

SHAPING THE NEW TREND OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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Abstract

This paper focuses on shaping of the new trend of digital media in English teaching and finding the best ways how to take advantages from the technologies in pedagogical framework. The new trend of digital media technologies including social networks (e.g. Second Life, Facebook, Twitter) offer opportunities for teachers to challenge previous centralized models of learning by connecting, sharing and discussing ideas with their students outside of the class room and at great distance from each other. New digital media have become an important part in the life of our young generation. It is a natural for teachers to take a close look at the trend and take it into consideration when lessons are conceptualized. By using these media, teachers are offered a great possibility to increase motivation, oral participation and thus language competence in almost every field. Our failure to provide language learning material resources must partly be due to teachers and parents who either do not appreciate or do not understand the power of social media. In this paper, I try to explore the importance of shaping the new trend of digital media in teaching English not just simply because the students are confronted with new digital media in their daily life anyway, but because of the fact that the more channels for the reception of information are used, the better for the students' language acquisition or their learning process in general.

Key words: new trend, digital media, English teaching, social networks, language learning.

Introduction

As one of the globalised media products, new digital media technologies in education with their reorganization of social networks offer opportunities for teachers to challenge previous centralized models of learning by connecting, sharing and discussing ideas outside of the class room and at great distance from their students. Through digital technologies, students get more new information from the technology they use outside of school than they do from their teacher in the classroom. It is clear that learning in an online environment helps to improve the target language, encourages learner independence, and has a great potential for developing our cultural teaching and learning.

Using these kinds of new digital media has always been a challenge. Students and teachers should be able to use in their learning activity different media through different technologies. New digital media provide teachers and students with creative and practical ideas. They enable teachers to meet various needs and interests of their students. They also provide students with a lot of language practice and tasks which develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills activities using let say, Second Life, Facebook, or Twitter. New digital media also entertains students and encourage practicing English in general, both inside and outside the classroom, promoting extensive learning by giving the students the confidence, the motivation and the ability to continue their reading outside the classroom.

As a teacher, I see that schools as institutions have to react to the emergence of this new media cultures. The greatest opportunity for change is currently found in after-school programs and informal learning communities. Schools and after-school programs must devote more attention to fostering the new media literacies; a set of cultural competencies and social skills that students need to increase motivation, oral participation and thus language competence in almost every field.

In this paper, I try to explore the importance of shaping the new trend of digital media in teaching English not just simply because the students are confronted with new digital media in their daily life anyway, but because of the fact that the more channels for the reception of information are used, the better for the students' language acquisition or their learning process in general. It is clear that learning in an online environment helps to improve the target language, encourages learner independence, and has great potential for the development of intercultural and communicative skills.

Theoretical Framework

Ever since digital technologies were made widely available, scholars, educators, policymakers, and parents have been debating their implications for young people's literacy, culture, attention spans, social tolerance, and propensity for aggression.

The term of new media itself, according to James, et al. (2009:6), "Refer to the actual technologies that people use to connect with one another—including mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), game consoles, and computers connected to the Internet." Through these technologies, young people are participating in a range of activities, including social networking, blogging, gaming, instant messaging, downloading music and other content, uploading and sharing their creations, and collaborating with others in various ways.

Similarly, on their book Ito and colleagues (2008:12) stated that "We use the term "new media" to describe a media ecology where more traditional media, such as books, television, and radio, are "converging" with digital media, specifically interactive media and media for social communication." They use the term "new media" rather than terms such as "digital media" or "interactive media" because they are examining a constellation of changes to media technology that cannot be reduced to a single technical characteristic. Current media ecologies often rely on a convergence of digital and online media with print, analog, and non-interactive media types.

Based on the arguments above, I may conclude that new media refers to applications of the computer that include multimedia, artificial intelligence and networking. Multimedia is the combination of the computational power of the computer with the presentation capabilities of video and audio. Artificial intelligence uses the computational power of the computer to support and in some ways mimic human cognition. Networking includes the uses of computers that are connected via landlines or microwave to each other and the Internet and World Wide Web.

