Chapter 13
First Steps toward a Model of Interactive Whiteboard Training for Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents findings of a research project that investigates a model of interactive whiteboard technology training that incorporates a) a “bottom up” approach to teacher professional development in Computer Assisted Language Learning, and b) a pedagogical framework based on a socio-cognitive view of communicative language teaching. The chapter reports on a study conducted with a group of nine English teachers at a secondary school in Germany. Research data were collected via classroom observations, video recordings of IWB training workshops and in depth interviews with the teachers. The research findings shed some light on a) the various competencies that may be required by language teachers who want to exploit the IWB towards a socio-cognitive view of communicative language teaching and b) some principles for the design and implementation of an IWB technology training which would best assist the teachers with achieving this outcome.

INTRODUCTION

Research evidence suggests that the lack of high quality teacher training is a major factor impeding the integration of new technologies in education (Legutke et al., 2007; Hubbard & Levy, 2006). In spite of the growing interest in increasing the amount and quality of in-service technology training programmes, most of the programmes currently provided consist of a series of one-day workshops without appropriate follow-up at the school level. As a result, although teachers tend to become relatively well-informed about the newest approaches in computer assisted learning, they lack a deep understanding of how these new technologies can help them to fulfill their own pedagogical goals. There is thus a need for change in how professional development for technology integration is conducted.

In order to tackle this issue, several innovative approaches to in-service technology training
First Steps toward a Model of Interactive Whiteboard Training

have been proposed in the literature. Meskill et al. (2006), for instance, advocate the creation of learning communities through collaboration involving researchers, pre-service and in-service teachers, and Preston et al. (2000) propose the development of online communities of practice as a key means of supporting teaching and action research practices in technology-enhanced classrooms. Most researchers agree on one fact: the training programmes that are most promising are those that support individual teachers’ exploration of their current pedagogy, and helps identify how the new technologies can support, extend or transform their practice.

This chapter presents research findings of a study that investigates a model of interactive whiteboard technology training that incorporates a) a “bottom up” approach to teacher professional development in CALL, and b) a pedagogical framework based on a socio-cognitive view of communicative language teaching. The project (2008-2011) encompasses seven in-depth longitudinal case studies with English teachers at different levels of technology expertise and teaching experience. Research data are being collected via a variety of ethnographic research instruments, namely classroom observations and field notes, video recordings of school lessons, in-depth interviews and video-triggered reflective dialogues with the teachers. In order to address the purposes of such a study, two research questions were formulated:

1. What are the competencies that English teachers need to acquire in order to use the IWB to develop their practice towards a socio-cognitive view of communicative language teaching?
2. What kind of technical and pedagogical support is mostly needed by them in this process?

This paper discusses findings of a study conducted with a group of nine English teachers at a secondary school in Germany. Three researchers took part in the data gathering, coding and analysis: one university lecturer and two pre-service teachers. In the first stage of the study, we investigated how the teachers in that specific school were using the technology in their English lessons through interviews and classroom observations. In the second stage, we designed and implemented technology training workshops for the English teachers involved in the project. These workshops, which were informed by local pedagogical practice, were designed in response to the specific needs identified in the first stage of the study and offered guidance on how to exploit the potential of IWB technology for English language teaching. This paper presents an in-depth analysis of the process of IWB integration in that context.

THE INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARD IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Interactive Whiteboards have become increasingly available in language classrooms across the world. The number of publications dealing with this topic has increased considerably in the last five years. Recent books with focus on ICT and language teaching, which are aimed at practitioners (e.g. Dudeney & Hockly, 2007; Sharma & Barrett, 2007), have dedicated entire sections to the discussion of potential applications of IWB for facilitating classroom language learning. This technology has also stimulated interest in academic research on CALL. A number of recent publications (e.g. Gray et al. 2007, Cutrim Schmid, 2009; Miller & Glover, 2009) present research findings on how the technology is being utilized in language classrooms.

The main pedagogical benefits of adopting IWB technology in the language teaching context are: a) facilitating the integration of new media in the regular language classroom (Cutrim Schmid, 2008a; Gray et al. 2005 and 2007; Walker 2003), b) enhancing the scope of interactivity and learner