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INTERNET AS A CLASSROOM TOOL

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ABSTRACT: *Nowadays the Internet appears to be ubiquitous. Especially young people are eager to enjoy easy access to the network and spend a decent amount of time in front of their electronic devices. Thus, it seems obvious that modern technology should be incorporated into didactic process in schools. Such lessons can be much more appealing to students and increase effectiveness of learning. In order to achieve these aims the lessons must be carefully planned, taking into consideration several important factors. This text discusses some of those crucial aspects.*

KEY WORDS: *Internet, skills, lessons, factors, components, effectiveness*

Being widely present, the Internet is becoming more and more popular device used in learning-teaching process. As Teeler (2000) claims, the only difference between an Internet classroom and the classroom we used to know is the presence of the Internet that the teacher may use to broaden and diversify types of activities. Whether its application will prove effective, highly depends on proper organization, that is the planning stage together with practical reality of the medium, not only student but also teacher's skills and technological requirements are the key to successful technology-enhanced teaching (Krajka, 2007). All these must be taken into account when planning a lesson with the use of the Internet. This text will examine some of the elements of a Web-based classroom, enumerating certain factors that influence well-organized technology-enhanced teaching.

First and foremost, when planning an Internet classroom the teacher should focus on both the choice of activities and timing. Some tasks may occur to be completed faster than expected but others may take more time than set in the schedule. This may happen due to many factors, say: improper level of tasks difficulty, students becoming too engrossed in the task, technical problems or some other. As Teeler (2000) points, all such aspects need to be noted in the lesson plan, adding some extra time for such situations. Secondly, when choosing types of tasks the teacher should consider his or her learner's skills. In order to participate in such classes effectively, students do not have to possess great knowledge of how numerous programs work, but checking if they know some basic ones, like a browser or an email is essential. Windeatt (2000) in his book proposes a very simple way of doing that by means of short checklist where students tick the actions they can properly do or demonstrate them in practice. Krajka (2007) however, underlines the importance of the latter, since students may overestimate their abilities when responding to a questionnaire and adds the Core Curriculum for the specific level of education as a useful source of such information. All these sources will help to estimate students' skills that are actually possessed. Researchers (Krajka, 2007) classify some basic students' competencies, as far using computers in general is concerned into several groups:

1. basic hardware/software knowledge, that is naming some parts of the computer or knowing basic operations;
2. browser-related skills: using the browser or scrolling around the web-page;

3. program-management skills: windows switching, quitting programs;
4. e-mail related skills: creating an e-mail account and using it;
5. computer lab-related skills: specifying servers, logging in with a password.

What is important for the teacher is to decide, which of these are going to be of use when students perform certain tasks. An interesting division of some core Internet skills was made by Windeatt (2000). Firstly, he claims that students should know how to search for materials. Secondly, sort the unnecessary information and thirdly evaluate on the results. What is meant here, is the ability to use tools in order to receive what they want, omitting all the redundant data, which the Web is full of. Additionally, students need to know how to use the Internet to communicate with others not only by means of emails and instant messages, but also by audio- and video conferencing. They should be able to write messages, start a conversation or set up a discussion list. However, if students do not possess even some of these abilities the teacher may organize a learner training. Teeler (2000) suggests starting with easy tasks due to which students may gradually gain confidence and develop an inner urge to work on their own. Students may be asked to look at their screens and find the name of their computer, double click on different icons to see what happens or send messages to one another. What can also be done is pairing less confident learners with more confident ones. This solution for pre-work activities is also useful due to the fact that the students may gradually become accustomed to technology at their own pace during this starting period. Furthermore, the teacher should also take into consideration various styles and modalities. Some students may actually start doing the incorrect tasks before the teacher finishes his or her explanations and then ask loads of questions disturbing others. Subsequently, visual learners may become confused if they are not demonstrated with the activity first, while auditory learners listen to teacher's instructions even if there is no eye contact between them. The teacher should be aware of all these factors that were described here under the heading of "learner skills". However, there are some more skills on the part of the teacher without which an Internet-based classroom would work rather poorly. Apart from very good language teaching skills the teacher should be obviously computer-literate. Teeler (2000) makes a point that in order to be successful in Web-based classroom, the teacher should use the Internet for his own purposes for at least a term before doing this with students. Krajka (2007) adds that it is not only the general knowledge of system management but also

the awareness of operating system and its requirements in the IT lab that are crucial. He also stresses out the importance of deep practical knowledge of the Internet together with specific skills like: searching the Web with the use of various means (search engines, portals), retrieving these materials (copying, pasting, saving), managing URLs (Web sites evaluation on the basis of their addresses) and making the best of the browser (managing favourites, saving websites). Apart from the knowledge of computers and the Internet, Windeatt (2000) claims that the teacher should always be prepared for the classes by checking if the sites he used before still exist or did not undergo any change. A teacher needs to be patient due to the access speed that may vary at times and organize his materials well using favourites. Another tip is to try new things out together with being critical as far as the value of the information found may be different than expected. In order to make teacher's job easier, sharing information with other teachers and students may be of help. On top of that, the teacher should understand that the Internet is only a tool in Web-based classroom for achieving particular goals not an aim in itself. The last important component of technology based teaching is the classroom itself. According to Teeler (2000) an Internet classroom should have enough space for working with computers, using books or making notes. Then, the arrangement of desks should make teacher's visual contact with the group possible. Sometimes group work may be hard to perform, but in that case two students may use one and the same computer. In order to create a friendly atmosphere a teacher can put colourful posters and pictures on the walls or bring plants. As for the equipment Windeatt (2000) mentions:

1. Computers (their number and type)
2. Multimedia (sound-card and speakers)
3. The Internet (access)
4. Software (web browsers, email facilities, 'chat' software)

These four pieces of equipment presented should be the basis for creating activities for the classroom.

On the basis of the above, it can be stated that making work effective during Internet-based classes is a complex undertaking due to lots of aspects that must be taken into consideration. It requires not only computer technology and the Internet access but also crucial skills on the part of learner and teacher. However much time it takes to prepare such lesson, it is worthwhile as using the Internet presents numerous advantages to both.

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