

## WAYS TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING BY USING MODERN TECHNOLOGY

**Ionela MANGU<sup>a\*</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> High School "Spiru Haret", Vasile Alecsandri Street, 10, Moinești, Bacău, Romania

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### **Abstract**

*It is well known that today, anyone with an Internet connection has instant access to other languages. That is why teachers should take advantage of using the Internet and other modern technology tools while teaching foreign languages. The use of multimedia helps exposing students to these authentic speech exchanges, increases time on task and the effectiveness of the study time. Incorporating computers and technology into class discussions can make difficult courses much easier for students to grasp. Using technology as both a learning tool and a subject matter discipline provides teachers with a number of new ways to inspire children to learn. The present paper deals with different ways of using education technology to promote enhanced classroom learning, such as: using connected learning, sharing content online, having fun with Twitter, using video chats, creating a class blog, creating interactive maps. We will develop each of these in turn, focusing on advantages and disadvantages.*

**Key words:** computers, foreign languages, learning, interaction, technology

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### **1. Introduction**

It is well known that today, anyone who has access to the Internet has instant access to other languages. That is why teachers should take advantage of using the Internet and other means of modern technology while teaching foreign languages. The use of multimedia helps expose students to these authentic speech exchanges, it increases time of one task and the effectiveness of the study time. Incorporating computers and technology into class discussions can make difficult courses much easier for students to grasp. Through the use of technology as both a learning tool and a subject matter discipline in and of itself, there are a number of new ways in which teachers may inspire kids to learn. With every other technology, including computers, educators have

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\* E-mail address: ionela\_mangu@yahoo.com

recognized its importance and debated on how to apply each nascent commercial technology for educational purposes.

## **2. Ways of using technology in the classroom**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher is a complex personality who has to fulfill many roles in order to develop an efficient process of education. It is true that there is no perfect teacher, as we are human beings and not robots, but nowadays there are many teachers who try to do their best. On the one hand, they inform themselves concerning the topics they have to teach, but on the other hand they study, they attend different courses in order to find out new methods of teaching. They try to find out what new methods of teaching are being developed, but also how to use modern technology during classes. One does not need to be a teenager to use or understand these technologies, or to use them in the classroom, teachers have to adapt to modern times, new science and technology and to make use of them in order to make lessons more and more attractive. All our students use them, but we should make them use modern techniques in a productive and efficient way.

Steinberg (2013) mentions different ways of using education technology to promote enhanced classroom learning, such as: using connected learning, sharing content online, having fun with Twitter, using video chats, creating a class blog, creating interactive maps. We will develop each of these in turn:

**- using Connected Learning** - The concept of "Connected Learning" "is a model of learning that holds out the possibility of re-imagining the experience of education in the Information Age" that draws on "the power of today's technology to fuse young people's interests, friendships and academic achievement." Examples of Connected Learning are when a teacher may ask a student to do a report on their favorite video game, or if a kid who likes to draw on the computer creates the signs and banners for a classroom party. Students and teachers can join e-conferences, finding this way information, changing opinions, interacting with people from different places, with less effort, without having to travel to a distant location in order to attend the conference. This may give the students the chance of connecting to other students around the world, on different topics of study, can ask the others to search for them, to collect data, photos or many sources that will be of utter importance for them.

**- sharing Content Online** - Whether it is posting videos to a private channel for class members and parents to see, using Google Docs to share materials so students can collaborate on a shared project, or posting homework assignments to a class website for everyone to access, using

technology as a tool demands a base level of proficiency from students that they will need to continue to build on. It is known that there is no book that is perfect, that really is appropriate, for this class. There are either books that tend to be too easy or too hard or just not broad enough in scope. We can solve this problem by placing his lecture notes, selections from different textbooks or handouts on the web. Nowadays, students have the class group on Facebook, from where all the members of a class can get information;

- **having Fun with Twitter** - For classes with kids over 13, consider using Twitter to contact well-known personalities or to create hashtags about a relevant classroom topic and see if you can spawn participation from external parties. You may be surprised at just how much support and interest your students can garner from the community at large, or who is happy to hear from them – all of which reveal how the power to make valuable new contacts and influence the world is often waiting just one click away. They can do all these also using Facebook, as every student has a Facebook or a Twitter account and they log in every day. In this way, they do not waste their time, but they do something useful, they learn something;

- **using Video Chats** - Use videoconferencing solutions such as Skype to connect with faraway experts or other classrooms for an online meeting via webcam, letting children share their experiences, make new friends around the world, and engage in distance learning. All provide opportunities to teach your kids basic rules and etiquette for teleconferencing online, such as when and how it's okay to connect, as well as how to act when you're on camera, especially if sessions are being taped or recorded;