Discussion: Shaping the New Trend of Digital Media in English Teaching

The concept of online language learning is in the formative phase and is still being shaped by the emerging socio-technical landscape of web 2.0 tools. However, it is clear that learning in an online environment helps to improve the target language, encourages learner independence, and has great potential for the development of intercultural and communicative skills.

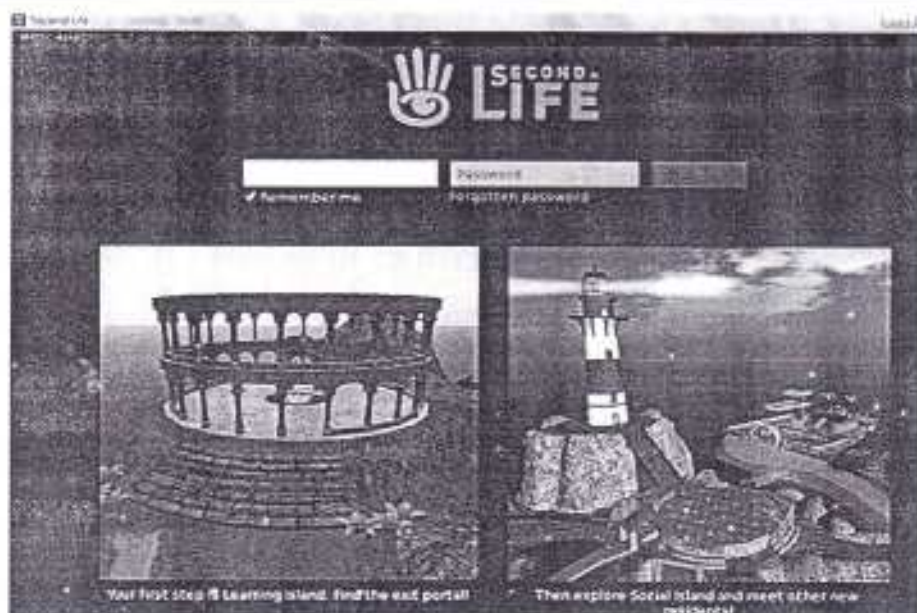
In terms of English language learning in particular, Craig and Patten (2007) note that digital resources have been shown to support learners in developing verbal interaction skills, increasing their vocabulary, and improving their reading comprehension. Furthermore, access to the Internet and social media develops students' intercultural skills and promotes global awareness.

In addition, Warschauer and Healey (1998, as cited in Brown, 2001, p. 145) contend that integrating digital technologies in the English language classroom allows for individualization in large classes; facilitates multimodal practice; encourages collaboration; and increases the "fun" factor for learners.

On the table below are the main types of Internet-based social media that are within the scope of online language education:

Type	Examples
Social networking sites	Facebook, Google+, LiveMocha
Collaborative media	Wikis
Blogs and Microblogs	Blogger, Twitter
Content communities	Youtube, Picasa
Virtual game worlds	Warcraft
Virtual social worlds	Second Life

Here is an example of some the websites:



(From <https://id.secondlife.com/openid/loginsubmit>)

There are already many on-line language learning sites with millions of users but which provide little feedback about the achievements of learners and little or no guidance from language teachers. An online language teacher assumes a new role where the balance of control and feedback between them and their learners is different than in the traditional classroom.

As a language teacher who is also teaching my students virtually, I consider an online language teacher means that: the teacher is part of a community and provides help and guidance as an equal; the teacher does not strictly control the material provided rather facilitates learning from materials that the student may provide; the teacher familiarizes their students with the different types of discourse available in social media and helps them to adopt and adapt their use; the teacher provides help where the student is not being understood or is having difficulty understanding idioms, expressions, or subtle connotations; the teacher guides rather than instructs the students in their use of language; the teacher ensures that the sessions are conducted in such a way that established learning objectives are being achieved; and the teacher is like the referee in a sports match, watching out for fairness, balanced participation, and adherence to the established rules.

Design and Procedure

Here is a check list design what I think should be done for starting a new social network learning group. See the procedure below the checklist for what should be considered at each stage.

