on how to best integrate technology within their methodologies to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching and learning in their classrooms. The question is, what constitutes effective use of technology in the L2 classroom?

First let's consider what technology is not. Blake (2008) points out that in language teaching, no particular technology is superior to any other tool. No technology should be implemented just as "mere replacement" and is not the answer to everything. Those who introduce technology under such premises will promptly find themselves with little rationale for its use, and with a great deal of dissatisfaction. In his book, *A Brave New Digital Classroom: Technology and Foreign Language Learning* (2008), Blake presents four myths or misconceptions regarding technology and language (also see Egbert, Paulus, and Nakamichi 2002; and Lam 2000). Myth 1: technology is not monolithic. It is "neither good nor bad….nor embodies some new superior methodological approach to language teaching" (8). Myth 2: technology does not constitute a methodology, it "is theoretically and methodologically neutral" (11) consequently, it is not about using technology per se, but rather about how

we utilize technology to make it a part of a pedagogy or a cultural practice. Myth 3: today's technology is all we need to know. One of the most challenging particulars regarding the commitment to implementing technology in the language classroom is the ever-changing nature of the environment. Unfortunately, the lack of teaching preparation and exposure concerning CALL perpetuates this predicament. Lastly and most commonly heard is Myth number 4: technology will replace teachers. I personally have heard this remark more as of late, due to the troublesome atmosphere of budgets cuts and limited resources for education. However, lets remain mindful of the fact that teaching language with technology requires good language pedagogy and "that the introduction of technology neither replaces nor transforms the nature of good teaching. Technology can undoubtedly raise the quality of the learning experience, and enhance the ability of even the best teacher to reach the students. However, a computer is not a substitute for a teacher, and it can not transform a bad teacher into a good one" (Hoopingarner 2009) Most likely the answer to this myth is that in the work force, teachers who use technology will replace those who do not .

How can one begin including technology in a language course? Firstly, we must contemplate our instructional goals and objectives, our own teaching styles, and the different technological platforms available. Different tools offer different advantages and should be matched to a corresponding pedagogical objective. Overall, there are three technological platforms that offer tools to enhance language teaching and learning: the web, network- based communication (e-mail, chat programs, wikis, blogs, etc.) and CD-ROM or hyper media applications. There is no question that the CD-ROM has become the most common fixture as the accompanying auxiliary material medium for language textbooks today. Nevertheless, teachers need training in recognizing sound pedagogical materials in this format. Just as with books, sophisticated, complicated interfaces should not get in the way of pedagogical goals and objectives. The web and network-based communication applications, present a wide array of environments for interaction. The World Wide Web offers endless source of materials for content-based lessons and provides plentiful opportunities for interaction with cultural authentic material. As a matter of fact, when using the web in class, a challenge for the teacher is to pair the medium in a sound pedagogical manner with the lesson objectives, language level and the student's needs. The teacher should ask such things as: should I use it as the primary or secondary source of information? Should it be used in its original or adapted form? As well as keeping up with the ever-changing IRL addresses typical to this environment.

Network-based communication applications or Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) offer tools for social construction of meaning. Synchronous

or Asynchronous chat provide excellent opportunities for student centered, task-based interactivity in the L2. My experience with Synchronous CMC has been through the teaching of a lower division Spanish class in a hybrid format. In this class, the students met face-to-face only twice a week. As part of the course, the instructor directed a series of 30-minute chat sessions working with student dyads. The chat program was tri-modal in that it supported the exchange of video, audio, and text. Results from the students' surveys indicated that those who participated in the chat, felt a significant increment in the amount of interactivity and production in the L2. Moreover, the students indicated that they felt they had greater agency in the completion of tasks and that the medium offered better opportunities for actual conversation. As the instructor, I observed that the learners engaged in meaningful extended exchanges. The medium provided me with the opportunity to hear each student and offer significant and immediate feedback. But most importantly it offered a channel for continuous formative oral assessment, which is not always possible in the traditional language classroom setting. However, a weekly chat with a class, two students at a time, was very demanding and time consuming. Nevertheless, having taught with a tri-modal synchronous chat application allows me to adjust and change whatever is necessary to make it work best for the students, the curriculum objectives, and my teaching style. Blake (2008) points to this "rethinking" of what we do when incorporating new technologies and how as a result, teachers transform their pedagogies.

Conceptualizing the role of technology in teaching is essential to its effectiveness. In my experience, technology has broadened the spectrum of interaction while empowering the students' learning process by providing better opportunities for language usage. It provides possibilities for engagement otherwise not possible. Most importantly, the synchronous chat helped me shift the way I perceived my students. By expanding the opportunities for interaction, I observed their communicative potential moving from learners to communicators who actively conversed for meaningful purposes.

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