Computer Assisted Language Learning Pedagogy in a Computer Assisted Language Learning Course

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ABSTRACT

Literature reveals that the inclusion of New Technologies in language teacher-education programmes enhances their knowledge and development in pedagogical methods. This paper takes a look at the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) pedagogy in a teacher-training CALL course, part of a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature degree. It starts with some background information in the inclusion of technology in teacher and second language (L2) teacher education. The it paper then reports on the implementation of this CALL course. The paper documents how through practising specific CALL pedagogies, which evolved around the development of an Electronic Portfolio, students achieved in learning about CALL pedagogies through implementing them.

KEYWORDS: *Computer Assisted Language Learning, Teacher-training, Peda-gogies*

INTRODUCTION

Experts such as Worsnop (1999) and Considine (1995) strongly support the importance of media literacy. The promise of computer technologies, supported by both research and practice, underlies the emergence of technology classes across teacher-education programmes and a sharp increase in courses specifically aimed at language teachers (Johnson 1999). Research in teacher technology use support and show the following: (a) pre-service teachers gain confidence in the use of computer technologies through formal teacher-education coursework (Knezek, Chiristensen & Rice 1996); (b) their attitudes towards computers improve through such coursework (Lam 2000); (c) prospective language teachers transfer and apply practical experiences from Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) course-work to their teaching (Egbert et al. 2002); (d) during such courses, developing autonomy in future teachers or the capacity to improve and be creative in their teaching, keeping themselves abreast in Second Language (L2) & CALL, promotes autonomy, lifelong learning and continuous professional development.

"Teachers learn best how to use technologies for educational purposes if their own learning takes place through such technologies." (Erben 1999, p. 230) Incorporating technology into a CALL course should not, therefore, be a surprise, it should be common practice, either as part of syllabus design, where CALL is a course aim, or as an aspect of pedagogy, where new technology tools are media of choice. The aim of this study was to find out how the use of CALL pedagogy in a

language teacher training course contributed to a more informed approach towards the use of CALL pedagogy in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

CALL PEDAGOGY

A number of pedagogical approaches have developed historically in the computer age, including the communicative and integrative/experimentative approaches (Levy, 1997; Mitchell, R. F. Myles, 1998; Davies, 2007a), and others, which are not exclusively theories of language learning such as constructivism (Vygotsky 1978), and sociocultural theory (Bucholtz & Hall 2005), but which have influenced it.

Technology has inevitably brought about changes in the teaching methodologies of foreign language (Domingo). Although the use of computers and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) does not exactly constitute a teaching method, they force pedagogy to think in new ways to exploit their benefits and work around its limitations (Warschauer 1996). For this reason, language teacher training courses need to incorporate ICT as an integral part of their programme strategies and styles of instruction in order for the teacher trainees to exploit CALL potential.

CALL COURSE DESCRIPTION
Course structure, students and teaching modes

The course under study was a teacher-training CALL course, which attempted to use CALL Pedagogy as part of its instruction strategies. The students were BA in English Language and Literature 2nd, 3rd and 4th year, 19 to 21 years old students from Cyprus. The course was teacher-directed in that it was guided and graded. At the same time, it was learner-centred in so far as successful completion of the course depended on students choosing their own way of dealing with each topic (content, presentation, etc.), and then engaging in individual research to find the necessary content or data. Students were also allowed flexibility in pacing each task's work. The course was based on a reflective and autonomous learning mode, leading to lifelong learning.

Materials, Technology and Tools

"Technology and Teaching English Language Learners" (Buttler-Pascoe & Wiburg 2003) was used as the course textbook. Moreover, additional printed and electronic references were provided. Exposure to a wide variety of ICT use was considered important to encourage CALL use in TEFL. For example, CD ROMs provided a wide range of pedagogically developed electronic materials. Internet Warschauer & Whittaker 1997) resources offered a variety of research articles, pedagogical ideas, interactive activities, authentic materials and tasks, and authentic communication.

CALL in the Course Design

In the course design, the place of CALL was evident in several ways. Firstly, CALL classes were held in a language computer laboratory. Students were also expected to have access to a computer at home and required to possess a mobile storing device (memory stick). Students began the semester with computer skills,

having done COM 150 as a pre-requisite to this course. Many course activities and research tasks were executed using the computers and the Internet, both in the lab and at home, using tools such as Internet Explorer, email, online search engines, word processing, presentation, spreadsheet, webpage creation, and online communication and collaboration software, and English printed / electronic dictionaries. A Learner Management System (University Intranet) was used for scheduling assignments. A Class-management software was used to facilitate teaching. Student work was stored in individual, Electronic Portfolios (Lorenzo & Ittelson 2005) created by the students.

