

Beyond Technical Skills: Interconnecting Computer Use, Inquiry, and Oral Communication

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This article presents the results of a study exploring how students responded to a technology-enhanced task-based project. The project was part of the Information Technology (IT) Skills course designed for a summer English language institute known as the Language Village, held for the first time in Nabeul, Tunisia, in July 2006. The main goal of the two-week instructional and recreational program at the Language Village, Nabeul (LVN) was to give the students opportunities to improve their English by emphasizing oral practice. Those selected were among the top ten percent of their class, based on their second year English comprehensive exam scores. The IT Skills course was one of the three courses offered in the morning sessions; the other two were communication skills and pronunciation.

Developing a Vision for the IT Skills Course

As the person entrusted with designing the course, I was interested in creating a technology-enhanced learning environment whereby computer use, Internet-based research, multimedia design, and oral communication were interconnected. The cornerstone was a project that combined the use of computers (particularly the multimedia software PowerPoint), the Internet, and oral presentation skills.

The project was the context for students to draw on their pre-existing mastery of the four language skills. They needed to skim through the documents they found on the Internet, to evaluate the sources of information and the information in the resources, to identify the central ideas, and to synthesize text to construct the PowerPoint slides. In

addition, they had to transfer and adapt writing skills to create the PowerPoint (PP) slide shows. For them, this was a new genre requiring conciseness and authoring of multimodal text (Stark & Paravel, 2008; Kress, 2003). Finally, to present their project to an audience, the students put to use their speaking skills. This opportunity for “pushed output” (Swain, 1985) fit well within the general objectives of LVN as a language enhancement program.

The course covered ten class contact sessions spread over two weeks (see Appendix A). In the first four sessions of the IT Skills course, the students were required to perform mini-tasks designed to help them discover features of web-based research (directories, search engines, search strategies, and evaluating web resources). Students were then given the project assignment and directed to form their teams, decide on a topic, and design a plan. The assignment sheet included a list of ten topics and set the requirements for completion of the project (see Online Appendix B¹). In the next session, the students were required to introduce their group members and the topic chosen, then explain the group’s reasons for choosing it and how they intended to tackle the project. The teacher acted as facilitator providing feedback and asking questions that helped the students flesh out their outline.

In the next session the teacher introduced PP through a very brief ten-minute “show and tell” presentation covering only the basics. This left room for the students themselves to explore the features they intended to use in their presentation. Students were also provided with a list of tips they could use for the creation of a multimedia presentation as a handout (see Online Appendix C.).

The handout drew their attention to criteria associated with creating effective PP slides, while putting restrictions on the number of slides and number of words per slide. The expectation for the remaining sessions was that the students would be working autonomously within their teams to prepare their PPs to use in their oral presentation. To guide them through this phase, they were provided with a third handout providing guidelines for structuring face-to-face oral presentations and a list of useful expressions for the presentation (see Online Appendix D).

The Teaching Strategy

The teaching style adopted made extensive use of the principle of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986). In the beginning of the course *directive scaffolds* (Cazden, 1988) in the form of PP presentations and “show and tell” demonstrations were used. The directive scaffolds were kept short and less frequent as the course progressed, giving way to more *supportive scaffolds* in the form of on-going support for students as they worked around the computer. The tips, guidelines, checklists, and lists of useful expressions mentioned earlier were part of the supportive scaffolding for the students to use when navigating their way through the project.

As Meskill (2005) suggests, *triadic scaffolds* were used to create a balance between the role of the teacher, the role of the learner, and the role of the computer. In addition, instruction was in the form of tasks, beginning with mini-tasks in the first weeks and then leading up to the project as a series of integrated tasks. The IT Skills course proceeded, as suggested by Nunan (1989), from a course syllabus, to lesson units, and finally to a series of integrated tasks that “form coherent units of work” (p.18). The hope was that while engaged in the project the less competent, shy, or less confident learners could be supported by more expert team members (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Task-based language learning also has support from the research literature in second language acquisition (SLA). The thrust of the argument is that when learners are solving problems in pairs or in groups with native speaker (NS) or non-native

speaker (NNS) peers, they engage in negotiation of meaning conducive to language development (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Varonis & Gass, 1985) within complex social interpersonal relationships that emerge and unfold during task completion (Slimani-Ross, 2005; Zhang, 2004; Foster, 1998; Breen, 1985). LVN participants came from five different institutions, and as a result, the situation was ideal for the negotiation of world views and personal perspectives around a common instructional goal. CALL practitioners and researchers share similar beliefs and expectations for computer-mediated collaborative projects as conducive to target language development and interpersonal/intercultural growth (Jeon-Ellis, Debski, & Wigglesworth, 2005; Belz, 2003; Fürstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001; Warshauer & Kern, 2000; Warshauer, 1997).

