Language Blended Learning

Oscar Rubio Vargas
Autonomous University of Baja California
Bachelor's degree in Philosophy in Education in English Teaching by the University of Exeter, Master's in English teaching by the University of Guadalajara, Mexico. Currently working at the Language Faculty of Mexicali, Baja California as a teacher of the Language Teaching program and also gives courses on English, Electronic Interactive Media, Materials Design for Online Education and training workshops for the use of new communication technologies. He has a wide experience in the development, design, implementation and evaluation of technologies and instructional design. He is enrolled in the Ph. D. program in English Language Teaching at the University of Southhampton.
Electronic mail: ozrubio@gmail.com

Summary
The language teacher is the ultimate key to language educational change. Therefore, one element of the successful implementation of language learning through technology is related to teacher readiness. Different degrees of readiness may be due for different reasons, like teacher's lack of confidence using information and communication technologies, or lack of understanding how to use information technologies effectively in language teaching. In addition, the blending of traditional teaching and information technologies in language teaching needs to be more fully understood.

Introduction

A few days ago, I was talking with teacher *Brand* while teacher *Torres,* in the other side of the office, was very busy working editing different video clips that their students from an intermediate level course had recently recorded as part of an English course project. And for what I could observe, both teacher *Torres* and students were having fun doing this project in collaboration. The video clips previously recorded by the students were really entertaining. It

was obvious that a lot of planning and hard work and creativity had been invested creating those video clips.

The objective of the project was to produce a TV news broadcast. Each different video clip contained a different section as seen in a real TV news broadcast. I could see two anchors introducing each section of the news, followed by different reporters commenting and extending the information in that particular section of the news accordingly. And of course, there was the sports section, the weather report, the local and international news update. This project is an example of how technology can be combined in language classroom context.

Producing this type of project implies students getting together to write a script, negotiating information, ideas exchange, and having social interaction communicating with a purpose. During the production of the short video clips you could see students' enthusiasm getting involved in producing a project of this nature. Students were involved in a real world activity. Perhaps they will not be working on a TV news station, but with this project they could experience a real life situation where they had to test their communicative competence. Communicative competence refers to the use of the language following appropriate linguistic and nonlinguistic features in order to communicate a message to other users of the language.

Teacher's readiness

Like teacher *Torres* there are more teachers who are getting hooked up and integrating information and communication technologies into their language learning courses and these are excellent news. Unfortunately, this group of teachers implementing language learning through new technologies is a minority. Research studies on the importance of teachers' use of technology reveal that teacher's attitudes towards new technologies influence the way they

use new teaching approaches. The teacher's perception of technology and his comfort with it will dictate the degree of its integration into the classroom. But, even though, we live in the digital age there is a great number of teachers who remain inexperienced in the use of education technology West (2012). In addition, surveys show those language teachers are not comfortable integrating technology in their lessons due to the lack of hands-on experience on the use of information and communication technologies Lewis (2010).

Teacher's implications

In order to be innovators in education technology, it is necessary that teachers become experienced with internet, blogs, multimedia applications, social network, interactive white boards, and data streaming. Without this type of knowledge and skills, teachers cannot take complete advantage of digital resources. However, it cannot be denied that even for the experienced teacher the implementation of technologies in the classroom can be daunting. These technologies have given place to new ways of communication, text production, collaboration, and social networking Levy (2009).

Collaborative learning

These types of projects, where students collaborate with one another formulating and planning learning, offer an excellent opportunity for language learning. The use of blended learning, a combination of technologies and face to face instruction, or hybrid approaches, report students engagement and effective skills development when compared to just traditional approaches Shama (2010).

Looking for new ways to engage students in language learning process is a key factor to moving forward. The use of this type of technology in the classroom captures the attention

of language learners who are in touch with it daily. Today, many people log on to the Internet, use e-mail, or text friends, share comments, photos, or social experiences through information and communication technologies Carrier (1997).

Technology implementation in the classroom

If the language teacher incorporates technology in the classroom in meaningful ways, he will have much more chances motivating language learners. Technologies like, video, social media, blogs, video games and others should be considered as part of the language course. Students are engaged when using these types of instructional vehicles that can promote an additional language learning experience.

According to Clark and Estes cited by West (2012, p. 107), it requires the use of "authentic educational technology" in order to make a difference in the classroom. Engaging students in this type of interactions might favor language learning. In addition these two authors suggest four important elements needed to complement language blended learning, and those elements are experimentation, innovation, collaboration and learners' engagement.

Dudeney and Hockly's (2007) opinion, is that teachers who have access to these technologies are placed in a position to not only teach language to their students, but also strategies and valuable skills to help learners become skillful in the use of technology. The use of technology should become an integral part of the teaching and learning practice, and should not be undertaken apart from the learning experience. Condie and Livingston (2007) mentioned two radical decision that teacher must make; they have to learn how to use technology and must change the way they teach.

Technology benefits

In the opinion of Dukes (2005), technology offers different opportunities for real interaction between classmates outside the classroom. Students interact with classmates and

technology based projects, such as creating a news report, or creating an electronic book combining multimedia elements. Warschauer and Meei-Ling (2010) agree that technology placed in the hands of learners offer and excellent way to meet and satisfy the needs of those learners. Pemberton and Winter (2011) suggest that learning in collaboration is more effective than learning individually because learners negotiate meaning and new knowledge.

Conclusion

Nicolson, Murphy and Southgate (2011) conclude that the age of technology and teaching has created diversity and an increase of digital knowledge, where the traditional and the digital are becoming more complex demanding that teachers in blending contexts become more resourceful professionals who must acquire the skills needed to meet 21st century challenges. Understanding the impact of blended learning in language teaching is vital for delineating the future direction of language acquisition.

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