Learning activities, E-Portfolio and expected outcomes

Classes consisted of hands on, task-based assignments, reviews, projects, and presentations. Students developed an E-Portfolio, where they were gradually added their work through the semester. The expected outcomes formed the framework for organising the E-Portfolio. Its purpose was to support the learning of the use of CALL pedagogy in TEFL. A key aim was to help students foster a reflective approach to evidencing their achievement in every task and in the whole of the programme learning outcomes, with the use of ICT, always used as part of the course pedagogy.

Tasks

Students were involved in: Observation TEFL classes in Cyprus: CALL use; research work: Learning and Teaching Needs Analysis of CALL use in TEFL classes in Cyprus; Language Websites Annotated Review; CD ROM and Website Evaluative Review; The use of ICT tools in TEFL: theory, examples and activity development; Collaborative, Comparative Review of Electronic Testing Software; Reflection and Self-Evaluation.

Learning process

CALL pedagogy provided a framework for the whole course. CALL pedagogy was an integrated and integral part of the teaching and learning processes and was evidenced in elements such as the course description, the course implementation, the students' completed individual and group work and their progress, and their achievements (as measured by the "objective" marks given during the semester). Students were also given examples of different teaching strategies they were to be involved in during the duration of the course. In this way, the course began and ended with the use of CALL pedagogy. The aim was to transform their language teacher training into a curriculum of hands-on CALL pedagogy. The production of a comprehensive portfolio constituted solid evidence of their CALL pedagogy learning and substantial record of the process of students' active involvement in CALL pedagogy as an integral part of their training.

METHODOLOGY
Data Analysis

To identify the elements of CALL pedagogy in the delivery of the CALL course and investigate to what extent CALL pedagogy was successful or not, this study examined the following data:

(a) Course Description (aims and objectives, course structure)
(b) Students' learning activities, task involvement and work evidence in the form of an E-Portfolio; materials, technology and tools used during the learning process and for the task completion, and
(c) Students' assessment and reflections

Course

A close study of the course description revealed that it entailed a systematic effort to involve teacher trainees into CALL pedagogy as part of the teaching and learning strategies used during the course. It addressed issues specific to TEFL through CALL. It aimed to provide prospective English teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to infuse technology into the instructional process. Students were expected to:

- Acquire a knowledge base that draws upon linguistics, language learning theory, teaching methodology and CALL.
- Have a solid understanding of ICT and its impact on L2 learning and teaching.
- Be able to apply this knowledge to TEFL teaching, and material development.
- Explore, both theoretically and practically, the use of basic electronic tools.
- Develop the ability to review, evaluate and incorporate such applications into lessons to enhance learners' skills.

Pedagogical Activities and E-Portfolio

Students' work in their E-Portfolio reflected the type of pedagogical activities they were involved in, the materials, and the technology and tools they used. The E-Portfolio work evidenced the knowledge, skills and experiences acquired in CALL pedagogy:

(a) The observations of the use of CALL in English classes helped students develop skills in identifying major lesson components (use of CALL, problems, and solutions), and reporting writing skills, using word processor and spreadsheets software to analyse and share information to make more informed decisions.
(b) It was evident from the students' research work on the use of CALL in TEFL classes in Cyprus schools that they acquired skills for conducting CALL needs analysis, and using the Excel software for teaching research purposes.
(c) The annotated review of TEFL related websites familiarised students with a substantial number of online pedagogical ideas (Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation, and Culture) through hands-on tasks, helped them identify their main characteristics and develop evaluative skills, and gave them the opportunity to practise in annotated review writing.
(d) The evaluative review of language CD ROMs and websites acquainted students with types of tools used in their English language teaching, and

helped them develop skills in reviewing and evaluating CALL material for teaching purposes.

(e) The study of ICT tools used in TEFL helped students acquire deeper knowledge of such type of tools and their use, gave them the opportunity to create their own TEFL pedagogical ideas using them and find ideas of how they can be used.

(f) The collaborative, comparative review of electronic testing tools contributed to the student development of evaluative reviewing skills of language testing software (based on set criteria), and an awareness of different electronic language testing pedagogies. It also gave students hands-on experience in the use of online, collaborative, group work tools, which can be used in TEFL.

Assessment

According to the university policy, D was the pass mark. According to the lecturer mark records, one student withdrew from the course, due to health reasons. One student achieved an A, one an A-, one a B-, one a C and one a D. The lowest performance was due to the fact that the student was accepted by the administration to do the course without having done the prerequisite, therefore, she tried hard to learn technology and learn how to use it in TEFL at the same time. According to the student's self-evaluations, the second lowest performance was due to student disorganisation and lack of systematic work during the whole of the semester. The assessment results indicated a good understanding of the CALL pedagogical ideas used in the course.