The culminating activity for the course was to have students performing orally using PP as media support. In a language development program whose mission was primarily to help students acquire oral and communication skills, setting the public oral presentation

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requirement in this project made sense. The PP-supported final public presentation provided an opportunity for students to work with peers to develop a strategy for communicating their ideas about a specific topic in a multimodal, interactive manner. Although the students attending LVN were excellent students of English, the assignment was challenging first due to its novelty as a student performance requirement and second due to its complex, multi-layered nature.

The Study

The study examined how this task-based teaching activity evolved once given to the learners. I considered the learners’ perceptions and accounts of their experience while performing the task as fairly reliable indicators of task outcomes. The data helped me as the teacher identify gaps between intended teaching objectives and evolving learning experiences, and as such, was situated within “exploratory practice” (Allwright, 2000) or “action research” (Nunan, 1992; McNiff, 2002). Action research is research which is carried out by the teacher in her

own teaching situation involving the collection and analysis of empirical data.

Method

The study used a semi-structured interview protocol to capture the students' account of their experiences while undertaking the project. The protocol was designed with a focus on five themes:

- What steps (strategies) they followed to complete the task
- How they distributed roles within the group
- What challenges they faced to complete the project
- How helpful they found the teacher's role
- Whether they would use the same strategies if they were to do the project again

Seventeen of my IT Skills course students volunteered to take part in an interview after their final presentation. They constituted six different project teams (labeled G1 to G6) who were either working in pairs or groups of three to four students. The students were interviewed with the other member(s) of their team immediately after their presentations the last day of LVN in July, 2007. They were given the questions just before the interview. The interview started when they were ready (approximately ten minutes later) with my prompting and following up with additional questions as needed. The interviews were conducted in English, tape-recorded, and transcribed.

The data analysis was guided by the themes in the interview protocol mentioned above. Using the learners' reports, I looked for the pathways learners followed in the process and the strategies they mentioned with regard to using the Internet as resource, the management of information, the creation of the PP presentations, the preparation for the final oral performance, and the challenges they faced in the process of orchestrating and juggling the different levels of the task. I used a teacher-reflexive thinking process (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990) to develop ways to fine-tune the instructional design and implementation strategy for future teaching and research.

Results

Task completion strategies

The data related to the first theme, what steps/strategies the students followed to complete the task,

provided support for the expectation that learners would follow their own paths through tasks (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Nunan, 1989). The groups adopted different entry points and carried out the activities in a different sequence. This was the case even with G3 and G6, who happened to be working on the same topic, "wonders of the world." Students in G6 decided to focus on the "old wonders of the world." Intrigued by the controversy over the new wonders, G3 decided to redirect their attention in that area. The shift meant restarting the Internet search to find information about the new wonders and discarding information they had about the old ones. In other words, the path that this group followed included another loop in the process that G6 did not have to follow.

The numbers of steps the groups followed ranged from six to ten with little variation in the order. The G1 pair mentioned ten steps that included three briefing sessions to discuss what to do next. Table 1 shows the steps that emerged from the students' accounts as fairly stable across groups.

Table 1. Steps in the process

1. Selecting a topic and writing a rough outline
2. Collecting information from the web
3. Selecting pertinent resources
4. Organizing ideas from the documents
5. Discussing the structure of the presentation
6. Splitting the work for more focused search for materials (if necessary)
7. Reporting back and evaluating documents with group members
8. Exploring the PowerPoint software
9. Creating the PowerPoint presentation

The students' accounts made it possible to trace variation in the sequencing of the first three steps above. Students either opted for brainstorming with peers and writing a rough outline first or for exploring the web first and then writing an outline inspired by what they discovered while surfing the net. For example, students in three groups (G1, G4 and G5) started with the outline first and then used it as a road map for the collection of information. This led to a revision of their outline in light of the information gathered from the web (the case for G1 but not for G4). The other possible entry point was to collect

information about the topic first and then write an outline. This strategy was followed by G2, G3, and G6. Thus, writing the outline figured as step 2 for G6, step 3 for G3, and step 4 for G2.

Specific collaborative strategies to divide the work were used while collecting information. S1 (G6) reported: "Each went and collected information on his own and then we compared the results and decided this is good, this is not so good, or this is too scientific." The more technically capable students in G2 used bookmarks, created a list of favorite sites, and stored their files on a flash disk. They explained the reasons for adopting this strategy: "We downloaded some information and images and put them there (in a folder) because we do not have much time in the computer rooms during the self-access hours and we know we can lose Internet connection...this way we can carry on our work!"

