

How to teach English with Technology (Book Review)

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How to teach English with Technology (with CD-Rom)
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Overview

The volume "How to teach English with Technology" is about language and second language teaching using the devices provided by the latest computer and the Internet technology. The authors, Gavin Dudeney and Nicky Hockley, are co-directors of a language consultancy (Barcelona, Spain) specializing in online and distance learning. The book has two main goals: introducing a wide range of teaching possibilities for those teachers who are not fully aware of computer technology and Internet, and providing ideas for classroom activities. The book has 12 chapters plus four appendixes which first describe the theoretical background of each topic, followed by a description of the technical devices, software or hardware, used in the chapter and some suggestions for classroom activities. Each chapter concludes with a summary, and has some follow up activities in the first appendix. The most interesting feature of this book is the possibilities of teachers who work with a variety of types of software or hardware (or even who actually do not approach language teaching with technology) to integrate the contents into their daily teaching plans. Additionally, the book has a CD-Rom which contains practical demonstrations of the contents of each chapter, interviews with practitioner teachers and some related webliography. These interviews reflect the ways, constraints and ideas of novel and experienced teachers when working with technology.

Introduction and justification

Computers and language teaching have walked hand in hand for a long time and contributed as teaching tools in the language and second language classroom. In fact, this is not the first book of its kind. It seems that regularly, as computers evolve, applications to language teaching in form of relevant general volumes are published (Chesters, 1987; Brierley, 1991; Sabourin, 1994; Boswood, 1997; Beatty, 2003; Lee, Jor & Lai, 2005; Szendeffy, 2005; Towndrow, 2007). Besides, among a large number of recent publications, some volumes have addressed specific issues in second language acquisition (Chapelle, 2001), communication (Warschauer & Kern, 2000) or language teaching for the professions (Arnó Macià, Soler Cervera & Rueda Ramos, 2006) to only mention some.

Computers and technology are still a source of fears and insecurity for many teachers everywhere in the world despite the latest advances applicable to language teaching such as specialized websites, blogs, wikis, language teaching methodology, journals, and so. Although many countries have done institutional efforts to modernize their equipment, spent large amounts in technology, proved the positive effects of integrating computers in language learning (Tsou, Wang & Tzeng, 2006) and so, many teachers still miss the appropriate interest, strong will to learn and a challenging attitude towards teaching with computers. Most times the reasons are the lack of time for out-of-school training in combination with the natural difficulty in incorporating new working schemata within their own classrooms. Besides, institutional organizations, district and national educational boards, and even publishers are doing important institutional efforts to strengthen the presence and evolution of distance and online education. As a consequence, computers should no longer be a little more than a way to typewrite (as they are sometimes today), send messages and, when lucky, to browse out for information on the net (Johnson & Eisenberg, 2006). Therefore, one major concern that is commonly shown by both teachers and education boards is how to motivate and instruct teachers to integrate computers and ICT into their classes.

How to teach English with Technology, integrates theory and practice. In this sense, the authors intend to inform as well as propose ways in which to incorporate teaching tips, ideas and classroom plans as well as provide activities for self learning and evaluation. In fact, texts are usually followed by revision and critical thinking questions that try to make the reader process and summarize what has been said in each chapter.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1, *Technology in the classroom*, deal with the importance of including ICT in the language curriculum. According to the authors ICT have intrinsic features that make its use a valuable source of input but, as mentioned above, sometimes teachers may distrust technology or just be reluctant to include computer activities in their classrooms.

Chapter 2, *Word processors in the classroom*, provides unique ideas for those teachers with limited expertise in teaching with technology so they can begin progressively to incorporate computer activities with texts and pictures but, in any case, in a productive and elaborate way.

Chapter 3, *Using websites*, is probably one of the most interesting chapters since the chapter gives information on how to find information for classroom activities, it makes a difference between authentic and teacher created materials, on the features to be evaluated when working with and distinguishing the best didactic websites, it also provides ideas for classroom plans and, very important, tips for disadvantaged or advanced students. The chapter is also attractive because it gives ideas for classes with different proficiency levels.

Chapter 4, *Internet-based project work*, addresses the issue of task based learning and cooperative language learning, two of the most significant issues in the last twenty years in language teaching. The authors propose a scale from the easier projects like information gather to simulations and webquests. Especially significant is the authorst combination of constructivist and behaviourist ideas and function of webquests in language learning (p. 56).

Communication asynchronous and synchronous are especially studied in chapters 5 and 6, *How to use email* and *How to use chat*. These two chapters have attracted a huge number of researchers in the last few years that have been able to see their importance in cross cultural communication and intercultural competence. Thus, the first and foreign language teachers may want to read the chapters with especial attention. These chapters include features such as proposals for keypal projects, or the educational use of chat rooms (either written or oral), chat lessons, and, overall, follow up activities for both types of communication activities.

