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Power Point as an innovative tool for teaching and learning in modern classes

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Abstract

Nowadays , PowerPoint is an educational tool for teaching and delivering materials in classes. It was basically developed for presentation and not essentially for teaching and learning in a classroom. Its applications in teaching and learning settings should provide better means of communicating information to the students. Used thoughtfully, PowerPoint can enhance your teaching sessions by providing a roadmap, reinforcing what you say and allowing you to use graphics and other multimedia to clarify understanding and to support different learning styles. In this paper, first we will look at general design principles that apply to any PowerPoint presentation .Then , we will see how teachers can use PowerPoint presentations specifically in their teaching. Finally , the ways that it might be employed within the classroom besides the simply didactic and look at how an educational model might be applied to act as a framework and checklist for design.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, POWERPOINT has become the common presentation and teaching tool in educational and professional settings all over the world .

Although PowerPoint used to be in existence for some years, it has just begun to spread to schools and language classrooms. More and more classrooms and teachers have computers and the equipment to use PowerPoint. Not only are more teachers using these presentations, but more are producing their own. Some are even placing them on websites for others to download. PowerPoint is a useful tool that is now being used in many classrooms.

You may have many years of classroom experience, as a student and a teacher, which guides your teaching. However, you are less likely to have had similarly rich experiences with instructional technologies, as these tools have become available only more recently. Additionally, we are only beginning to understand the capabilities and possibilities that emerging technologies have for teaching and learning.

There are many tutorials, books and other resources for using presentation technologies, like PowerPoint. However, most deal only with the mechanics of creating slides and presentations and the general principles of good design from a graphic design and business perspective. There is very little about effectively teaching with PowerPoint.

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Most people seem to simply convert their lecture notes and transparencies into PowerPoint slides. Though the research indicates that this may be slightly more effective in terms of student achievement, this approach does not exploit the possibilities this technology has for education.

Some example slides can be found in a presentation to support a workshop offered by the Centre for Academic Practice, which can be accessed from the web at:

http://cap.warwick.ac.uk/powerpoint/Teaching_with_Powerpoint_4.ppt

A number of educational models could be applied to the design of a PowerPoint presentation for teaching and its integration into a classroom situation. Applying an explicit model provides a framework on which to base the design and a checklist of issues that the presentation should cover. We use Robert Gagne's *Events of Instruction* here as an example.

1.1 Gagne's Events of Instruction

1. Gaining Attention
2. Informing Learner of the Objective
3. Stimulating Recall of Prior Learning
4. Presenting the Stimulus
5. Providing Learning Guidance
6. Eliciting Performance
7. Providing Feedback
8. Assessing Performance
9. Enhancing Retention and Transfer

1.2 Some good reasons to use PowerPoint

So why should you consider using PowerPoint for your teaching and learning activities? There are many reasons but the key ones include:

- Appropriate use of PowerPoint can enhance the teaching and learning experience for both staff and students
- It provides encouragement and support to staff by facilitating the structuring of a presentation in a professional manner. The templates provided have been designed to default to good presentation criteria such as the number of lines of information per slide and appropriate font sizes and types, etc: using the styles of the default templates can significantly improve the clarity and structuring of a presentation. This helps to avoid the common use of excessive text often found on overhead transparencies.
- By careful mixing of media, a presentation can appeal to a number of different learning styles and be made more stimulating. You are encouraged to incorporate more sophisticated visual and auditory media into presentations although care is required because of the inevitable increase in file sizes and the danger of excessive use. Incorporation can be done, either directly from within the programme or, sometimes more successfully, by appropriate pausing of the PowerPoint presentation and using alternative technology (e.g. tape player or VCR). Note that this does not require switching off either the computer system or the projector system, one of the most common perceptions that restrict use – instead, use the 'B' character toggle switch during a slide presentation to 'blank' the screen temporarily while using other media.
- The electronic file format allows distribution and modification for/by students unable to be present or who have impaired visual or auditory difficulties. PowerPoint comes with a free viewer programme that can be distributed with the files so that the reader is not required to have PowerPoint on their personal system. However, if they do

have it, they are able to perform a greater variety of manipulations on the PowerPoint file provided, such as editing the text, etc before printing it out. Most Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are now capable of including PowerPoint presentations if required.

- Editing of each PowerPoint file is very easy with minimal associated reprinting costs. This ease and potential immediacy of revision facilitates reflection upon, and evolution of, teaching materials by staff whilst minimising the consequences of any revision in terms of either workload or time. This was a major reason for my own extensive switch of teaching materials to PowerPoint, even when the end-product was required to be an overhead projection slide. I also find that I can add a new slide whilst in a lecture if so required: I often use this method to present notices or create a record of the outcome when collecting information from the class so that it can subsequently be made available to the entire class.

