TEACHING AND LEARNING ESP BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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Developments in technology, increases in demand and research into learning are all changing the face of how, where and when people learn. Two factors coalesce – the understanding that learning is exploring and the ability of technology to provide wide spaces for exploration. In these two senses the use of technology complements and extends the learner-centered methodology that predominates in ESP teaching. The main advantage if that learners can access the source material in their own time, work through the material at their own pace, choosing topics and subject areas to match their own interests and do all this without necessarily having to interact with a teacher.

Sophisticated technology has become so pervasive and intertwined with so many aspects of our private and professional lives that we seldom even notice it. The list of technological innovations we have accepted into our daily lives goes on and on. But technology seldom plays the same natural role in classrooms that it does in other areas of our daily lives. There is a tremendous need for practical, understandable information about integrating technology in classroom instruction.

It is helpful to propose a simple structure learners can use to organize and carefully examine a large amount of information. Such organizational structure can be called the **ACTIVE** learning environment. The word **ACTIVE** is an acronym for the characteristics of technology-facilitated learning, environments that are most beneficial to students. The classroom tasks should be:

Active – tasks require cognitive behaviors that emphasize the transformation of information into personal knowledge.

Cooperative – tasks require meaningful interaction among students.

Theme-based – tasks are flexible and multidisciplinary based on an organizing theme.

Integrated – tasks emphasize content area knowledge and use technology tools to encourage learning this content in ways that are meaningful.

Versatile – tasks make efficient use of technology skills and develop those that can be applied repeatedly.

Evaluative – tasks allow the assessment of the student's ability to use the knowledge and skills we want them to learn.

The dangers in committing to a convenient organizational structure or to a single model of instruction must be recognized. Effective educational practice is much too complicated to be characterized by any recipe and the types of learning students must accomplish cannot be addressed in any one way. But we should increase the probability that certain productive classroom practices and beyond involving technology be employed. Students should experience ACTIVE learning environments more frequently.

ESP teaching can be very different to EFL teaching and that there is a distinguishable ESP methodology. This arises mainly from two factors associated with the learners:
- the specialist knowledge that they bring – both conscious and latent;
- the cognitive and learning processes that they bring with them from their experience of learning and working within their specialist field.

One of the major corollaries of these two factors concerns the kind of activities through which learning takes place:
- in addition to language-learning activities, the ESP classroom uses tasks and activities that reflect the learners' specialist world (Dudley-Evans, St. John, 1998).

The classroom is only one place in which learning takes place. There are more autonomous ways of learning.

Essentially there are five modes that are being used in language learning and, to some extent, in ESP teaching. They are the use of video discs, the use of CD-Rom, the use of the Internet, the use of e-mail and the use of the computer for either CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) work or Data Driven Learning based on corpora held on the computer.

Because information in the form of sound, high-quality pictures, or video requires large amounts of storage space, multimedia and hypermedia often make use of the large storage capacity of videodiscs or CD-ROMs.

Video discs and CD-Roms can be used:
1. to support a course, e.g., revising basic skills or language;
2. to enhance a course by providing extra topics for the course;
3. as free-standing material. The CD-Rom or video disk presents a self-contained unit or set of units, and no other material is provided;
4. to provide data which can be exploited for language purposes;
5. to provide authentic material originally designed for a purpose other than learning language.

Although research provides some evidence that learning from multimedia is slightly more productive than learning from traditional materials, more impressive claims that multimedia and hypermedia may herald the restructuring of traditional education and result in experiences of greater personal relevance are still largely without strong empirical support.

Intuitively, however, they offer several advantages. Multiple presentation formats allow students more diverse experiences. Some ideas may be easier to understand when portrayed in a realistic video, when heard or when carefully outlined in text. Multimedia also allows experiences that are more like the rich and motivating contexts found outside the classroom. To the extent that students have some flexibility in controlling what they encounter or the form in which information is presented, students may also be able to adapt learning experiences to their individual needs.

Concerns about multimedia and hypermedia do exist. Critics often lament the lack of imagination in many commercial products and observe that many products do not really offer alternatives to existing traditional instructional materials. Finally,

students may not have the academic skills necessary to be responsible for their own learning.

The Internet provides the opportunity for courses to be used by all learners with access to the Internet. This means that a language school or a language centre can place an ESP course on the Internet, and that course may then be used by any student. The general format for such courses is that learners follow them on their own, in their own time. Nesi (1996) argues, however, that such courses can also be used with whole groups, with or without a tutor, and for pair/group or whole class work. Nesi suggests that where the course involves an aspect of communication, the presence of a tutor acting in a "moderator" role can be very helpful.

The Internet can also be used as a tremendous source of material for ESP classes, generally where students are involved in project work or case studies.