Chapter 7, *blogs, wikis and podcasts*, deals with social software in which a variety of social actants have the opportunity to include their own contents. Among these, podcasts are significant for the language teachers because teachers find difficult to find resources for pronunciation with a variety of accents and registers to be used in the classes. Wikis and blogs incorporate a wide variety of audiovisual items that are worth incorporating in the foreign language classroom.

Chapter 8, *Online reference tools*, looks at online resources as dictionaries, thesauruses, translators, corpuses and encyclopaedias; Chapter 9, *Technology based courseware*, shows publishers' materials that teachers may want to use along with their textbooks (of which, most times they are official complimentary materials). Chapter 9 also devotes some space to interactive whiteboards that have so successfully incorporated in countries like India or Mexico, and computer assisted language testing software and online resources. This chapter is enhanced by the following, Producing electronic materials, which is a very appealing mini-course in authoring, creating and designing one own's materials with or without authoring tools like *Hot Potatoes*, *Clarity Software*, *Creative Technology* or *Quia*.

The last two chapters are exclusively devoted to the professionals' personal development. Chapter 11, *e-learning: online teaching and training*, deal with the importance of online training and tutorials, discussion lists and online groups. Chapter 12, *Preparing for the future*, may be an interesting additional extra reading. It reviews the current state of the art, and gives advice on how to keep up-to-date in such a changing world and foresees what things like web 2.0, online learning, virtual learning and m-learning may bring. This chapter is very attractive and, even for those already in the field, will certainly offer new discussion and thinking perspectives.

The book also includes a section with activities and a key for those activities just in case this book may be used for teacher training in technology courses. These activities are linked to the webliography and interviews presented in the CD-Rom. The volume also includes a jargon-free glossary with the most common entries found in the book.

Discussion

It is a pity that some teachers in first language or general teaching may be deviated by the title of this book review considering that they may not be interested in language or foreign language teaching, because this book integrates ideas and current technology and web developments that some teachers may neglect or just simple ignore but could be valuable assets in their classes. Dudeney and Hockly's work tends to be informative instead of only supporting the great benefits of including all the elements pointed in the previous section in the language classroom. Of course, they support their use in the classroom but it seems that their goal is more offering a range of possibilities to the teacher rather than directions for the implementation of *Computer Assisted Language Learning* (CALL). In this sense, the real examples provided all through the book, the huge webliography, the snapshots from websites, the demonstrations and teaching tips facilitate its reading and quick integration into most school environments. Besides, readers will feel the potential of the book and self development because they will be able to go from the simpler ideas to "dip into the chapters which seem most relevant to [their] teaching or training situation" (p. 5). In the negative sense, the book could have placed most snapshots on the CD-Rom. Also, some readers may get the feeling that the CD-Rom has been underused since many demonstrations and classroom techniques could have been video recorded like some other books in the "How to..." series have done (Harmer, 2007). One other drawback would be that the book is too descriptive and although the activities lead to personal reflexions, more possibilities for writer-reader debate and some directions to for and against forums would have been desirable for the more experienced readers. A major criticism would be the almost total lack of citations to mega websites that include many of the desirable materials (exercises, journals and more) like onestopenglish.com, Dave's ESL Café or isabelperez.com as well as mentions to journals like TESL EJ, CALL EJ, Language Learning & Technology, Internet ESL journal and many more which are open and free to be accessed by practitioner teachers.

From a content perspective, the book addresses issues that have currently attracted the interest of many teachers in any field and that have proved their value in any classroom like the educational place of webquests (Ikpeze & Boyd, 2007), the traditional use of websites as a source of information and language input (Dalvit, Murray, Mini, Terzoli & Zhao, 2005), the positive attitudes of teachers and students towards the integration of the Internet in language teaching (Yang, 2001), the use of video to provide language input and correct the student's phonological realizations (Hada Ogata, & Yano, 2002), issues in synchronous and asynchronous communication (Ingram, Hathorn & Evans, 2000), attitudes towards computer based oral (Kenyon & Malabonga, 2001) and writing (Sawaki, 2001). assessment, projects in language learning as a teaching approach for classes with different competence level and students with different teaching styles (Hollenbeck & Hollenbeck, 2004).

In general, because it can be assumed that we live with and by technology, it is time to look at ICT as an integral part of education with some limited implications in education. Thus, teachers need to use them as tools in education rather than variables of failure or success in language (or content) teaching (Felix, 2005). Of course, ICT can

definitely complement textbooks, as seen in chapter 9, but it is so much more than supporting stuff (Oakes & Saunders, 2004) and, obviously, a lot less than the teacher who assumes a facilitating role that allows students to achieve new degrees and types of literacy (Molebash & Fisher, 2003).

Overall, both experienced and inexperienced practitioner teachers as well as teacher trainees will definitely learn very much from this book and its friendly reader style. They will certainly find teaching tips and strategies that may enhance and improve their teaching. Again, it can be emphasized that teachers with no experience have nothing to fear, and that the implementation of some strategies included in the book will increase confidence in technology and their esteem as teachers.

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