

THE COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE WITH TABLETS: MOVING FORWARD IN A LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Résumé

The main objectives are to see how the use of tablets can effectively improve the learning environment and enrich the educational experience for both students and teachers while ensuring the development and implementation of innovative teaching practices and professional learning activities in a language course.

Mots-clés

Tablets, language courses, mobil-learning, pedagogy, technology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Without the resources of a language lab, teachers and students do not have the tools necessary to accomplish goals or excel to the best of their ability when it comes to learning or teaching a language. How are teachers able to monitor a student's language progression in a classroom of 24 students without the proper tools available? When a classroom with this many students, who learn at varying rates and with different styles, come together to learn a language, how can one teacher feel confident and ensure that they are truly doing their job. Having tablets available as a tool to help facilitate the application of appropriate pedagogical strategies means that language teachers can achieve their objectives efficiently and in turn, help students to learn more effectively and autonomously. Coming into an era where pedagogy and technology work hand in hand, it was only a matter of time before tablets would replace language labs. It is in fact, what educators now call, a mobile language lab. The possibilities at the fingertips of both the teacher and student are endless. Being able to easily access the numerous education applications available allows the teacher to monitor each student individually and recognize what that student needs in order to excel.

Clarife, the language centre at the Université Catholique de Lille in France, uses tablets for educational purposes in order to implement innovative pedagogical strategies in the foreign language classroom. As a community, they aim to move forward and develop pedagogical strategies that can further education for both students and teachers, which focuses on interactive collaboration, engaging and motivating activities that meet diverse learning needs, as well as targeting the main objectives for the class through the use of tablets. The applications used will focus on the four essential competency skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) when learning a language.

II. CSCL AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Since the birth of the Internet, the world around us is being incessantly transformed. Not only the way we currently communicate with other people, but also how we learn and teach. Given that a learner's first aim when studying foreign languages is generally to be able to communicate with native speakers, and is currently achieved by way of telephones and tablets, teachers should adapt their courses to reach this goal. Through the implementation of meaningful tasks in which students have to work together to accomplish different projects or digital tasks, each learner has the possibility to negotiate toward a shared creation in class or in an online classroom.

Through technology, CSCL (Computer Supported Collaborative Learning) has developed, as Koschmann says [2002:12]: "It is a field of study centrally concerned with meaning and knowledge building practices in the context of joint activity, and the ways in which these practices are mediated through designed artifacts." Teachers should have in mind that learning together is more than just carrying out a task, learning is a social activity and teachers should not forget the social aspect of learning in teams, according to constructivist principles. [Ellis, Greaney & MacDonald, 2006]. Thus, the main aim when a teacher decides to use the Internet and digital tasks, is for learners to enhance communicative competences in the target language by doing real communicative activities through mobile artefacts, also currently referred to as mobile learning. This kind of learning is based on the idea that students are going to learn the use of collaborative techniques with other students, the implementation of tablets and the use of pedagogical applications, not to mention, relying on their teacher's helpful knowledge. The role of tablets is most valuable with this kind of learning style, especially since it offers media that can support interaction among students and provide technology resources to promote social acts that lead to better learning through interaction and collaborative work within a training process. Moreover, according to Dudeney and Hockly [2007], using focus on tasks in addition to m-learning as methodology for the implementation of collaborative projects based on the Internet provides a structured way for the teacher to gradually integrate the Internet, web 2.0, ipads and telephones in the language classroom as a tool with which students can learn better. The Internet provides multiple resources where learners can

look up almost anything, and can search for information that also facilitates students' access to authentic multimedia and interactive learning environments. It also provides students with the possibility to publish their work and extend the learning process beyond the face-to-face process.

It is important for us to remember that, despite all the technology we have today within our grasp, the purpose of learning is not solely to perform a task: it is a social activity which should not forsake learning in collaborative groups, according to constructivist principles [Ellis, Greaney & MacDonald, 2006]. Tasks are thus designed to be student-centred, to encourage learners to take an active role, collaborating and negotiating in groups [Hauck & Hampel, 2005].

