

Designing IWB Resources for Language Teaching: The ITILT Project

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Abstract

The recent increase in the use of interactive technologies, particularly interactive whiteboards (IWBs), in foreign language classrooms is creating a need for teacher training and pedagogical support in this area. Research suggests that the pedagogical exploitation of IWBs is limited by the availability of suitable teaching resources, as well as teachers' understanding of the affordances of the technology (Cutrim Schmid, 2010). iTILT (Interactive Technologies in Language Teaching) is a European project which aims to promote the effective use of the IWB in communicative, task-oriented approaches to language teaching. This paper presents early outcomes of the project with respect to the development of teacher training materials to support learners' interactions in the target language. It provides examples of teaching resources for the development of different language competences, templates for the creation of shareable materials, and criteria for materials design in the IWB classroom.

1. Introduction

The digital revolution is bringing new technologies into the language classroom at an increasingly rapid pace, and the interactive whiteboard (IWB), perhaps one of the latest additions, can serve as a hub which allows teachers to exploit different resources and technologies (Cutrim Schmid & Stetter, 2008) [1]. However, the accelerated rate of these changes and the complexity of the new technologies create a challenging situation for teachers and trainers who are charged with exploiting the new resources in pedagogically effective ways. Neither teachers nor researchers have had time to identify the relevant affordances of new technologies such as the IWB (Whyte, 2011) [2] and training to date has been necessarily limited in scope (Cutrim Schmid, 2010) [3]. What is needed is classroom-based research on IWB use in language teaching to identify effective teaching practices with this new tool and inform further teacher training. The iTILT project, Interactive Technologies in Language Teaching, was conceived to meet this need [4].

2. Aim of the project

The iTILT project, an EACEA Lifelong Learning project on IWB use in the language classroom aims to develop training models based on examples of effective teaching practice in order to train language teachers to become confident users of the IWB technology while remaining consistent with current language teaching methodology (van Hazebrouck, 2011) [5].

Recent research suggests a number of IWB affordances which are particularly useful in language learning; the IWB can

1. facilitate the integration of new media in language classroom (Gray et al. 2007) [6]
2. enhance the scope of interactivity and learner engagement (Miller & Glover 2009) [7]
3. support the development of "electronic literacies" (Cutrim Schmid 2008a) [8]

4. meet the needs of learners with diverse learning styles (aural, visual and kinesthetic) through the use of multiple media (Wall, Higgins, & Smith, 2004) [9]

However for the teacher, learning to teach with an IWB can lead to feelings of insecurity and may mean a return to teacher-centered whole-class teaching instead of a communicative task-based or project-based teaching (Cutrim Schmid, 2009) [10], Cutrim Schmid & Whyte, to appear, [11] Gray et al. 2007 [6]. And for learners, inappropriate use of the IWB can lead to cognitive overload, or inversely, to “spoon-feeding” with pre-designed presentation materials (Cutrim Schmid, 2008b) [12].

Thus there is a clear need for professional training and pedagogical resources to assist teachers in exploiting IWB in the foreign language classroom.

The iTILT project aims to help language teachers make the most of interactive whiteboards by

- producing effective IWB training materials for language teachers
- informing teachers of effective IWB practice based on research
- providing a support network for teachers and schools
- bringing together teachers from all sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational) of education
- encouraging the sharing of example lesson plans
- promoting reflective practice with IWBs.

The iTILT project involves primary, secondary, university and adult learners of six foreign languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Turkish and Welsh) in 6 European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Turkey and the UK); a seventh country, the Netherlands, is providing web support. The partners are as follows:

- University of Antwerp – Linguapolis (Belgium; coordinator)
- TELLConsult (Netherlands)
- Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg (Germany)
- Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis (France)
- British Council Barcelona (Spain)
- University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UK)
- Bilkent University (Turkey)

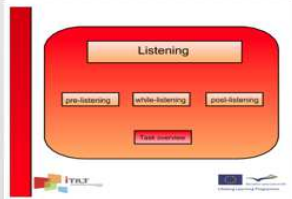
The project runs from January 2011 until April 2013 and involves a training phase, data collection, and the creation of a website with video examples and participant reactions to classroom IWB episodes.

3. Progress to date

3.1 Training resources

The first part of the project, from January to June 2011 has involved the development of a training manual for teachers using the IWB in the language classroom, and the creation of training materials. The materials for project teachers have been developed with an emphasis on communicative language teaching, offering an explanation of strategies and procedures for designing effective IWB materials, and including opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own practice. The materials are designed for teaching different languages in various educational contexts (primary, secondary, vocational and higher education) and are organised around the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) plus vocabulary and grammar.