- **creating a Class Blog or Wiki** - We all know that our students are interested in computers, and creating their class blog gives them a sense of belonging but also it is a means of letting them prove their creativity and skills. Encourage kids to respond to in-class lessons or current events and topics, and devise a system for posting thoughts, news or impressions of them to a class blog or Wiki. Kids will love improving their creative writing skills and seeing their work appear online, and parents will love being able to feel more connected to the classroom. As the school year progresses, it is often great fun to watch a class' page fill up with posts and discussions, and see kids, parents, and educators engage in more frequent and ongoing dialogue. Here, the teachers can post different types of tests and students can solve them whenever they want or in a time limit, wherever they want, from their mobile phones, their personal computer or the school's computer;

- **creating Interactive Maps** - Whether it's marking locations of family trips, or simply identifying state capitals, consider using an interactive map to which children can pin their

thoughts or exploits. These tools may also offer multimedia elements such as photos, videos and street-level views, so kids can discover fun facts about faraway places or get an up-close look at distant locales discussed during geography lessons.

- **project-based learning**, designed around real world contexts. It involves students collaborating and discussing ideas, possible solutions to different problems. This way students receive the theme, the teacher guides them if necessary, but the students search for information for their project, they divide work, each member of the group has a specific task. Modern techniques are meant to facilitate their work, to make them collect data quickly, and the information to come from various sources, having thus the possibility to choose the best options. The project can also be presented to the teachers or to the other classmates by means of modern technology, making use of an OHP, laptop, the internet etc.

- **digital games**. Digital games encompass much more than your computer's Solitaire, Zuma or Doom. Over the last decade, the genre of digital games has exploded to include numerous platforms and designs. Digital games, whether computer-, game console-, or handheld-based, are characterized by rules, goals and objectives, outcomes and feedback, conflict/competition/challenge/opposition, interaction etc. But they should know from the very beginning that they do not play games just for fun, but also for educational, instructive and constructive purposes. They should know they have an instructional goal, the time and the rules of the games should be clearly explained to the pupils.

### **3. Advantages and disadvantages of using modern technology**

There are a lot of advantages of using modern technology in classroom, such as increasing time on task, on line videos can also be used to reinforce in-class teaching activities, technology provides context (technology can help imitate and create the associations, the social settings, the events, the sounds, the sights, etc.) Through video we see things in context; through audio we make associations from the sounds we hear; through online social programs we exchange real information with real people who understand what we communicate), contextualized learning environment (the multimedia combines audio, video, pictures, and text in new ways that help to create a unique rich learning environment; this type of context allows students to make new combinations for enhanced learning), technology frees us from the limitations of a course book (as teachers we are always supplementing our lessons with our own materials). Technology provides ways to increase the foreign language input that learners are exposed to and enhances

the process of how input is converted into intake, as Pegulescu said (2012). It also improves the students' motivation and it supports self-directed learning. It supports home-schooling, experiential education, open schooling and life-long learning. In self-directed learning (SDL), the individual takes the initiative and the responsibility for what occurs. Individuals select, manage, and assess their own learning activities, which can be pursued at any time, in any place, through any means, at any age. In schools, teachers can work toward SDL a stage at a time.

Using modern technology during classes definitely helps communicative teaching, which is one of the most efficient approaches as it considers the learners the main actors in the process of education, stressing the importance of communication. Communication is the process by which we assign and convey meaning in our attempt to create shared understanding. It allows us to share information and feelings through a system of signs and symbols, idea enhanced by modern technologies. Communicative teaching is based on the communicative principle which starts from the idea that language is a means of communication, so language classes should be active and students should be encouraged to work and use the language during the entire lesson. Thus using computers, the internet, DVDs, videos, sites, blogs and all the other elements of modern technology stirs the students' interest and makes them communicate, interact with the teacher and also with the other students. Teaching foreign languages requires the use of authentic texts and tasks into the learning context and seeks to adapt language to the students' interests and using the modern technology items mentioned previously, teachers can do all of these. The teacher's role is very important because he/ she should have in mind the students' needs and abilities, the activities he wants to design, the resources, the class organization etc. in order to give the students opportunities to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.