Furthermore, students mentioned using collaborative processes like holding meetings, "reporting to the group" after collecting information and having a discussion about "the selection of relevant documents," either with reference to the outline or to the project guidelines. The students referred to documents downloaded from the Internet as "usable documents for the project," "pertinent documents" or "documents which fit the outline."

While there seems to be convergence about the above strategies, there was variation in the number of discussions and the number of search expeditions across groups. G1 and G3 needed to start a more focused web search once they settled on an outline. The latter group had to do so because they decided to refocus their presentation. The former felt the need to do a focused web search at step 5 upon deciding "what the PP presentation [was] going to look like." That was, presumably, upon creating a storyboard for their presentation.

The three students in G3 were convinced that having to go back to collect information was a problem, but those in G1 did not share that view. In fact, students in G3 were so convinced it was a problem that they mentioned it in the beginning and once more at the end of the interview. When asked

what they would do differently next time, they responded that would do the task in a more straightforward manner and write a solid outline so that they would not have to go back to collect more information and discard information they collected before. They obviously attributed having to go back to the Internet as an indicator of poor planning.

PowerPoint Creation

In the PowerPoint creation stage, the groups were found to have followed different paths as well. The students mentioned having to "reorganize," "reformulate," and "revise" the ideas in the process of creating the slides. The more technologically capable students in Group 2 mentioned discussing possible options and the effects of PP (animation, color, and images) on the audience and made decisions accordingly. However, the less technologically prepared students did not have that level of comfort

and ease with the technology. They therefore had to explore PP first (G1 in step 9; G6 in step 5) and teach themselves how to use the software effectively.

Students in Group 5 mentioned that as they discovered the options in the software allowing more interesting ways of delivering the content, they revised the initial outline. A student in G5 explained: "the outline that we did [wrote] was a starting point but then as we did [created] the PP, we found ways to make it interesting for the students listening to us" (G5, S2).

Another strategy employed by other groups was to test their PP on their peers. Groups 1, 4, and 5 mention that they revised the presentation (and the original outline) in light of the responses they obtained from peers. These groups were keen on raising their fellow students' interest and impressing the audience. They attempted to achieve that by exploiting the technological options or by introducing "fresh content." G3, however, was the only group not to mention carrying out any discussion about the creation of the PP slides. In fact, S1 in that group exclaimed: "[I]t's not so hard to insert the format and use the options!" This raises doubts as to whether enough energy was spent within this group on the effectiveness of the PP presentation.

These groups were keen on raising their fellow students' interest and impressing the audience.

It was indeed surprising to find out when analyzing the retrospective accounts, that only two groups (G1 and G6) mentioned discussing “*what to say*” (content) and “*how to say it*” (organization) in preparation for the oral presentation in class the next day. The other groups’ account had no details beyond the creation of the PP slides. S1 in G6 and students in G1 acknowledged that not much energy was spent on preparing for the oral presentation. The two students in G1 underscored that their “biggest mistake was not to rehearse before the presentation” and that in future tasks they would work more on timing and pacing their presentation. In this exchange they explained that they did not have a script when they presented in class. Once they were selected to present in the lecture hall, they started the “real” planning:

S2: Well, actually to be honest we made a sketch the night before the final presentation when we learnt that we were selected to present our work in the lecture hall, eh...

R: So tell me about this sketch. What was it like?

S1: We thought of presenting it like a scenario but it really happened to us! We thought we will begin by saying, eh..well, I told her that we are going to be faithful and tell the audience what we felt when we first saw the word “netiquette”

R: What did YOU think?

S1: I told my friend “netiquette?” Are you sure it is not “etiquette?” and she told me “no, it is etiquette related to the Internet” and it was funny actually when we surfed the net a bit and we discovered she was right. I said: “Good job!” (laughs). So that’s how we started the presentation, if you remember.

It appears that what the students needed was the little push of being selected to get them across the finish line.

To summarize, self-reported data about the strategies students employed in the course of completing the project indicate that the students did in fact engage with the pedagogical objectives I had in

mind. By undertaking this assignment, the students were expected to display abilities in forming a thesis for their web-based research project, to articulate a scheme of work (outline or questions), to find the necessary information on the web, to select the materials best suited for their needs, to compose multimodal text, and to communicate the knowledge they had acquired to an audience. Given the evidence in the data presented so far, it can be claimed that they displayed mastery of the information literacy skills (iskills) identified by Educational Testing Services (ETS) (see <http://www.ets.org/iskills>). There is a striking match between the strategies that students reported and the seven iskills assessment indicators, as shown in Figure 1 below.

