

New Technology in the English Classroom

English language teaching has gone through a radical shift of emphasis in the last twenty years, beginning with the communicative revolution in the mid-1970-s. Just some years ago the traditional classroom was a place where the teacher, unaided, imparted and shared his/her unique knowledge with learners. As the world has become more complex, the sources of knowledge more diverse, no one trainer can possibly be the fount of all wisdom. Today's sophisticated trainees expect teaching media to bring more dynamic and authentic models of language, communication and content in to the classroom. The ELT world gives us access to a wide range of video and audio material, and increasingly multimedia.

These materials are the software or courseware of training; and equipment is the hardware. To be useable the hardware needs to satisfy certain criteria:

- reliability - it must work first time every time
- ease of use - it must be useable by trainer and trainee without specialist instruction
- accessibility - it must be easy to get to
- utility - it must provide a useful adjunct to the traditional teacher and learner activities.

The reasons why audio is the most common device in the classroom are: it satisfies all the above criteria more completely than other equipment; it is comparatively cheap to buy and maintain; it offers more English training materials.

Video is catching up on audio in popularity because of the greater impact achieved by combining sound and picture in the learning experience. While video is certainly a very attractive medium for showing longer stretches, there are still issues of ease of use when searching for and replaying short extracts. In addition, published ELT video materials, because of their high production costs and relatively low sales, are still expensive in comparison with cassettes.

The latest addition to the repertoire of equipment is the personal computer (PC). The computer, more than any other device, has revolutionized the way work is done. The computer is also beginning to make its mark in the classroom. The impressive power of the computer, its storage capacity and its tireless repetition of tasks makes it an ideal workhorse. Yet the current crop of machines are bedeviled by problems of complexity and reliability. This will undoubtedly change and we can expect the multimedia experience, harnessing together text, sound and video together on one machine, to become a very attractive teaching and learning tool.

Multimedia really is nothing new but its current reincarnation or development means that it can fill a place and fulfil a role that we would never have imagined a few years ago. It complements and enhances the "learner-centred" methodology that has become so fashionable - and rightly so.