Training Materials



Activity


- description of the activity and steps to be taken by teacher and students

aim

- Aim of the activity
- Learning goals

design

- explains how the flipchart was designed



potential

- potential of the activity in comparison to former methods

www.itilt.eu

Figure 1: Training materials
IWB files for training feature pull tabs describing the activities, their aim, how they were designed and why the IWB is used.

A comprehensive training manual has also been prepared, including general tips on how to make the best use of interactive whiteboards, and guidelines for the development of IWB materials.



iTILT Training Manual



4.1.4. Platform for carrying out speaking games

Another good example of a free-practice activity that could be supported by the use of an IWB is the 'picture domino' game which could be carried out by the whole class. Students have to drag pictures to the centre of the screen and find/explain the relationship or connection between the two pictures. The students can associate freely and find new patterns with every picture.



Figure 7 - Picture domino – (©Daniel Martin)

Figure 2: iTILT Training Manual
The manual includes examples of activities for different language skills using the IWB.

3.2 Criteria for materials evaluation

These criteria cover the design, evaluation and implementation of IWB language learning sessions, and also address copyright issues for IWB based material. The criteria are likely to be revised after the project training sessions in September and October 2012, but at present they include the following considerations:

1. Activities or tasks should be designed around a real-life context and should have a clear communicative purpose.
2. Flipcharts should support teachers in setting the context for language learning activities, in motivating learners and in providing linguistic and cognitive support for the achievement of clearly defined language learning goals.
3. The main purpose for the design of IWB-based materials should be to enhance target language learning and not just for the sake of making the lessons more interesting and fun. In other words, they shouldn't be only learner-centred, but also learning-centred.
4. When designing IWB-based activities teachers should measure the personal cost of integrating the IWB against its return and its efficiency. In other words, they should ask themselves whether the same activity could not be implemented more easily via other means.
5. Flipcharts should include step by step instructions on how they should be used and for which purposes – each page should contain a brief explanation of the purpose of the activity, language learning goals and how the activity should be implemented. This way, flipcharts can be more easily shared with others.
6. Flipcharts should contain a good amount of visual, audio and tactile input (e.g. embedding of audio, image and video files). However, it is important to balance the amount of stimuli presented in order to avoid cognitive overload (e.g. adding too many images to one page).
7. IWB software tools should be appropriately used to add elements of physical and cognitive interactivity to the materials (e.g. drag and drop, hide and reveal tools, point and click programming).
8. Flipcharts should allow space for pupils' contributions and ideas in order to allow adequate room for learner experimentation and discovery. For instance, by including opportunities to redirect instruction and/or content based on learner feedback, and the inclusion of open-ended questions.
9. Flipchart design should also encourage learner autonomy, for instance by including links to web resources that students can use out of the classroom independently and by making clear reference to language learning strategies and important study skills to be used by learners in the new information age.
10. Flipcharts should only include copyright-free materials, unless permission for publication has been provided by copyright holders.

3.3 Data collection

Data collection begins in October, and involves two classroom visits to each of 6 teachers in six partner countries. On the first visit, the language class is filmed, and learner reactions obtained via focus group interviews. On a second visit, when both the researcher and the teacher have independently viewed the class film, short episodes of class interaction are chosen for the project website during a teacher interview (video-stimulated reflection, VSR), and additional information and

resources are collected from the teacher. These recordings then form the basis of a media-rich web page which presents each video clip alongside audio, video, and/or transcriptions of learner and teacher reactions, together with related digital resources. The final website will offer a searchable database of IWB classroom episodes featuring learners of different languages in a variety of contexts.

At its conclusion early in 2013, the iTILT website will offer open access to some 100 to 140 of these pages, allowing teachers and trainers to see how the IWB can be used in the language classroom, hear participants' comments, and access the resources used in the examples.

4. Conclusion

The iTILT project aims to support teachers with professional training and pedagogical resources which assist the teachers in exploiting the IWB in ways that are consistent with current models of foreign language teaching. The training phase offers an opportunity for professional development to the 36 teachers in the project, as well as interested local colleagues. The project teachers will also benefit from the class filming and VSR sessions, and the data collection phase will also, crucially, provide the project researchers with insights into teacher practice and reflection on IWB use. Finally, the iTILT website will offer a rich source of examples and inspiration for teachers and trainers seeking to make the most of IWBs and the new technologies in today's language classrooms.

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