

watching the game (“How cool!”) and are engaged in a collaborative writing task. What more could you ask for?

Further gaming:

<http://www.freegamesnews.com/en/>

<http://www.gamershood.com/>

<http://kylemawer.wikispaces.com/INDEX>

<http://www.pointandclickgames.com/>

Bio

Kyle Mawer is a DELTA qualified English Language teacher currently working at the British Council Young Learner centre in Barcelona. He's been teaching EFL for 14 years and in recent years has become very interested in using computer games and virtual worlds as an English language learning tool.



IATEFL Pre-Conference Event

Tuesday 31st March
Learning Technologies SIG

Learning through digital games

Introductory presentation on the value and benefits which games can bring to learning.

Includes sessions on CD computer games, online games and games in virtual worlds

Hands-on sessions and discussions on when and how the games used in the PCE can be incorporated into language teaching

PCEs are planned as professional development days and participants will receive a certificate of attendance.

<http://www.iatefl.org/content/conferences/2009/index.php>

Maximizing students' collaboration through computer-based activities

Claudio de Paiva Franco

1. Introduction

The computer has been employed as a teaching tool since the 1960s, but it was only in the 1990s that personal computers emerged as a meaningful tool in the field of language teaching. From that moment on we have come to notice a rapid increase in computer-based tools used in ELT, more recently the ones available on the web such as blogs, podcasts, discussion lists, and online learning communities. Such technological tools seem to empower learners and promote a student-centred approach. Above and beyond, online learning seems to enable learners to develop a sense of fruitful cooperation in a world of stiff competitiveness. This paper also outlines basic beliefs and guiding questions, which may guide teachers when designing online activities or courses centred on collaboration.

2. Collaborative learning: what is it?

Collaborative learning, occasionally referred as cooperative learning, in Larsen-Freeman's words (2000: 164), “essentially involves students learning from each other in groups. But it is not the group configuration that makes cooperative learning distinctive; it is the way that students and teachers work together that is important”. Having this concept in mind, one should establish clear course aims to help learners engage in online collaborative activities. The following goals always contribute to my planning:

1. To provide students with a deeper understanding of the subject they are studying;
2. To allow students to develop greater facility with online research;
3. To create connections that can serve students long after a course ends;
4. To allow students to become critical thinkers.

3. Is it possible to promote collaboration in online courses?

Palloff and Pratt (1999) propose some guiding questions for instructors in order to assist them in the development of a collaborative learning approach in online courses. According to them, collaborative learning must be planned and purposefully facilitated. As collaborative activities should be a distinctive feature while planning the syllabus, I have chosen three question areas from Palloff and Pratt (1999) to help guide teachers at the planning stage:

- What is the content of this course? What aspects of the content lend themselves to collaborative activities?
- Is there an expectation that students will provide feedback to each other on their work? How will this be built into the course?
- How will individual performance be evaluated?

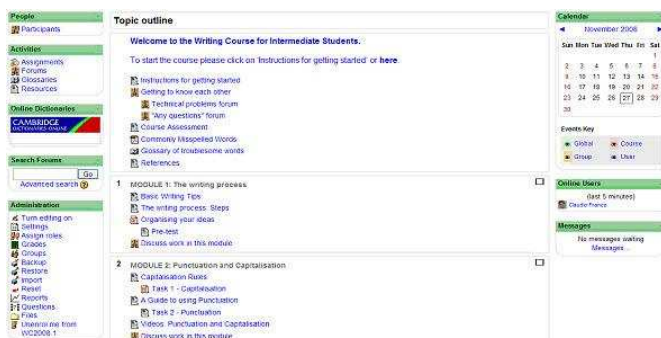


Fig. An online course (Moodle): tutor's view

4. Which techniques may help support online learners?

Palloff and Pratt (2003) present us with effective learner-focused instructional techniques that teachers should take into account in order to support online learners. Their comprehensive taxonomy includes a list of characteristics of online learners and a list of good practice for learner-focused instructional techniques. Techniques are grouped by areas, such as: commitment, collaboration and reflection. Techniques include sound advice for good practice such as: "Keep the technology as simple as possible so that it becomes transparent to the user"; "post clear expectations of time demands for students"; and "have students post their assignments to the course site with the expectation that they will provide critical feedback to one another on their work."

5. Which software may promote collaborative learning?

There is a wide range of software most of which are freeware, open source available on the Internet that may help teachers design interactive educational activities. Now follows five pieces of software to enrich your teaching practice through a collaborative fashion:



Hot Potatoes is an authoring software, enabling teachers to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for the

World Wide Web. It is not freeware, but it is free of charge for those working for publicly-funded non-profit-making educational institutions, who make their pages available on the web.

<http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/hotpot>



ELO (Electronic Learning Organizer) is an authoring system for producing learning activities, with an emphasis on language learning. With ELO you can create different kinds of teaching activities, including reading with a built-in dictionary, open questions and so on.

<http://atlas.ucpel.tcche.br/~elo>



Quia provides educators with the tools to create, customize and share learning activities with students, friends, anyone in the world. It also allows you to copy and modify any of Quia's more than three million activities to suit your own needs.

<http://www.quia.com>



Voki enables users to express themselves on the web in their own voice using a talking character. You can customize your Voki to look like you or take on

the identity of lots of other types of characters. Your Voki can speak with your own voice which is added via microphone, upload, or phone.

<http://www.voki.com>



Voicethread is a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, and videos and allows people to leave comments in 5 ways - using voice (with a microphone or phone), text, audio file, or video (via a webcam).

<http://voicethread.com>

6. Final thoughts

Ray Clifford's quote "technology will not replace teachers ... teachers who use technology will probably replace those who do not" best summarizes this article. In other words if you don't belong to the technological era, don't wait too long to start making the most of it, otherwise you will be perversely led out of the language teaching field.

References

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000) *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. 2nd ed., Oxford University Press.

Palloff, R. & Pratt, K. (1999) *Building learning communities in cyberspace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Palloff, R. & Pratt, K. (2003) *The virtual student: A profile and guide to working with online learners*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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<http://ltsig.org.uk/future-events/03-2009-milan-italy.html>

Computer assisted language testing with multimedia

Dr. V. Anitha Devi

Introduction

This article is based on a chapter from a PhD thesis entitled Computer Assisted Language Teaching and testing with multimedia material – some aspects. The research study consists of a series of experiments conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the MCALT (Multimedia Computer Assisted Language Test) application software in administering tests for assessing aural and oral skills at intermediate level.

Background

The need to develop a new multimedia test arose for a variety of reasons. For example, the procedures for setting up a tape based test were cumbersome. Previously, topics were given out on strips of paper. Manual recording was used, involving rewinding of a tape and recording from a particular point, which may tempt students to tamper with their performance by re-recording the answer and wasting examination time. A lot of manpower was required for conducting the Better Spoken English test in the conventional language laboratory. To remove these difficulties, the Better Spoken English test involving the use of computers was planned and designed.

Through using the MCALT application software, the process of the tape based test conducted in the conventional language laboratory has been modified, benefiting both the examiner and the examinee. The examinee can now concentrate more