Lab Notes

Narrowing the Pedagogy-Technology Gap: Intake Interviews to Assess Needs and Interest

by Josef Hellebrandt
Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA

Introduction

Lab directors may be familiar with this scenario. You just offered another workshop for language faculty: only one-half of those invited attended, and one proudly says "I have no intention whatsoever of using this in my class!" In addition to providing technical and administrative support, offering workshops and teaching classes, many times the above scenario turns into yet another challenge: enticing faculty to incorporate learning technologies into their teaching. What follows is a brief discussion of the issues involved and a strategy to enhance faculty awareness and participation.

The Current Situation

Without any doubt, there are many teachers—the *explorers*—who thoughtfully investigate technologies, attend workshops, and probe how computers, television, and video can enhance their teaching. Then, there are the *prescribers*, who follow a combination of off-the-shelf and reward approach to using instructional media. Finally, there seems to exist a third group, the *withholders:* teachers who think that their masterful teaching and mere presence meet the multi-sensual needs of today's language learner.

Given this situation, what strategy should a language learning center adopt to accommodate the diverse needs of these three groups? While some may favor lending support only to the deserving few (don't we all like the explorers?), others,

including me, feel that for the sake of the balanced incorporation or even initial introduction of instructional technologies, learning centers must offer support and methodological guidance to its entire language clientele, including the "prescribers" and the "withholders." In the past three years, this journal has voiced part of this concern, particularly through the articles by Lyman-Hager (1992) and Garrett (1992). Among numerous issues from availability (and familiarity) of technology, language methods, release time for development, technology anxiety, etc., two issues stand out: a new pedagogy and faculty involvement. Both are interrelated and may help to gradually narrow the widening pedagogy-technology gap. What can initiate this long-term endeavor is a standardized interview that aims at promoting an awareness of the relationship teaching-learning-technology, particularly among the last two groups. Its main objective is not to categorize faculty, but to draw out information and impressions which will help the lab director assist a colleague's efforts in incorporating technology into teaching.

Preparing the Change: The Intake Interview

Before language centers and foreign language departments set out to develop new methods for using modern technology/media or design elaborate training curricula, all "user" groups within the language faculty should be invited to comment on their pedagogical preferences, their media needs and familiarity with instructional technology. In a face-to-face setting, the intake interview combines elements of questionnaire-oriented data collection with oral interview methods which provide information participants would not want to put in writing, such as attitudes, values, or perceptions. Whenever costs are not a limiting factor, the interview should be conducted by the lab director at the beginning of the academic year to allow both interviewee and lab director to establish an ongoing dialog as to meeting each other's goals and expectations. A set of six questions can help identify projected utilization, disposition toward media, and specific training needs:

1. What will you teach this semester? Responses to this question will not only yield basic information about a professor's teaching load such as language, level and number of classes, but in addition give the lab director ideas on materials to suggest. Moreover, a faculty member teaching three or four courses in different buildings may be less likely to use computers or video than a colleague who teaches two classes in the same building.

2. Would you like to use any support media? One purpose of this question is to identify the type of user. An affirmative answer suggests that she or he may become (or continue as) an "explorer," "prescriber" or "withholder." To find out if the users are interested in more than the overhead projector, have instructors specify the type(s) of media they might use and allow for some possible combinations like videodisc, CD-ROM, etc. If the answer is negative, have the respondents elaborate why they are not planning on using media. In either case, encourage them to tell you why a selected medium might be of instructional benefit in one case and not in another. Does it support their own teaching and learning preferences? In addition, this question may give a first indication as to the users' media literacy and may allow them to start thinking about the link between methods and technology.

3. How do you think students will benefit from using media in your classes? In answering this two-tiered question, faculty reflect on their teaching, their knowledge of instructional media, processes in language learning, and student reactions. Responses (affirmative or negative) may reveal instructor attitudes toward technology as well as perceived potential of using media in language teaching. Since this is one of the key questions, faculty should specify how they expect their students to benefit. Will their listening or reading improve? How will this affect their overall motivation? Ask them if their expectations are based on empirical data or just anecdotal information. This set of questions probes faculty awareness of the teaching-technology-learning relationship and allows you to further determine future training needs.

4. Which media are you most familiar with? Using examples from your learning center, have faculty name the instructional technology they feel comfortable using in, as well as outside, their classes. Some of their answers may confirm your expectations, like the preference for video or television; others like "Oh, I didn't know we had that" may indicate a lack of familiarity with the media holdings at their own institution. Since faculty may not volunteer information as to their lack of information and familiarity, try to keep a friendly tone. Point out what type of instructional media and applications they can experiment with in your learning center and brief them about language departments in your region that successfully utilize media to meet their instructional goals. You may also want to share some information about CALL workshops at conferences or neighboring institutions. Again, this

"In a face-to-face setting, the intake interview combines elements of questionnaire-oriented data collection with oral interview methods which provide information participants would not want to put in writing, such as attitudes, values, or perceptions."

may further help to increase faculty awareness about the role of technology in language learning.

