

Technology-Based Pedagogy: A Cornucopia of Choices with a Lack of Options

Today, permit me to cast you in the role of student and ask you to take a short quiz.

TRUE OR FALSE STUDENTS SHOULD BE EXPOSED TO A GREAT DEAL OF TARGET LANGUAGE LISTENING EXPERIENCE AT ALL LEVELS OF INSTRUCTION.

TRUE OR FALSE THE LANGUAGE OF THE LISTENING EXPERIENCE SHOULD BE NATURAL AND AUTHENTIC, THAT IS, TIED TO SOCIAL AND SITUATIONAL CONTEXTS, WITH A VARIETY OF TOPICS AND SPEAKERS.

TRUE OR FALSE THE TARGET LANGUAGE LISTENING EXPERIENCE SHOULD BE DESIGNED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO HELP THE LISTENER ACHIEVE A SIGNIFICANT MEASURE OF UNDERSTANDING.

If some of you did not answer the questions, it can only mean one of three things: You are a government specialist or an academic expert who drafted the recommendations that answered each of these questions in the affirmative at the ACTFL Symposium on Receptive Language Skills (1984); or You are a seasoned veteran who feels that the answers to these questions are so obvious and self-evident they are not worth mentioning; or You are like Mary Wilson, who when asked by her professor, "Mary Wilson, what part of man's anatomy enlarges to ten times its normal size during periods of great emotion?" said she was too embarrassed to answer *that* question in public. Whereupon the professor replied, "The correct answer, Mary, is the pupil of the eye—which leads me to three conclusions. One, you didn't do your homework. Two, you have a dirty mind, and three, when you get married, you're in for a major disappointment."

Motivation

As foreign language educators, we may not be held accountable for how much dirt and disappointment attach themselves to the minds of our students. We are, however, a major factor in whether or not our students motivate themselves to achieve linguistic and communicative competence, attainable in part as the result of the homework we assign. Although the issue of motivation is as old as Plato, in the classroom of the 1980s and beyond, it appears reasonable to assume that pedagogy and course management *together* serve as the primary impetus to student motivation.

Cornucopia of Technological Choices

Is there anyone who has not been told—in one way or another—that we live in the Age of Information? Depending upon our location and inclination, we, as foreign language teachers,

have also been told that we have at our disposal a cornucopia of “hand-me-down” technologies—originally developed for commercial and consumer markets—which can help us improve both the management of our classes and the quality of our teaching.

Furthermore, we are often reminded that the existing and emerging information technologies give us unprecedented opportunities to provide learners with the next best thing to being in the target language country.

Now, unless we exist in splendid isolation, it is impossible to entirely ignore the technological “horn of plenty,” overflowing with a variety of ever-changing hardware. It is possible, however, to ignore the foreign language courseware that integrates the technology into course content, because, for the most part, it is so minimal; it is possible to ignore the empirical evidence about the effects of technology on language learning, because, generally speaking, it is uneven and scant; and, it is possible to ignore the actual use of technology in foreign language learning, because, with rare exceptions, it is incidental and peripheral.

Why, one wonders, in an age of technological plenty, is there such a dearth of courseware, such a small body of research, and such incidental use of technology in foreign language learning? Why are we, for the most part, still teaching the same old stuff in the same old way, with the same old results?

The Issue of Reward

Until the use of technology in pedagogy is valued and rewarded as is published research, namely, with time off, promotion, tenure, status, and remuneration, the technologies useful in classroom teaching will not be a significant force in education. Although we as teachers control what happens in our classrooms, how much we publish controls how much we earn and how secure we are professionally, especially at large, research-oriented universities. As long as we value good teaching as just so much icing on the “publications-in-prestigious-journals” cake, we are in no danger of changing the way things are, because we will have neither the time nor the energy to create courseware, to learn about

technology, to conduct classroom experimentation, or to integrate the appropriate technologies into the fabric of our courses and the cognitive learning styles of our students.

Resistance to Technology

All of us would probably agree that everything we do and everything we use in our classrooms should serve our students in their learning and ourselves in our teaching. Well, perhaps, not quite *everything*.

As Gordon T. Bowden (1982) points out, “Teachers have resisted the use of technology in the classroom...Despite the spectacular proliferation of audiovisual technologies for entertainment and information purposes, many professional educators have maintained attitudes of indifference, skepticism, and opposition...” toward technology.

In my capacity as director of a learning laboratory facility which provides, in some instances, state-of-the-art technologies useful in language learning, I have encountered the indifference, skepticism, and opposition of educators toward the use of technology in language learning.

Faculty indifference is often voiced by students who say to me, “My professor says he learned French without using the language lab; he doesn’t care if we go to lab or not.” I think all of us know that it is, indeed, possible to learn languages without the technological aids language laboratories can provide. I learned all my languages without the technologies available to today’s students, but not because my professors were indifferent to the usefulness of technology in language laboratories; I simply did not have access to a language laboratory.

To my indifferent colleagues, some of whom drafted the resolutions of the ACTFL Symposium on Receptive Language Skills, I ask, where should students at American universities go to get that “*great deal*” of target language listening experience at all levels of instruction? Where should they go to experience target languages in their “*authentic and natural*” states, tied to social and situational contexts, with a variety of topics and speakers? Can we really expect foreign

language teachers with 15 to 30 students—given a 50-minute class hour, meeting five times per week, during the ten-week quarter—to provide as many and varied listening experiences as even a modestly equipped learning laboratory with audio, video, shortwave, computer, and satellite technologies can provide?

