

Taking Advantage of Internet in The EST Classroom

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The use of Internet all over the world is increasing nowadays. It offers a great deal of possibilities to the teachers of English for Science and Technology especially in certain areas in which there is a lack of multimedia materials . The following article tries to encourage EST teachers to include exercises involving communication via Internet in their syllabi designs.

One of the most fascinating technical innovations in the area of new technologies is the development of Internet. However, when dealing with such a revolution we sometimes have many questions to be answered before deciding to try and have a look into the net. The main problems arise because we need to have a certain knowledge of computers and, as it is obvious, teachers need to know some concepts about the nature of a net and how it functions. But, once we get over our fears and we realize that the basic ideas of the data transfer in the net are not so difficult to learn, we will enter a new era of communication. To quote Widdowson (1978:16) “ After all, the language teacher always has to know about something other than the language he is teaching”. The net will probably be the main means of communication of the future and, as we will try to prove below, it will become a new tool for our daily job as a teacher of English for Science and Technology.

As Hutchinson and Waters (1987:107) mention in their work “Materials provide a stimulus to learning. Good materials do not teach : they encourage learners to learn”, and this is precisely what Internet provides teachers with : a powerful stimulus for our technical students in the task of teaching them English for Science and Technology. One of the most important problems of teaching EST to university students is the difficulty that arises when teachers try to teach a foreign language to technical students. Most of the time, they are not interested at all in what they do not consider to be a technical subject, and the reason for this attitude will probably be that our students realise the importance of learning

our subject only some years after they have completed their studies, so now we have a new tool to be used in the classroom in order to motivate our students. In Hutchinson and Waters' words (1987:128), " Language learning is an active process. It is not enough for learners just to have the necessary knowledge to make things meaningful, they must also use that knowledge".

A second question we have to bear in mind is the necessity of an adequate place in which we could find the technical facilities to carry out our task. The existence of Multimedia Centers is becoming very normal these days, primarily in Technical Schools because nowadays they offer a wide range of possibilities to the teachers of all technical subjects, so, why not take advantage of that situation ? We should try to adapt our teaching methods to the environment in which our students carry out their daily routine because, after all, our EST subjects develop with them. As Berns (1990) affirms in the preface to her work : " The first step for the program designer is becoming familiar with the social and cultural features of the context of the language being taught. This includes a consideration of the uses the speakers make of the language, their reasons for using it, and their attitudes toward it". Definitely, it does not consist in either preparing complete courses via Internet or spending our time giving classes on computers. The proposal is preparing certain activities which will deal directly with using the Internet connections to provide practice for the students in those skills we want to emphasize. One of the main advantages of the net is that one can take part either actively or passively, acting as a source or a receiver at the same time. It is simply a matter of integrating the net communication in the EST experience.

The introduction of certain exercises involving practice in an Internet environment will bring into our class some practice that is normally very difficult to obtain. The use we can make of this new world of communications is as wide as the number of possibilities that we can think about. As teachers of certain areas of EST such as Engineering, architecture, and so on, we always suffer from a lack of new material ready to be used in class, especially when looking for multimedia products for EST students. The design of this kind of products is not so easy for us, unless we find an appropriate group of technicians, so it is much easier to adapt information from the web and prepare our own personalized practice for our students.

Before presenting some practical applications of what has been suggested in the paragraphs above, it is necessary to distinguish between what we can obtain for our students' practice and what we can receive for our teaching and researching daily work. Within the possibilities we can exploit with our students, we will show those ways with the easiest access that require the least amount of computer knowledge .

1. Use of World Wide Web Pages to carry out many different *activities for our technical students*. The WWW offers the users thousands of pages with information in hypertext mode. This allows them to find resources, services, news and so on in the net. Navigation is very easy nowadays because there is a wide variety of web browsers through which we can obtain the information we need by simply using the mouse. Several examples can be presented, depending not only on the WWW page we are connected to but also on the skills we want our students to put into practice. A list of different activities based upon different WWW locations is provided below:

1.a. We can visit a place related to a topic on science and technology, choosing it from a list of 80 places compiled by Craig Nansen by using Science Links . He offers visits to places so distant as NASA or the City of Kobe.

1.b. Perhaps we prefer to prepare some reading-comprehension exercises using articles from The Science Daily Magazine or The Technology Page at CNN. These sites can be very useful when we want to make our students look for some technical information on a certain subject and it can also be used to prepare a discussion afterwards. The use of hypertext also obliges the students to learn some basic vocabulary on the topic in order to go into the next pages.