5. Are there any media which do not interest you? Why not? These questions invite faculty to identify the media in which they are not interested, for whatever reasons such as unfamiliarity, pedagogical orientation, or simply lack of interest. With few exceptions, faculty will not openly express the latter toward any medium. Therefore, have them name one they feel ambiguous about using compared to others. Some answers may help explain why instructors have become "prescribers" instead of "explorers." For example, they may prefer video, but the course they will be teaching suggests using a CALL program. You may find that this question helps you "validate" previous answers, especially to question four.

6. How can the lab best support you in your efforts to use more multimedia in your teaching? This last question is intended to let faculty know that they will be supported in their quest to incorporate media using text, graphics, video and sound. Emphasize that taking advantage of multimedia capabilities of modern technology lies at the heart of your department's efforts to incorporate technology into the language curriculum, and that any work leading toward the design, development and implementation of multimedia applications will be of merit in the faculty's performance evaluations. Build on any indications you may get as to that professor's interest in developing or incorporating a multimedia application and offer ample praise as that project leads to tangible results. Help faculty develop pride and ownership in the applications they develop in their language sections.

"A structured interview at the beginning of the academic year and scheduled follow-ups will provide valuable information as to faculty preparedness in using technology in foreign/second language teaching."

Summary

Before inviting experts and sending faculty to media workshops in order to narrow the pedagogy-technology gap, it is necessary to determine faculty's projected use of media as well as their attitudes toward and literacy in instructional technologies. A structured interview at the beginning of the academic year and scheduled follow-ups will provide valuable information as to faculty preparedness in using technology in foreign/second language teaching. Not only will it help to identify "explorers," "prescribers" and "withholders" among faculty; it will also serve as a first step—particularly for the last two groups—to look at instructional technology in a different light and perceive it as a beneficial tool for language learning. Bridging the pedagogy-technology gap will also foster the lab director's relationship with faculty and provide an opportunity to pass along information one-on-one. ∎

References   Garrett, Nina (1992). "Faculty Involvement in CALL: Chal-
lenges or Threat?" *IALL Journal*, 25 (1), 7 – 14.
Lyman-Hager, Mary Ann (1992). "Toward a new pedagogy."
IALL Journal, 25 (2), 7 – 13.

*Josef Hellebrandt is an Assistant Professor of Spanish and the
Multimedia Lab Coordinator at Santa Clara University in Santa
Clara, CA.*

FLEAT III at UVIC

August 12-16, 1997
Victoria BC Canada

The third in a series of jointly sponsored conferences and the first to be held in North America. Sponsors: **LLA**, Language Laboratory Association of Japan and **IALL**, the International Association for Learning Laboratories.

August 12 - 16, 1997   Victoria BC Canada

Victoria is Canada's westernmost city, situated on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, in one of Canada's mildest climates. Famous for its gardens, sailing, fishing and close to spectacular National and Provincial parks, Victoria is a year-round destination for international tourists. Plan to arrive in Victoria by air via Vancouver or Seattle, or land there and cruise in by ferry through the islands and sounds. The University of Victoria is renowned for its state-of-the-art CALL Facility and looks forward to hosting this important conference.
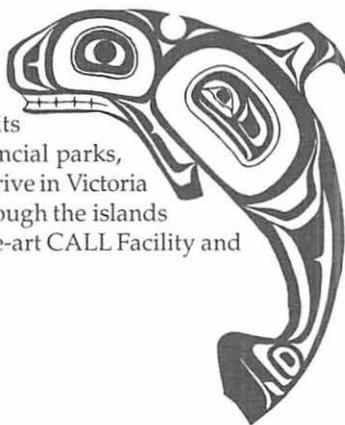
VICTORIA and VANCOUVER ISLAND

❖ The Butchart Gardens
❖ Craigdarroch Castle
❖ Pacific Rim National Park

❖ Whale Watching
❖ Swiftsure Lightship Classic
❖ Museums

"To realize Victoria you must take all that the eye admires in Bournemouth, Torquay, the Isle of Wight, the Happy Valley at Hong Kong, the Doon, Sorrento and Camp's Bay – add reminiscences of the Thousand Islands and arrange the whole around the Bay of Naples with some Himalayas for background."
—— Rudyard Kipling

For more FLEAT III at UVIC information:

E-mail: **FLEATIII@CALL.UVIC.CA**
Phone: **(604) 721-8294**
FAX: **(604) 721-8778**
WWW: **http://ikra.call.uvic.ca/LangCen/**
          FLEAT/fleat1.html

Foreign Language Education And Technology