Students' Reflection

Students engaged in different types of reflection, in CALL areas before, during and after the course. From this data, it was evident that students felt they had learned a lot about CALL pedagogy, and other skills (organisational, working skills, more effective planning, organising, and writing of academic work.) These are some of the comments students made in their reflective journals and end-of-programme self-evaluations:

"CALL did not only teach me how to use technology in TEFL, but also helped me improve my knowledge in computers, learn how to summarise main points, how to collaborate electronically with others, and write paper…" (NM: end-of-programme self-evaluation, May 2006)

"I realise now that teaching needs to be creative and fun, and there are many sources on the Internet for a teacher to excite the class… With technology, learning becomes easy and pleasurable." (IS: end-of-programme self-evaluation, May 2006)

"Today we found out about WebQuests, which allow students to be self-sufficient and independent in their learning" (NM: Reflective Journal, 27 March 2006).

"Taking a look at different TEFL websites, I found some very interesting

language exercises, and learned how to create some of my own (MS: Reflective Journal).

"I have realised that CALL offers more variety of materials so that communication between teachers and students becomes better and student participation in class turns enjoyable!" (IS: Reflective Journal, 6 February 2006)

"The idea of using CALL in TEFL is very good and will attract many 'customers', in case I open an Institute of English. I consider furthering my expertise in CALL for future job opportunities. It will be another qualification in my CV" (SL: end-of-programme self-evaluation, May 2006).

"I chose this course because I wanted to learn something new and exciting. In all other classes, I know what to expect and the boring ways of teaching. In this course, the tests were abolished; everything I learned was via problem solving and evaluation, while simultaneously I was being taught, without realising it up until now!" (IS: end-of-programme self-evaluation, May 2006)

"I am very happy I studied CALL because I learned so many things about computers and language teaching which will hopefully help me when I become a teacher. In addition, CALL was one of the few courses which made me feel proud when I finished all the work I had and evaluated all the things I had accomplished." (NM: end-of-programme self-evaluation, May 2006)

"I feel very proud of my work and for selecting this course. Now I am thinking of doing my masters in CALL." (IS: Reflective Journal, 10th May 2006)

Students' reflection indicated that the CALL pedagogy used in the CALL course offered to students the following CALL ideas:

(a) CALL Pedagogy offered the opportunity to improve ICT knowledge and skills
(b) CALL Pedagogy offered a wealth of new pedagogical ideas including problem solving, collaborative group work, etc., materials, tools and ways of communicating and collaborating
(c) CALL Pedagogy made learning easier, more fun, pleasurable and creative and student participation more enjoyable
(d) CALL Pedagogy provided self-sufficient and independent learning
(e) CALL Pedagogy made language teaching more attractive, and teacher job prospects more promising
(f) CALL Pedagogy promoted reflective learning and self-evaluation and offered a sense of achievement and self-satisfaction, pride and encouragement for further learning

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study. First, because of the small sample size (six students) these findings cannot be generalised to the greater CALL teacher training population. However, these findings support the conclusions from the literature closely enough to suggest trends that can be noted. Second, the participants

in the study all chose to take the CALL course as an elective. This may not necessarily be the case with other prospective teachers in the field. These findings are useful, however, because we expect these participants to be the ones who infuse technology into their classes.

CONCLUSIONS

What are the goals of CALL coursework? In the main, teacher educators hope to help prospective language teachers understand and apply CALL pedagogy to promote student achievement. The data studied suggested that the course provided students the knowledge, skills and pedagogical ideas how to use technology to enhance language learning, based on L2 and CALL theories and pedagogy. Furthermore, students became very comfortable with the application of CALL in TEFL through the use of CALL pedagogy, and indicated their strong wish to be given the opportunity in the near future to implement what they had learned in a real teaching context.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COURSE DESIGN

The findings supported what Erben (1999) suggests, that teachers who learn through technology also learn the theory and pedagogy of technology. In the same vein, Langone et al. (1998) suggest that ongoing field coaching for several years after graduation might be one way to support teachers in technology implementation in specific contexts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study underscores a great need for further studies in the area of training prospective L2 teachers the infusion of CALL in language teaching. Examining the usefulness of a sequence of CALL education courses and experiences, as opposed to one course, could shed light on this area. Furthermore, we might investigate whether and what theories of learning with technology transfer from coursework to the classroom, and how this is evidenced by the applications that teachers employ, in the two different L2 teaching and learning context in Cyprus, the all-day government and private school language programmes and in the after school language teaching classes.

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