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Globalization through Distance Education via Inter-and Intranet Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper advocates the important role of English language teaching in preparing students to succeed in the era of globalization which can be accomplished through distance education via Inter- and Intranet Pedagogy. The following key elements in this approach of language teaching and learning are discussed: syllabus, materials, tasks and activities, testing and evaluation, and the roles of teachers and students.

As regards the design of the syllabus, the readiness of infrastructure, the training of net teachers and the readiness of the students have to be taken into account. Materials for the "global classroom" should include both teaching and learning materials. Tasks and activities for the Inter- and Intranet Pedagogy require prior preparation and planning of the use of the computer room to ensure that the objectives of the lessons will be accomplished. To assess students' performance, means of testing and evaluation have to correspond with the nature of teaching. The Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) provides advantages for this approach. Finally, the success or failure of the approach depends on the attitude and the receptiveness of the teachers and students to the demand placed on their changing roles.

It is undeniable that English is a universal tool for communication and through this medium people around the world can share their knowledge, feelings and ideas. One responsibility of English language teachers is thus to help their students communicate and realize that they are a part of the "global village."

Distance education is one way to create globalization. The term "distance education" has been differently defined though the purpose is the same. Tripathi (1997, p.1) presented its definitions as follows:

Educational Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University describes distance education as:

Combining technology and education to reach audiences across vast distances is the hallmark of distance learning. It has become a strategic means to provide training, education, and new communication channels to business, educational institutions, government, and other public and private agencies.

University of Wisconsin - Extension, Continuing Education Extension defines it as "a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning."

The Engineering Outreach staff at the University of Idaho mention that "Distance Education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e., voice, video, data, and print), often in concert with face-to-face communication, is used to bridge the instructional gap." San Jacinto College, Pasadena, Texas summarizes distance education as "instruction that can be delivered through various technologies to students at a distance from their instructors."

In brief, distance education may be defined as a type of teaching that exploits the benefits of technology to reach students regardless of time, place and race.

Consequently, the idea of distance education works well with "Internet Teaching." Tripathi (1998, p.1) refers to the Internet as

a global computer network allowing communication with millions of computer users and access to resources from around the world.... It is also a network of services and resources, a library, a database and a community of people from around the world eager to share, listen and learn from each other.

In language teaching the focus must be on pedagogy, not technology as many Internet educators have pointed out. Language teachers should exploit the advances of technology as a means to supplement their regular duties. Prapphal (1997) mentioned that in EFL contexts, the appropriate use of educational technology must be considered. In addition, to make effective use of IT in English teaching, the following aspects have to be considered:

1. Syllabus
2. Materials
3. Tasks and Activities
4. Testing and Evaluation
5. The Roles of Teacher and Student

Syllabus

Regarding the syllabus, syllabus designers have to take into consideration that instruction is not limited to the traditional classroom setting. The degree of success of virtual classrooms depends on the readiness of infrastructure, the training of net teachers, and most importantly the attitude and readiness of the students. For example, an online distance course requires a lot of budget for Internet access, skillful teachers who can cope with the technology,

and responsible and motivated students who can self-direct their own learning.

Internet Pedagogy seems to be an ideal situation for the new millennium if all the above constraints can be handled. Its advantages have been advocated by many teachers. For instance, Kim Gray (1997) in Sperling (1997, p.52) mentions that the Internet can "improve the teacher's ability to teach by offering students activities that can take them almost anywhere in the world..." However, many drawbacks have also been brought up. This does not mean that language teachers should not prepare their students to cope with the world of information technology.

Intranet Pedagogy, an alternative to Internet Pedagogy appears to help solve some disadvantages of the Internet. Weinstein (1996, p.50) pointed out the difference between the Internet and an Intranet as follows: "while the Internet is global in scope, open to everyone with no regard to content, an Intranet serves a well-defined and bounded user community." Similar to the Internet, an Intranet's main function is to read and display Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML) files created by the teacher and student. E-mail and interactive programs are also functions of some Intranets.

An example of Intranet Pedagogy is by using E-mail in English classes. A study was carried out with first-year Engineering students who took Foundation English Course from Chulalongkorn University Language Institute in 1998. The instructor used E-mail to supplement regular materials and the students indicated that they learned about writing, structures and error corrections from the teacher's feedback via

E-mail. Other examples of Intranet teaching are interactive Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) activities. Teachers can integrate computer technology into the tasks like electronic journals, web-based projects that can create interaction among students from the same class or those from different classes. (For more examples please read New Ways of Using Computers in Language Teaching, Boswood, 1997.)

Materials

As for materials, both instructional and learning materials should be incorporated in the "global classroom." The former is provided by the teacher while the latter comes from the student's needs and interests. At university level, "the Content-Based Approach to Internet Literacy" proposed by Ward and Karet (1996) seems to be an appropriate method to increase language proficiency through content. Content-based approach which is related to English for Special Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language teaching which is different from skill-based approach. While the former focuses on content areas or themes, the latter emphasizes skills. This is because language learning is contextualized and purposeful as the student uses the language to pursue a specific goal and simultaneously acquires the language. He or she can gain mastery of the language (procedural knowledge) as well as mastery of the subject (declarative knowledge) at the same time. In this respect, the World Wide Web is an ideal teaching tool for any academic discipline since it gives opportunities for both procedural and declarative learning. The WWW provides a lot of comprehensible

input while features of the Internet can facilitate and enhance learning. Source materials are available in various English for

Specific Purposes (ESP) web sites. Some of them are listed by Sperling (1997) as cited below:

<http://www.hut.fi/~rvilmi/EST>

<http://www.eslcafe.com/discussion/wwwboard9/wwwboard.html>

<http://www.u-aizu.ac.jp/~t-orr/international-esp-menu.html>

<http://www.cibnor.conacytmx/est.html>

<http://www.interserver.miyazaki-med.ac.JP/~Kimball/med/1.html>

Tasks and Activities

In terms of tasks and activities, Sergeant (1996) proposed the following *Golden rules for task setting*.