As teachers make it easier for students to be in authentic learning environments, it is also important to foster social interaction and collaborative work inside a sociocultural context. So, if our aim is to help and guide learners to use language in real-world situations, then it seems accurate to implement online activities as they can be found in the real world. This has just been said, according to Vadillo and Klinger [2004], and now more than ever we noted that applies even better if we add the use of tablets and activities that motivate students to learn, albeit, in ways they never thought.

Thus, the CSCL is a field of study that is based on the idea that the learning process is constructed as a joint activity, and this knowledge is made mediated by different devices, such as computers at first, and mobile devices (phones, tablets) with increasing frequency today. The relationship between CSCL and mobile learning is both obvious and clear, and although CALL and what is also known as MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) have the same objective, given that they support the process of learning a language through different devices, first the computer and now mobile phones or tablets, there are some differences that should be noted. Since our most important responsibility as teachers is to be able to focus the course for interactive collaboration and using activities that motivate and engage students in their own learning, we should recognize what their needs are so we can decide what we want to learn through the use of tablets/smartphones.

For years Chinnery [2006] stated that there could be two different types of learning through mobile devices, one face-to-face and the other from a distance. What the author was trying to explain is that there are educational applications that the student, or even the teacher can delimit during the learning process through the sequencing of activities that the student carries out after school hours.

There is still no complete agreement on the definition of mobile learning, since it is a field that changes very fast and also because the mobile word is ambiguous, since it may refer to the fact that it encourages student to learn while it is moving (on public transport, at home or school, etc.) or based on technology [Traxler, 2009, en

Kukulska-Humes, 2009]. The prevailing idea is that it is a type of learning that takes place with any device that is small, autonomous, and can be taken along at any time [Trifanova, 2004; Kukulska & Shield, 2008]. According to Geddes [Kukulska-Hulme & Shield 2008: 271], mobile learning is identified with the idea that we have a mobile device "anywhere, anytime."

There are multiple advantages to using tablets or phones in the classroom instead of computers. Some authors have found it easier and more intuitive to use tablet computers themselves, because of keyboards and mice. Computer applications are usually a more complex installation and need some requirements (such as maintenance) that are not only more expensive but also take longer. Among other things, some authors like Chen, Lambert & Luidry [2010] found positive relationships between the level of student engagement and educational technology, especially in order to promote and facilitate collaborative learning interaction among students. The scholars mention the following: [Peters, 2007 and Brazuelo & Gallego Gil, 2011]

- Promotes active learning and personalization of learning (process-centered learning) and at the same time, enhances a more meaningful and motivating learning process.
- Connectivity at any time and place helps to have more social interaction between students and teachers. Through this connectivity it encourages participation and collaborative learning.
- Greater access to information effectively by both the student and the teacher.
- probably most important is that its portability, you can wear it all the time without being disturbed and students always have their study materials in their possession. [Miangah & Nezarat, 2012].

III. CASE STUDY: THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

III.1 Case study #1: Storyboarding: a focus on writing, speaking and listening

In this case study, the student's objective was to create a storyboard in which they will use their own ideas based on a theme given by the teacher. As a collaborative group, the students worked together to build a storyline which incorporated Freytag's pyramid, also known as a narrative structure [Freytag 1863]. Freytag's pyramid consists of how a story progresses from the beginning to the end with a climactic moment in the middle. The two main applications that were used when creating these storyboards were ComicBook! by 3D TOPO Inc. and iMovie by Apple.

The first thing the students had to do was write a story which had a setting, characters, a climactic moment and a moral issue. Being able to use the tablets to show their story, allowed for the writer to show the reader two visions of how their story took place, both visually and auditory. Once their stories were written, the students used the

tablets and took pictures using ComicBook!. ComicBook! is an application where you take pictures that look drawn. The collection of comic-like pictures helped the students visually see their story from beginning to end.

Once they were finished with their photos, they then used iMovie and pieced their stories together to play out like an actual movie. The features in iMovie gave them the ability to extend time on a certain picture, change the frame if needed and also to add a recording. The recording that the students used was of them reading out the original story that they had first written.

Conclusion: A case study like this seeks to engage student activity along with progressing their language skills in any level class and in any subject. As a language teacher, bringing to light these competences and why they are effective is substantial when motivating students to learn and become active in their education.