The students did not dwell on how they made use of the rhetorical functions of graphic design or whether they thought about them in the process of creating the PPs. They did indicate that they developed, in the process, a strong sense of audience. They mentioned thinking about ways to raise interest and surprise their peers with fresh ideas or a different way of dealing with the same topic. Nevertheless, it appears that some students realized, perhaps too late in the game, that the preparation for the oral presentation demanded more of their attention and energy. As a result, the students walked away from the assignment with a valuable lesson: just creating a PP slide show does not make a presentation. S2 in G4 made an insightful comment that summarized the general mood among the groups:

I’d like to add that there is no problem with finding difficulties in this project because that will give us the possibility to think and to try to find a solution; especially for such

- **Define:** Formulate a research statement to facilitate the search for information
- **Access:** Find and retrieve information from a variety of sources
- **Evaluate:** Judge the usefulness and sufficiency of information for a specific purpose
- **Manage:** Organize information so as to find it later
- **Integrate:** Summarize or otherwise synthesize information from a variety of sources
- **Create:** Generate or adapt information to meet a need, expressing a main point and supporting information
- **Communicate:** Adapt information for a particular audience

Figure 1: ETS’s iskills assessment indicators, based on Katz (2007).

an important issue in our life and our environment. So it was an opportunity to learn how we can use PP to sensitize some people to this issue [endangered species].

Another student (S1, G5) had a similar comment about the power of PP in public life:

If I'm given a chance, I would do the project on some other topic that will be used to raise public awareness like AIDS, pollution and a lot of other topics, eh... Because in our society, especially Arab and Tunisian society, there are many topics that are taboo so people don't find it easy to talk about such topics and we need discussion about these topics.

The students used this learning situation to "define their own roles and choose their own course of action" (Nunan, 1989: 128). When asked what they would do differently if they were to do the task again, they asserted they followed the "right steps" and went about the task in the "most efficient way." They felt a sense of accomplishment and appreciated the experience of engaging in such a "complex project," as S1 (G6) put it:

Despite the difficulties in the oral part ... for me, I discovered PP and I am happy we managed to do many, many things at the same time and in a very short time. It is a very interesting project. This is the first time I do something like this.

Despite the novelty of the experience for them, the groups demonstrated that they could put into practice what we taught them about searching the Internet and PP. They brought to the task surprising cooperative working skills and personal qualities rarely recorded in other teaching situations. However, the students' responses pointed to areas of difficulties that would not be easy to detect without the data in the retrospective interviews. The challenges are summarized below.

The Challenges

In response to a question about identifying the most challenging aspect of completing the project, the students mentioned three challenges in the process of

completing this web-based research project: presenting in public, selecting and organizing information from the web, and narrowing down the research topic and focusing the web search.

1. *Presenting in public:* The biggest challenge mentioned by G1, G2, and G6 was to present in public. That meant for them the ability to keep on time and to synchronize the parts among the group members. The three groups suggested that the teacher could provide further guidance about "how to talk in public" (S2) by arranging for "mock presentations" and allowing time for further revisions to the PPs.

2. *Selecting and organizing information:* It seems that by opting for collecting information first, students were overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the information they collected and the subsequent need to select sources and organize ideas into the PP. In other words, the more

information they found, the harder it was for them to control it.

3. *Writing an outline and focusing:* G3 and G4

reported having been specifically challenged in this respect. G3, for instance, mentioned "struggling" to give a particular focus for their topic and G4, the challenge of "finding fresh content and simple texts (not scientific texts)."

Contrary to the teacher's expectations, they did not think designing the PP was challenging because, it appears, they related to the PP as a recipient for their ideas/content. For instance, students referred to the process of creating the PP as "formatting" and "putting the ideas in PP format." When they ran into difficulties, they turned to their peers for help and carried on with their work.

Assumptions about Teacher and Learner Roles

The last theme explored in the interview focused on gauging the students' reaction to the teacher's role by prompting them about whether they felt they needed more assistance from the teacher. The responses indicate that they did not really expect much intervention from the teacher. They explained that they believed the assignment was "personal work." They understood their task was to work

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individually and with members of the group to complete it and to solve problems as a team rather than expect the help of the teacher. Student 1 in G2 explained: “Personally, I prefer to complete a task..eh..to try it myself and then seek feedback,” and S2 in G5 retorted: “Well, the project is designed to give the students the opportunity to prepare something personal and then the teacher is there if you need help!” S1 in G6 emphatically added: “Well, the PP presentation is **personal** in the end. It reflects what the group members wanted to do with the topic and how to do and say things.”