To get students to use the Internet productively, teachers are going to have to play an active role. They might require that students "study" specific Web resources or they might require students to use the Web to gather resources to generate a product (for example, a paper on specific topic). These approaches may provide an **incremental advantage** over existing practices in that students have access to many more resources and can access these resources more efficiently than is presently the case, but they do not offer a **transformational advantage** (Grabe, Grabe 1998). Student experiences would still emphasize similar classroom activities and the same cognitive skills, even without the Internet. The transformational advantage of Internet activities would be realized if students were engaged in different learning activities emphasizing new areas, such as information literacy, or in finding ways to effectively target skills that have always been valued, but that are difficult to develop in some content areas, such as critical thinking and problem solving.

Here is somewhat different way to think about how you might want to use Internet resources. Consider how Internet access might contribute to an ACTIVE learning environment. The Internet can provide factual answers to simple objective questions, but it can also provide information that students can use in trying to resolve complex problems and questions with no definitive answers. Using Internet resources in the investigation of complex problems is a good way to integrate the use of technology into nearly any content area and a way to take on challenges that students can attack collaboratively. Giving students the opportunities to use knowledge and skills in ways that are authentic to the discipline provide valuable opportunities for assessment.

Perhaps of most interest to ESP practitioners are interactive courses with tutor presence and peer interaction. The patterns of interaction possible are:
- participant to text;
- one-to-one participant-to-participant or participant-to-tutor;
- peer-to-peer in pairs or groups;
- whole group;
- whole group plus tutor.

Probably the most common format for interpersonal telecommunication is electronic mail or e-mail. Communicating through e-mail provides the opportunity for many kinds of activities and projects. Harris (1995) suggests that tutors should

understand the properties of different kinds of projects – Harris calls them "activity structures" – and then apply these structures to the content actually being studied. Harris contends this approach makes it more likely that classroom content will be emphasized. The following activity structures can be identified:

Interpersonal Exchanges. "Talk" among individuals, between an individual and a group, among groups.

Key pals: unstructured exchange among individuals or groups; e.g., exchanges to develop cultural awareness or language skills.

Global classrooms: study a common topic and exchange accounts of what has been learned.

Electronic appearances: e-mail or chat interaction with a guest, perhaps after some preparation.

Electronic mentoring: ongoing interaction between expert and student on a specific topic.

Impersonations: participants interact "in character".

Information Collections. Working together to collect and compile information provided by participants.

Information exchanges: accumulation of information on some theme.

Electronic publishing: publication of document based on submission by group members.

Pooled data analysis: data collected from multiple sites are combined for analysis.

Problem-Solving Projects. Focus of interaction involves solving problems.

Information searches: solve a problem based on clues and reference sources.

Electronic process writing: post written works for critiques before revision.

Parallel problem-solving: groups at different sites solve the same problem and then exchange and discuss methods and conclusions.

Sequential creations: work on sequential components of an expressive piece.

Social action projects: groups take responsibility for solving an authentic problem and share reports of activities and consequences.

CALL materials have all the advantages of self-access materials; learners can work on their own and can carry out tasks without support or feedback from the teacher. Materials for CALL are generally produced using authoring packages which enable the teacher to introduce exercises into an existing exercise framework and use the same exercise types.

The establishment of a number of computer-based corpora of texts provides an extremely useful resource for ESP researchers, teachers and ESP learners (Biber 1994, Johns 1991, Scott and Johns 1993). For researchers and teachers there is the opportunity to look in detail at lexical features; one example is to investigate the frequency of lexis in a text or a corpus, and, to determine which are technical terms, semi-technical lexical items and general vocabulary items.

For ESP teaching the corpora provide a resource for students wanting to check whether they have used the correct collocation in their writing, a question that frequently occurs when feedback is given on writing.

The question is whether the time needed for such activities is fully justified by the end-results. An activity that can take up to 30 minutes to present various collocations deductively could be replaced by a short 5-minute presentation by the teacher. With learners who are curious about language and enjoy working with computer programs the extra time spent using data-driven learning techniques is justified. For learners who are less curious about language and computers the benefits are considerably fewer. In this context we can say about *technophiles* and *technophobes*; clearly technophiles will generally gain a lot from data-driven learning programs while technophobes may not.

The five described modes have undoubtedly widened choice in ESP teaching, and provided the means whereby learners can do more on their own and can control their own learning; but these activities generally supplement the regular ESP class and the role of the teacher. They do not normally replace the class and the need for the teacher. The use of the devices is most successful where it is integrated with the classroom courses, and the learning activities are consistent in methodology with those of the classroom courses.

In considering which approach to take, it is most important to remember that there is no best way; all techniques and methods are a response to a particular situation. One of the skills ESP teachers need is the ability to assess a situation from a variety of viewpoints and then to select and adapt their methodology to match the learners' needs. *Flexibility and willingness* to take risks are the name of the game.

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