

Chapter 16

Teachers Acquisition of CALL Expertise

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that teachers need preparation in classroom based technology use, but teacher education programs do not prepare them. Nevertheless some teachers are effective with technology in language classrooms. In this paper, the author examines successes and challenges and documents how teachers succeed in developing their own expertise for technology use in language classrooms. Data collection included teacher interviews to discover successes or contradictions within the planning and implementation of technology in language classrooms. This study investigates how the choices that teachers make influence the way technology motivates student learning. These choices determine how successful they are in creating an environment free of technologically mediated contradictions. The author uses the cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) to examine the ways that teachers use technology to promote language learning. This study found that communities of practice influence how teachers can implement technology in language instruction.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot of research on teacher knowledge, both in relation to language learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Johnson, 2006) and on the use of technology (Egbert, Paulus, & Nakamichi, 2002; Kessler, 2006, 2010; Robb, 2006). These authors have provided us with insights into how

teachers acquire knowledge, and the knowledge that teachers need to know, which include knowing how to integrate technology (Egbert, Paulus, & Nakamichi, 2002).

Egbert, Paulus, and Nakamichi (2002) discovered that having training in the use of a particular technological tool had a large effect on whether or not these teachers actually used this tool in their classroom, however their study also showed that many of these teachers already knew some of

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these tools prior to the class they took. Without this training, they were unable or unwilling to use the tools that were given to them. The students in the classes which had teachers who were uncomfortable with technology, would have less access to technology for their learning - which might expand on the digital divide, in terms Kelly (2007) has expressed. Kelly designated two additional forms of digital divide, which have to do with the kinds of instruction. These two aspects (according to Kelly) are “achievement enhancing ... [and] culturally sensitive [technologically mediated instruction]” (p. 33). These aspects of the digital divide are more related the technological skills of teachers than to the funds applied to the system to develop the technological infrastructure. This demonstrates the importance of having teachers who have technological competence.

Kessler (2010), in his study of teachers using computer-assisted language learning (CALL), discovered that they either have problems using technology because they are uncomfortable with it, or they do not understand the applications to language learning. Those teachers who are uncomfortable with the technology were not able to see the purpose for using the technology. Interestingly, Kessler also found those students who were comfortable with using technology for their own purposes often still had no knowledge of educational purposes for technology and had problems using it in the classroom. This is because of their lack of technological knowledge applied to their content area. This problem exists because many teachers coming out of Teaching of English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) programs have little or no training in CALL (Kessler, 2006). Hubbard (2007) showed that a required or optional course in CALL is often offered outside the department and therefore may not include content integration. Even though teacher candidates may come to teacher education programs with some technological expertise, this lack of preparation keeps these teachers from applying it to their teaching practice (Kessler, 2010). With technology changing faster

than teacher educators, Hubbard (2008) points out that teachers (and teacher educators) need to be prepared not just for current conditions, but to changes that will occur in TESOL in the future. Egbert, Akasha, Huff, and Lee (2011) have said that we need to prepare teachers for “real learning contexts” (p. 4), implying the need to prepare teachers for more than just the context in which they are learning. Robb (2006) also agreed with this call to train teachers’ ability to develop their own technological skills. As Egbert, Paulus, and Nakamichi (2002) pointed out, those who have some knowledge of technology are more able to develop this further.

Johnson (2006) discusses the use of Freire’s “Praxis” and demonstrates this dialectic that is formed between the application of theory and practice, and that this is what allows teachers to continue to develop after they have left the teacher education program. Johnson reiterates that teachers do not come to teacher education programs as a blank slate - they bring with them prior experiences that affect how they interpret and internalize what is presented to them in these programs. Without an appreciation of this information, she believes that teachers will not be as able to adapt to changes in teacher practice developed without an understanding by teacher educators of how we acquire knowledge. This is as true for the use of technology as it is for any other aspect of teacher education. A teacher who has a fear of using technology will need to be able to get over this fear, as Johnson and Golombek (2003) state that teachers shape their ideas on the basis of study in teacher education programs, however this process is mediated by their sociohistorical knowledge of education and the processes which they have experienced - i.e., lack of technological experience in their learning would mean lack of expertise in using it in the classroom. In order to develop technological expertise within the content area teacher educators will need to demonstrate the usefulness of using technology in the classroom. Development of technological integration

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