- The printing of handouts in a variety of formats is facilitated with a number of embedded options to print either the slides themselves (useful if there are graphics involved) or the text from the slides (outlines). The outlines may be saved as .rtf format and opened for further modification within an appropriate word processor. This allows the easy development of more sophisticated handouts based on the PowerPoint presentation but with extra interactive elements such as readings and questions added where appropriate.

- Extra information can be ‘hidden’ within files for answering predicted questions or for providing feedback to students using the file in a distance-learning context. The use of speakers notes as an automated feedback system was described by Mottley (2003) who also describes other ways to use PowerPoint for development of self-study materials .

- The portability of the files, especially on compact disks (CDs) with their large capacity, allows presentations to be given wherever the technology is available or distributed where appropriate. Presentations can also be set up to run automatically if required e.g. as demonstrations/instructions within a laboratory

There are, of course, several risk factors associated with using the technology that make some reluctant to commit to its use, the main ones being:

- Equipment failure: refusal of any component of the system to work as expected. Bulb failure in the projector is rare but possible. The solution here is to have alternative activities, etc prepared.
- File corruption caused by magnetic or physical damage so that the presentation will not run. Best countered by having alternative media files available. CDs are a fairly robust medium, unaffected by magnetic fields, etc.
- Incompatible media: arriving and finding your files are incompatible with the system available. Best solution is to be aware of the systems you plan to use or carry your own laptop.
- Lack of appropriate training in both the programme and the technology.

There are diverse ways that Power Point can be used in lectures and seminars, including:

- delivering automated instructional protocols in laboratory sessions
- gathering the outcomes of discussions and polls during class activities
- providing tests and options for consideration during class sessions
- question and answer sessions
- interacting with web sites and information
- provision of self-study sessions with feedback after the class activity e.g. Mottley (2003)
- requiring student presentations (group or individual)
- building complex visuals, with or without animation

The most common abuses in PowerPoint use for teaching and learning include:

- Including excessive detail so that students need not be active (or even present if files are made available) during delivery.
- Slides are visually poor and/or boring or even over the top – this is particularly the case when reds and greens dominate
 - Too much text is put on a slide detracting from its legibility.
 - Excessive use of graphics– just because you can!
 - Irritating noises and slide transitions.
 - Inappropriate use of multimedia options.
- Content often unmodified from an earlier non-PowerPoint presentation thus failing to make use of the advantages offered – the 50 slides of text-only presentation is doomed to fail
 - Tendency to go too fast is common simply because of the ease of delivery of the material
 - Not making plans for coping in event of technological failure e.g. backup overheads (expensive) or alternative activities, etc

2 . Conclusion

PowerPoint presentations can be used in many ways in the ESL classroom as well as in other classrooms. Presentations can be used for initial teaching, for practice and drilling, for games, for reviews, and for tests.

2 . 1 Initial Teaching

PowerPoint can be used to teach new ideas and concepts to students. In theory this sounds very good; however, in practice this can be tricky. The teacher must anticipate areas of misunderstanding and difficulty. Once the teacher knows the troubles, which the students will face, he or she can create or adapt a presentation for the students. The presentation must be clear and uncluttered. It should address anticipated areas of student difficulty in an orderly manner. This type of presentation is difficult to prepare, but it can be done. Once an initial teaching presentation is prepared, it can be saved and used again and again, and it can be shared with others.

2 . 2 Practice & Drill

To use PowerPoint presentations for practice and drills it is necessary to have the type of material, which can be repeated many times. A presentation of irregular verbs is one example of something which can be repeated again and again. Other types of material can be repeated on a weekly or biweekly basis. Presentations using the correct preposition, or the correct form of an adjective, or countable and uncountable contrasts could be practiced and reviewed periodically.

Games are a good way to review and practice English. Teachers can use PowerPoint to create their own games to use in the classroom. Once a game has been created, it can be reused by the author or shared with other teachers.

2 . 3 Review

PowerPoint presentations are great for reviewing ideas which have already been taught. After the students have learned and practiced something, it is good to see a presentation. I do not show presentations every day. I like to save them for a special treat sometime during the week. They provide a break in the routine and a way to see material differently. Not only do students find this interesting, but it is also a good way to check and see if they have mastered a concept. When I use a presentation created by another teacher, my students have a chance to see old ideas presented in different ways. PowerPoint presentations are also good ways to review before a test.

2 . 4 Tests

A teacher in our school uses PowerPoint for his tests. He places pictures of items on slides to be shown at preset intervals. (He sets his timer for a reasonable number of seconds for each slide.) The students then write down the

name of each item. It's a great way to test vocabulary. Using the timer feature, a teacher could design a many types of tests or quizzes.

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