Integration of ICT for Effective Learning, Teaching and Assessment

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So-called emerging technologies such as wikis, blogs and e-portfolios are becoming familiar learning and teaching tools. Social networking websites including Facebook, and VLEs such as Second Life are also being explored for their educational potential for language learning. This paper discusses examples of how technologies have been integrated into language courses to achieve desired learning outcomes. It will show how, with holistic assessment approaches, they are used as effective tools to assess the more complex learning outcomes ie development of learning competencies that foster life long, autonomous learning. It also discusses initial explorations of the potential of Second Life for language learning and intercultural competence.

1. Background

Technology is a natural ally for language learning, enabling access to authentic materials, interaction with native speakers, and providing the environment and tools to foster the development of learning competencies. Its use facilitates a holistic approach to learning, teaching and assessment, encompassing experiential learning and connectivism (see www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm), and fosters the development of life long autonomous learning.

To achieve this, technology must be integrated carefully into the curriculum (Hoven, 1999) and link to learning outcomes and learning, teaching and assessment activities. In other words, that consideration be given to pedagogical issues, the best way to resolve them, and only then whether or how technology could play a part. This view is supported by in-house research projects: evaluation of a kanji software package (Corder & Waller, 2005), initial findings from trialling an e-portfolio, findings from two papers in a BA programme, and personal experience as an online student (see http://debbiecor.blogspot .com).

Technology was introduced to the Japanese programme at AUT to foster autonomous learning with the development of a kanji (Japanese characters) software package. Findings showed that students needed scaffolding to use the software effectively, and to identify learning needs. This revealed the importance of teacher/student and student/student dialogue to develop learning strategies, and most significantly, the ability to reflect and self assess, which is linked to deep learning.

An e-portfolio was developed to manage this learning across the Japanese programmes. The findings (Moffat, 2008) show successes but student reluctance to engage. Even students who recognized the benefits only continued because it was assessed. Students are familiar with blogs, wikis, Facebook, and portfolios, but as Jafari (2006) says, portfolios are not 'integrated into their lives' yet. Additionally, the design of the e-portfolio did not allow for student ownership, online social networking or development of online identity, all of which would seem to be necessary for an e-portfolio to be successful.

Most significantly, the learning, teaching and assessment activities, did not provide students with the learning experience on which to reflect.

2. Integrating technology

As Prensky (2001) says 'One of the most interesting challenges and opportunities in teaching Digital Natives is to figure out and invent ways to include reflection and critical thinking in the learning. . . We can and must do more in this area.' It was necessary to integrate technology in such a way that it became invisible or 'normalised', and something that students used naturally (Bax, 2006). The following illustrate 'strategic' integration of technology.

2.1 *Third year Japanese paper*

This paper has six weeks of translation, exposing students to material they could be asked to translate in the workplace. For the assessment, they used to have materials decided by the teacher. These were often badly translated and poorly presented, so students were given the chance to select their own material, but had to justify their choice. They could get help but had to hand in versions of before and after, analyse the difference, and reflect on the experience following trigger questions.

The result was increased engagement, deep learning, and higher achievement. Student reflection included words such as 'style', 'interesting to the reader', 'expressive vocabulary', 'written literally', 'make it flow', 'needed a simile', 'great words that I'd like to remember', 'literal translation' and 'unnatural'. They were analyzing and reflecting beyond expectations, without training. They found it challenging, but enjoyed the freedom of choice: it provided relevance to their language study. By using online dictionaries, search engines and websites, they were using technology naturally and purposefully. To ensure collaborative learning, open wikis will be used in future to record work and reflection.

2.2 *Intercultural Competence Paper*

Language teachers are now expected to integrate intercultural competence into the curriculum. In addition to knowledge, affective, attitudinal and behavioural components involve complex learning outcomes that do not lend themselves to traditional teaching and assessment methods.

We have adapted Sercu's (2004) assessment framework (based on Byram's (1997) savoirs) for our learning outcomes, and added graduate competencies including ICT and collaborative learning. Content input is by experiential learning activities, followed by debriefs, explanation and handouts. Portfolios (see http://inet.dpb.dpu.dk/infodok/sprogforum/Espr18/byram.html) seem to be preferred for developing and assessing intercultural competence, but we are using blogs and wikis within Blackboard until we have access to an e-portfolio that meets the learning, teaching and assessment needs. Learning, teaching and assessment activities include YouTube, the Internet, Powerpoint and DVDs as required.

Blogs are used to ease students into the online environment with informal reflection: self introductions and comments on what they have learnt in the class and what was important for them. Students post a minimum of five blogs and comment in at least one other student's blog each time. The results show good interaction and engagement: after four weeks the blogs recorded 40 to over 80 views, with some postings recording nine comments.

Wikis are used for formal reflection in a 'DIE' (adapted from Cornes, 2004) requiring students to **D**escribe, **I**nterpret and **E**valuate an intercultural incident. They write four DIE entries and have to comment in at least one other student's DIE each time. The criticality required can be challenging but the benefits of collaborative learning are apparent with 80 views in less than a week for the DIEs that are done well. Group work can be problematical, so wikis are used to record meetings and assignment of tasks, group work and individual work. The teachers also have blogs and wikis.

The assessment method is standards based with performance indicators, as the traditional percentage and weightings method is no longer suitable.

Initial evaluation indicates that there is greater student engagement with open blogs and wikis than when they were closed: stronger students model for weaker students, and teacher monitoring ensures scaffolding.

3 Second Life

Some students seem to have limited life experiences on which to reflect. Second Life could provide the real time intercultural interaction needed. It has the appeal of the gaming aspect, and at the same time, students can be observed in their interaction and are kept 'honest' in the interaction. Ideas for interaction with students from a university in Japan are currently being formulated.

4 Conclusion

Initial evaluation of student learning in both papers is promising: the integrated technology is allowing student learning to go beyond the classroom, and enabling teachers to have greater interaction with students and understanding of their needs. Students are taking responsibility for their learning by

interacting and engaging in reflection inside and outside the classroom. This has been achieved by purposeful use of technology to enhance the learning, teaching and assessment activities, which in turn have been made more relevant and authentic.

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