Writing: Having students write stories allow for them to organize their thoughts and to communicate in a variety of ways. They would be able to understand grammar and punctuation rules, as well as, sentence syntax and vocabulary.

Speaking: The students focused on pronunciation, intonation, word stress and fluency. To be able to speak clear and announce was one of the main goals for the students. Having them record themselves really helped the students recognize what they need to do to improve their speaking skills.

Listening: Having them constantly listen to their recordings and how they spoke allowed them to concentrate and narrow in on the key points needed, such as mood, feeling or specific information that they really needed to make their story whole.

III.2 Case study #2: Artistic poetry: a focus on writing and reading

This case study will show how art is incorporated in a class lesson, specifically in poetry. In groups of two to three, students worked together to create poems which were based off of images chosen by another group in the class. The applications used in this lesson were Pages by Apple and Safari, which is an internet browser, also by Apple. They also used the Airdrop function to send images and poetry to each other from one tablet to another.

Before the beginning of the lesson, the students already had a clear idea of the different structures of poetry given to them by the teacher in a previous lesson. This helped them to chose a 'voice' and a form for their poem. The first thing the students did was use Safari to search for an image. Once they finished, they sent that image using Pages to another group, using Airdrop. Pages is a word processor on IOS that allows you to create documents easily and creatively and works hand-in-hand with Airdrop. Airdrop is a bluetooth function, also on IOS, that allows you to send things to other tablets. With that chosen image, the students used what emotions they felt while looking at it and wrote poetry about it, while sticking to the structure they previously agreed on.

While writing their poems, they continued to use Pages so that they were able to send both their photo and poem to the teacher and to each other, via Airdrop. One of the criteria of assessments in this class is peer review, so being able to use Pages and Airdrop as a fast way of delivery, really helped the students evaluate each others poems.

Conclusion: Having students exposed to art is ideal when learning because it allows them to see the many different aspects in the world and allows them to be open-minded about certain situations [LeNoir 2002]. The use of art in the classroom can be used at all levels and in all subjects as long as the teacher guides the students in whatever activity the teacher chooses. In this specific activity, the students were able to focus on their writing and reading skills.

Writing: The students were given a choice of what kind of structure and form they wanted to write their poems about. Giving them that freedom, opened up their minds to the endless ideas that came to them when they first looked at their image. Based on what structure they chose for their poems, the teacher evaluated voice, descriptive image, form and word development.

Reading: Through peer review, students had the opportunity to evaluate each other's poems. In this particular competence, students had to really assess their peers poems by interpreting what meaning they believed to be true in what they read and from what they saw.

IV. CONCLUSION

There are multiple advantages to using tablets in the classroom over laptops or workstations. Applications designed for touchscreen interfaces have been found to be simpler and more intuitive than those requiring keyboard and mouse for input. Computer applications tend to have more complex installation and setup requirements, not to mention the additional maintenance required to keep the desktop system running smoothly and securely in general. Finally, tablets are often cheaper and more power-friendly than their larger counterparts. Moreover, Chen, Lambert and Luidry [2010] have found positive correlations between the use of educational technology and student engagement, notably to promote an active and collaborative learning and student-faculty interaction.

Previous research has shown that tablets in the classroom can benefit students and further their ability to acquire more knowledge than in a traditional classroom. The idea of having tablets in the classroom essentially means that the teacher is providing a language lab at the students disposal. Since teachers have such a small amount of face to face time with the students, usually about 15 to 24 hours a semester, it is important that the teacher utilize as much of the time they have available as possible. Tablets can shorten the feedback loop between the student and teacher by allowing the teacher to observe student progress in real-time. Tablets are capable of generating

exercises for students on demand allowing students to work at their own pace. Auto-grading with teacher oversight also provides students with instant feedback while allowing the teacher to observe the students strengths and weaknesses in the classroom. Having tablets available will provide the students and the teacher the tools through the use of technology that is already driving education into the future.

Technology, with the use of Internet and iPads/tablets, gives teachers and students new opportunities for authentic tasks, activities and materials. Ipads will offer excellent opportunities for collaboration and communication between learners in and outside the classroom. As technology is becoming increasingly mobile, it provides us with new ways to practice and acquire main language skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading.)

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