1.c. We can introduce our students into Scitech-SL, an e-mail forum in which non-native English speaking students of technical areas discuss topics in science, technology or computers. This time, we can suggest our students practice with writing techniques by communicating with people in a situation similar to theirs. This same practice could be done by using e-mail communication with other previously known students from other universities. It is a previous stage to the use of several programs

that allow written communication via modem in real time. This second possibility could be more complicated because it involves more knowledge about computers and different programmes.

2. Referring to the help that Internet can offer to *teachers of English for Science and Technology*, we can distinguish several different uses. Among the most interesting ones, we can mention :

2.1. First of all, Internet allows teachers to look for up-to-date information (texts, charts, graphs, etc.) related to the different topics included in their syllabi. There are compilations of data in the net such as Voice of the Shuttle : Science, Technology and Culture Page compiled by Alan Liu or Technology pages from all the most important newspapers in the world ; apart from the specialized magazines and newspapers. Otherwise, many enterprises offer information about their activities in the net. It can be obtained from normal staff presentation to reports of their businesses or general information about the topic we are interested in. In this case it is better to look up our key words in the net by using one of the different browsers offered by our software.

On the other hand, Internet makes easier our activities of looking for bibliographical information in many different ways :

1. There are certain collections of resources for EST teachers such as *EST-L Bibliography* or *The International Directory of EST Programs and contacts*.

2. Connections made through the Virtual Library offer us services such as *Resources for teachers of EST* compiled by Roy Bowers in the University of EL Paso (México), or Web pages related to the information of the different topics within the syllabus of our subjects. We have another possibility of contacting needed bibliography through connections via Telnet with other University Libraries all over the world. This programme helps us to access remote machines as if we were working with them in real time. In this case we can explore places such as *The Library of Congress* or *The University of London Library*.

3. Another important use of Internet for EST teachers is that it provides us with the most important means of communicating the results of our research activities, teaching experiences developed in the classroom or simply information about courses, publications, on-line newsletters and so on. As an example, we can mention *VOLTERRE-FR* (Web links for teachers of English) or *EST Events*. We also find e-mail forum activities called *EST-L* where EST teachers can discuss teaching resources and strategies.

In conclusion, quoting Strevens' words (1988:44) as they sum up the general proposal of this article :

The methodologies of ESP conform to the same model of language learning/teaching process as does any other form of language teaching. That is to say, the basic teaching activities are these :

- shaping the input.
- encouraging the learner's intention to learn.
- managing the learning strategies.
- promoting practice and use."

Introducing Internet to the classroom experience is not a matter of changing from the general methodological formulas to adopt new ones, but it implies renewing our means in order to adapt them to the new technology that surrounds our technical students. In this way, we will probably achieve motivation through exercises using Internet, but we have to bear in mind that we, as teachers, should manage the learning strategies and shape the input in order not to waste our time and our students' or affect the efficiency of our exercises.

WORKS CITED

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- Strevens, P.** "The Learner and Teacher of ESP" in D. Chamberlain and R. Baumgardner, eds. *ESP in the Classroom: Practice and Evaluation.* ELT Document 128, Modern English Publications in association with the British Council.
- Widdowson, H.G.** 1990. *Teaching Language as Communication.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WORLD WIDE WEB LOCATIONS CITED

- EST-L Bibliography* ([http:// www.wfi.fr/est/bib.html](http://www.wfi.fr/est/bib.html))
- EST-L e-mail forum* ([listserv asuvm.inre.asu.edu](mailto:listserv.asuvm.inre.asu.edu))
- EST Events* ([http:// www.tnis.net/rbowers/events.html](http://www.tnis.net/rbowers/events.html))
- International Directory* (<http://www.wfi.fr/est/dir.html>)
- Resources for Teachers of EST
(<http://www.wfi.fr/est/est1.html>)
- (<http://www.cibnor.conacyt.mx/est/est1.html>)
- Science Links* (<http://www.wfi.fr/est/science.html>)
- SCITECH-SL* (<http://www.wfi.fr/est/scitech.html>)
- The Science Daily Magazine*
(<http://www.sciencedaily.com/index.htm>)
- The Technology Page at CNN* (<http://www.CNN.com>)
- Voice of The Shuttle* (<http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/shuttle/science.html>)
- VOLTERRE-FR* (<http://www.wfi.fr :80/volterre/weblinktech.html>)

TELNET ADDRESSES CITED

- Library of Congress (U.S.A.)* (locis.loc.gov)
- University of London Library* (consull.uill.ac.uk)