When a colleague challenges me point-blank with “Prove to me that using technology helps my students learn the target language, and I’ll send them to lab,” I know what it means to meet head-on with skepticism. Comments like “My students have me; they don’t need technology or anything else to help them learn languages.” remind me that opposition to the use of technology in foreign language learning takes many forms, not the least of which is arrogance.

Bowden, as well as other critics, maintain that the reason for the indifference, skepticism, and opposition is the fact that teachers view technologies like film projectors, tape recorders, computers, videocassette recorders, and satellite dishes as threats to their authority in the classroom.

Fear of Technology

Undoubtedly, there are teachers who fear that technology will replace them in the classroom and usurp their authority. The experiences of several decades of using technology in my own language pedagogy and helping interested colleagues at various institutions do the same, however, convinces me that an effective antidote to such fear is to view the teacher-technology “meld” with the attitude exhibited by the widely publicized six-year old who was pictured at a computer in one of the popular weekly news magazines. Said the exasperated youngster, “This dumb machine. It can’t do anything that I don’t tell it or make it do.” Accordingly, we can assume that any teacher who is replaced by a dumb machine must have somehow enabled the dumb machine to do it, or as a skeptical colleague pointed out, any faculty member who *can* be replaced by a machine, *should* be.

Are the critics right? Does fear alone account for the indifference, skepticism, and opposition toward the use of technology in the classroom?

More Work Not Less

For many teachers there may be an even more immediate, compelling, and pragmatic reason for avoiding the use of technology. Teachers either know or suspect that the use of technology means *more* work not less for the teacher. Integrating technology into course content is just something else in addition to everything else. More importantly, perhaps, it is something which is not rewarded in terms of tenure, promotion, or remuneration as is published research at many colleges and universities. Worse, it takes precious time away from publishing articles in prestigious journals. Even the writing of courseware for the so-called “darling” of the Information Age, the computer, is given little credit in tenure reviews.

No Credit for Using Technology

In her March 18, 1987, front-page article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Judith A. Turner writes:

“Faculty members who write computer software for teaching often find that their chances of getting credit for it during promotion-tenure reviews are discouragingly slim. In fact, many younger faculty members—the ones who have had the most experience with computing during their own years in college—say they are being advised to forget about writing software or incorporating computers into their courses, at least until after they have tenure. They are being told instead to spend their time doing research and getting it published.”

Turner goes on to say that even when courseware development is recognized, it is usually counted as instruction or service, rather than the all-important published research. In spite of this, Richard M. Cyert, president of Carnegie Mellon University, is quoted in the article as saying, “The key to the revolution in higher education is the development of appropriate software...this development must come from faculty.”

Revolution in Higher Education

If the methodology of using technology in higher education must come from faculty, and

such methodology is the key to the revolution in higher education, my feeling is that the revolution will be "on hold" until there is a reversal in values, and *published* research becomes the icing on the pedagogy cake. When faculty get tenure, time off, promotion, remuneration, and status for the development and integration of technology into teaching, then and only then, will the revolution in higher education begin. Until such time, foreign language teachers will continue to do what, for the most part, they have always done—abandon their students to learning laboratories such as mine, jazz up their classes by checking out a film here, a video there, and a tape machine now and again, preferably on Fridays, to entertain the students—who managed to come to class—with music of the target language country.

Relationship of Learner and Target Language

If the learner's direct relationship to the target language is what really matters, then everything we do or don't do in our classrooms either brings that relationship into being and nourishes it or intrudes upon it; or worse still, becomes a substitute for it.

Technologies, judiciously used and properly integrated into course content and pedagogy, enable students to directly experience and practice actual aural/oral communication in the target language. To deny students access to direct experience of the target language—possible with technology in ways exceeded only by being in the target language country—is to intrude upon the relationship between learner and the target language. To lecture day after day after day *about* the target language is to make the classroom lecture a substitute for the direct relationship between learner and the target language.

If the only thing that keeps us from integrating technology into our teaching is lack of time, lack of recognition, or lack of monetary rewards, then let us heed the advice of Allan Tucker (1982) who reminds us that "in modern educational institutions, conditions for the award of tenure are embodied in documents governing university policy..."—policy that we as faculty have helped put into place; policy that we as faculty can help change so that good teaching is valued and rewarded as is published research. If we change the conditions of tenure at our institutions, we would not be breaking new ground. Faculties and administrators at Chapel Hill, Pennsylvania State University, Mills College and others are already instituting policies that give tenure credit for integrating technology into teaching.

Teaching as Midwifery

It has often been said that Plato asked the *right* questions about education. In his dialogue, the *Meno*, Socrates answers the question "What is good teaching?" with the view that teaching is analogous to midwifery. Under this Socratic principle, the students in our foreign language classes lack nothing; they have everything they need to form a direct relationship with the target language *except agents to assist in the delivery of such a relationship*.

The existing and emerging information technologies, both print and electronic, can be powerful agents to help bring into being linguistic and communicative competencies in our students. However, unless we as teachers understand the technology, know how to use it and when, we will not help nourish the direct relationship between learner and the target language. Instead, we will be an intrusion on that relationship, or much worse, we will become a substitute for it.

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