It is well known that verbal, nonverbal or paraverbal communication are essential in our lives. Nonverbal communication plays an important role for us, as we perform gestures when we communicate. Through gestures, movements, mimics, posture individuals express and communicate lots of things. Roventă – Frumușani (1999, p. 181) affirms that gestures explain, concentrate and comment upon interpersonal communication. Some say that modern technology hinder nonverbal and paraverbal communication. It is true that gestures are as eloquent as sentences or as speech acts, and that the errors related to gestures have serious interpersonal consequences like the linguistic errors, because gestuality shapes the individual's identity, either facilitating(improving) communication or destroying it, but still we consider that modern technology facilitates communication as it brings images, videos, sounds (of different nature), pictures, even when chatting students can make use of the so-called emoticons. When teaching

foreign languages, it is essential to expose them to different accents, different pronunciations, different types of listening texts. One idea for making use of technologies during listening classes would be to write an appropriate text (or use something from the textbook) and read it onto tape. They could copy the recording three times so they do not need to rewind. The text should not simply be read three times, because students want to hear exact repetition of the pronunciation, intonation, and pace, not just the words. Teachers can also play a video clip with the sound off and ask students to make predictions about the dialogue which is taking place. Then play it again with sound and discuss why they were right or wrong in their predictions. They can also play the sound without the video first, and show the video after students have guessed what is going on. Pegulescu (2012, p. 91) stresses the idea that “The Common European Framework of Languages lays stress on the importance of authentic listening materials which contain interesting topics related to the students` everyday life. There are listening activities such as: Listening for gist, Listening for detailed understanding, Listening for specific information.” Students` understanding of audio materials should go beyond being able to choose items of factual information: they should be able to distinguish between main idea and hidden points, the main idea of an audio text and specific detail; they are required to deduce meaning and lexical reference and to discriminate between true or false ideas related to the audio material.

Nevertheless, we should pay attention to our students` needs, the aim and objectives of the activities and how we use the modern technology as Jonassen et al. (2008) argue that unfortunately, educators have almost always tried to use technologies to teach students in the same ways that teachers had always taught. Information has been recorded in the technology (e.g., the content presented by films and television programs), and the technology presented that information to the students. The students` role was to learn the information presented by the technology, just as they have learned information presented by the teacher. The role of technology has been to deliver lessons to students, just as trucks deliver groceries to supermarkets. But what are the students producing? Too often, they are using the technology to reproduce what the teacher or textbook has already told them or to copy from the Internet. Others say that having computers in the classroom can distract students from the class itself. The mentioned authors add that their conception of educational computing and technology use, further described, does not conceive of technologies as teachers or repositories of information. Rather, we believe that, in order to learn, students should teach the computer or use the technology to represent what they know rather than memorizing what teachers and textbooks tell them. Technologies provide rich and flexible media for representing what students know and what they are learning. A great deal of research on computers and other technologies has shown that they

are no more effective at teaching students than teachers, but if we begin to think about technologies as learning tools that students learn with, not from, then the nature of student learning will change.

Some say that the issue of using technology in teaching raises the following question: can computers replace teachers? Well, I strongly believe that this cannot be possible, as teachers are not only sources of information, but they also mould student's behavior, personality and character and they have an overwhelming influence upon them. It is true that some people consider that being a teacher is simple, as the teacher only transmits some pieces of information to some children and that is all, but this profession involves many aspects such as improving students' general knowledge and achievements. Teachers should do their best to rise students' interest in the school subject and in the educational system, which is not an easy task, especially nowadays when students have many alternatives to school and it is very difficult for teachers to make them stay in school. As Pegulescu mentions (2012, p. 44) *the International Society for Technology Education* has re-released its Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. These standards include 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such "as finding and managing resources, publishing on the web, and connecting with colleagues, students, parents, and local and global communities". Teachers must be proficient in these skills in order to develop good practices in their students and to help students include these skills during the learning process. These activities will give you a chance to actively participate in using some of the web-based tools that are commonly used in classrooms and to discuss authentic ideas for using these tools.

## **Conclusion**

Even though, nowadays, the students' interest for school tends to be lower and lower, we believe that only with the help of a proper communication between students, teachers, parents and authorities can our students rediscover educational values and the desire to be active learners at school. In conclusion, a traditional class contains limitations and challenges that affect language learning. The time a teacher spends with each student is limited. L2 teachers are not native teachers; therefore, it is difficult to expose students in a classroom to authentic language, especially oral language. Another problem would be that language learning often focuses on isolated parts that become detached from real speech. The use of technology provides students with more time on task and a way to minimize these class limitations. Educational institutions should not be reluctant to embrace these technologies because, as shown above, there are

definitely more advantages than disadvantages of using them. Nevertheless, we should integrate computer interaction with traditional classroom activities.

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