Pre-planning

At this step the teacher negotiates with the students and learns about the students' ability to use the computer.

Planning

The teacher plans the lesson to use a variety of programs to suit students' needs and interests.

Pre-computer Room

The teacher explains the rationale for each activity before going to the computer room.

Computer Room

The teacher acts as an active participant and offers help where needed. Discussions about the tasks are encouraged.

Post-computer Room

The teacher answers the questions and gives suggestions to the students.

A variety of activities have been carried out in different settings. Boswood (1997) compiled the following activities in New Ways of Using Computers in Language Teaching which focuses on Internet teaching.

1. Word Processing and Desktop Publishing
2. Getting Connected: E-Mail and MOOs
3. Working with the Web
4. The Multimedia Machine
5. Concordancing

Internet activities that work have been reported by many educators. For example, Foster (1996) conducted the project "Where in the World Did My Ancestors Originate?" Fourth to sixth graders from around the world can create a home page on the Internet after they have researched the country in which their ancestors lived. The students have an opportunity to collaborate with a student from the country to compare life styles, cultures, etc.

Tillyer (1996) recommended incorporating online activities into a business oriented language program. Classes are paired up to do simulations by e-mail. More advanced students can write progress reports on their project for their teacher. Davidson (1996) used the CNN web site in his advanced class. The class was divided into two groups and each group studied its own part. After that the students partnered up and exchanged their stories with a member of the other group. The task ended

with a group discussion of the project. In teaching writing Houston (1996) tried a student newspaper. The class was assigned writing topics suitable for the newspaper. The students were responsible for being editors like senior editor, copy editor, art editor, sports editor, travel editor, news editor, etc. Extra credit for specific newspaper tasks was given.

As for audio-video-based media tasks, Sackett (1997) simulated the integration of the media. He supplemented PBS and cable television programming with materials from the networks' web sites. He reported that the students were able to access information in text-based and audio-video-based media and discussed and wrote about it.

Regarding virtual classrooms, Hudson (1996) used the Internet with intermediate students from different countries to communicate with each other. The same course materials were used. Another internet task suitable for the *global classroom* is 'conferencing.' Communicating via e-mail with classmates and teachers through networked computers provides many opportunities for language learning. Boswood (1997, p.71) suggests resources like the "International E- Mail Tandem Network" (which matches up students learning the same language in different parts of the world), and "EVENT_SL" (an electronic forum in which ESL students around the world discuss current events) to carry out global partner classes. Another related technology is MOOs (MUDs, object oriented), or real-time, on-line chat domains.

Teaching and Evaluation

Another component of Inter-and Intra-net Pedagogy is testing and evaluation. If the approach of teaching, materials and activities have changed, tests and other means of evaluation have to correspond with the afore-mentioned elements. Paper and pencil tests are now being replaced by computer-based/adaptive tests. Adaptive testing means that the sequence of test questions presented to each student and the questions themselves will vary because they are based on responses to prior test questions (ETS, 1999). Language learners can evaluate their own performance through web sites such as 'Starr Test.' Pellowe (1999) suggests 'Hot Potatoes,' software consisting of six applications for making interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-filling exercises.

There are several advantages of computer-adaptive testing (CAT). The University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts summarizes its benefits as follows:

1. CAT requires fewer test items.
2. CAT requires shorter testing time.
3. CAT is a realistic challenge for test takers.
4. Its test security is enhanced.
5. Test takers can get immediate feedback on their performance.
6. For a large scale administration, scheduling and supervision concerns are greatly reduced.
7. CAT technologies have been found to improve test-taking motivation and to reduce average test score differences across ethnic groups.

8. Using the computer to store performance data, students' performance over time can be followed.

The Roles of Teacher and Student

Apart from the afore-mentioned factors involved in the Inter- and Intranet Pedagogy, the last two key components are the teacher and the student. Learner involvement is crucial to success. In this approach, apart from the IT skills, the learner must have the following characteristics proposed by Clarke (1989).

1. Learner commitment
2. Learners as materials writers and collaborators
3. Learners as problem solvers
4. Learners as knowers and
5. Learners as evaluators and assessors

In brief, the learner must be oriented toward "self-directed learning." To cope in the era of globalization they can no longer be "spoon-fed." To help students achieve their own objectives and pursue their life-long education, teachers themselves have to change their roles. In the '*global classroom*'

the teacher must be the facilitator who provides comprehensible input and gives feedback to the students' output. Through the Inter- and Intranet Pedagogy, the teachers can help their students acquire the target language and take advantage of the world of information technology. This task requires a lot of responsibility, skills, knowledge and devotion because net teachers have to learn about their students' computer background, language abilities as well as their needs and interests. They have to select appropriate language tasks to match the students' linguistic backgrounds, cognitive and academic abilities. Also, teachers have to provide immediate feedback and create co-operation among students. It is not easy to be language teachers in the new millennium but if they can fulfill their duties, the result is rewarding because they can help create a '*global classroom*' where students can collaborate and share their knowledge, feelings and beliefs with peers from any corner of the world.

The Author

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