1. Create compatible groups.
Build a profile of the participants such as: the language they want to learn; the level of ability; learning objectives; interests; learning styles; willingness to participate.
2. Select the most appropriate medium and tools.
3. Provide a clear introduction and agree the rules of engagement
 - Give an introduction at the beginning of the course: in what language communication is to take place; how the course will be structured – that is by time, by topics or by some other method; the rules and restrictions of the social network; the role of the moderator; participants' rights and responsibilities; how much group and how much individual work will be expected; how much work will be on-line and off-line; when and how often does the group meet on-line. The content of each session
 - Ask learners to introduce themselves in a discussion forum. In the beginning learners could do this in their native language initially, to replace it at a later stage with a description in the target language. In fact, that could be their first aim.
4. Set goals.
Participants should set group and individual group. All participants should share in creating group goals. The moderator's job is to ensure that goals are well defined, realistic and achievable; also that enough time is allocated to achieve them.

5. Encourage team working
Members should understand each other's goals and styles and be open to resolving conflicts. Simple tasks or games are a good way of becoming acquainted. Agree the rules (and possible roles) within the team. Another way to think of this is establishing rights and responsibilities
6. Listen actively, participate, and provide momentum if necessary:
 - Have tasks in mind during on-line sessions and consider giving homework assignments.
 - Listen carefully without interrupting.
 - Ask questions from time to time.
 - Add some examples from your personal life – it gives more personal contact.
 - Lead some discussions but not all of them.
 - Express your own opinions about the topics
 - Manage silence.
 - Learn to recognise, use and deal with silences.
 - Allow silences when members need time to formulate their thoughts and find the right words.
7. Fix problems, recognise and solve conflicts.
Although moderating seems to be less authoritative than teaching, language course moderators on a social network should deal with those that are not following the rules. This may mean reminding members about the rights of participants, warning or even expelling repeat offenders.
8. Evaluate
 - Check for and give feedback.
 - Ask if your support was enough or appropriate
 - At agreed intervals or at the end of a round of social network encounters surveys could be sent or made available online so that participants can evaluate the course, the learning environment and the moderator.
9. Adapt
 - Suggest other tools to be used.
 - Make improvements to your own performance as well as the course and the environment.

From the list above, it is clear that all the language competencies can be taught through the new media. Preferably, I choose the new social media network called Second Life.

Second Life (<http://secondlife.com>) is an online world in which you have a character that can walk around and meet people. It is a social networking site that has very similar functions to Facebook. You can send friends invitations, talk to individuals, talk to groups of people and use learning applications or games. But sometimes the best way to explain something to someone is to simply show it to them. So later on the presentation, I will show a clip for you to watch.

Conclusion and Suggestion

I believe that there will always be a place for the traditional research paper in the college writing classroom, and we have certainly not jettisoned this, as a glance at our course wiki and class syllabus demonstrates. But more and more, we see that new media technologies undergird every aspect of our lives. By combining the print with the digital, our digital native students were able to think more broadly about their work—how it would look and how it would sound—and to translate their ideas into a complex mixture of words, images, and sound. Our students now default to social media in nearly every aspect of their life. They use it to communicate with their friends, play games and watch TV. Our failure to provide language learning resources must partly be due to teachers who either don't appreciate or don't understand the power of social media. But by ignoring social media we are missing out on a world of opportunities.

Schools like to think of themselves as modern, innovative and forward-thinking institutions, and the majority of them are. If you enter a classroom today, you are confronted with computers, PowerPoint, electronic whiteboards and iPads. But by refusing to engage with our students in the digital playground that is social media, we will never truly understand their needs and never fully realise its potential as a language learning tool. Second life provides the new world similar to ours, but virtually. Here, the member can choose their own avatar represents their personalities, dress it up, and join to various communities. The website provides the real experts from various universities all over the world to teach language and all members can speak, listen, write and read ever, material from each scene. Each scene teaches them new vocabularies and they will be put in a situation as if they are really there. Try and seek for yourself.

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Internet

Second Life (<http://secondlife.com>)