The only exception came from the students in G3 who mentioned needing reassurance that they were on the right path as they found the open-ended nature of the task particularly overwhelming. They felt they needed more feedback from the teacher first during the planning process, later as they embarked on creating the PP slide show, and once more when the PP was completed.

While the students were generally keen on taking decisions within the team, they also mentioned resorting to peers other than their partners. Students in G4 reported that they sought the help of students from other institutions, who “were more used to this type of work” (S3). Clearly, there was a whole dynamic of collaboration and peer support within the groups and outside of the groups across institutional lines.

It is interesting that while seeking and/or providing each other support, sharing ideas and “computer tricks,” the students left an opening for their teams to do original work and outperform the other teams. “In the end as the deadline drew near, everybody was talking about their projects so we learnt about what other groups working on ‘wonders of the world’ were doing, but we wanted, eh..to add our personal touch,” commented S1 in G6.

The students did note a place for the teacher. They felt they needed more guidance from the teacher upon completion of their first PP attempt. They insisted that the feedback from the teacher would help them improve the slide show before the final presentation, which was more of a high stakes situation for them. Obviously, some students found

the tips provided in the handouts helpful while others seemed to have made little use of them to prepare for the oral presentation.

Interestingly, the teacher’s intention was to provide guidance for the design of a reasonably effective PP slide show. The students’ reactions indicate that the guidelines fell short on drawing their attention to the importance of the delivery phase. They expressed the need for more structured feedback to improve their presentations and to practice with speaking in public. What they had in mind was probably a role for the teacher where she would model, guide, and correct behavior during the face-to-face presentation stage.

There was, indeed, no provision in my instructional strategy for a pronounced phase to prepare the students for the oral presentation. The advice and corrective feedback given to students the day of the

presentation in class came too late for them to improve their performance if they were selected to perform the next day in the lecture hall. This also raises the question whether the

ones not selected would ever use the feedback to revise their PPs. Naturally, a feedback session should not turn into heavy-handed teacher-centered corrections. To keep in tune with the principles of independent constructivist learning, a peer-review activity with the teacher as guide and facilitator is best.

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Implications of the Study

The data on the strategies students adopted to complete the assignment suggest that the students did not allow much time for creating the PP and less for preparing to deliver it. This is in contrast with the rather elaborate accounts they gave about the strategies they employed to carry out the web search and to create the PP. To focus students’ attention on these two important requirements of the assignment, two solutions can be envisioned: a structured peer-evaluation activity and a self-regulated task as preparation for the oral presentation.

A Peer-evaluation Activity

The objective of the peer-evaluation activity would be to help learners develop awareness of the

rhetorical power of PP. The method of setting up such an activity is envisioned as follows. Each pair or group finds one student to review their slide show using a peer response form (see Online Appendix E). Each pair/group is required to collect at least two responses they could use for reference to improve their slide show. For example, Howell and Boremann (1988, pp. 62-63) suggest using principles of graphic design as areas of concern for successful presentations. Ideally, the next class session is reserved for reports from each pair/group on what their peer evaluators thought about their presentation. The reports include explaining whether they agree or disagree with the evaluator and how they intend to deal with the critique.

The remaining time in class can be used for the introduction of the changes acceptable to them. The students are then informed that the next session will be reserved for real-time oral presentations and real-time oral responses from the audience in class (peers and teacher). Before they leave class, students are provided with guidelines for self-regulated preparation for the oral presentation within their groups. The guidelines assist members of the group with what to focus on and what to do as individuals and as a group to prepare for the oral presentation.

Self-regulated Preparation for the Oral Performance

The second area where improvement in the design of the assignment could be envisioned is the oral performance. The suggested change consists of introducing a self-regulated oral preparation activity to be carried out within the group before presenting in class (see Online Appendix F). The purpose of this activity is to focus students' attention on the required standards for speech delivery and other issues related to use of time, interaction with the audience, and common transition phrases for their presentation. The students can be provided with a list of ideas and advice on how to prepare for the delivery with their partners and a checklist to direct them to the requirements for a successful oral performance with PP.

This activity would be an opportunity for the students to think about the use of strategies like self-monitoring, engaging the audience, and keeping the pace of speech. It also gives students a chance to practice using the strategies before standing in front of the audience. This new element in the assignment

will focus their attention on planning and rehearsing as necessary steps to effective public presentations.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study was based on verbal reports from students. While informative, self-reporting gives access only to what the participants say they have done. Other techniques can be used to collect data on the students' composing of the PP, the collaborative dialogues, or their Internet search strategies. Data tracking software like Camtasia allows the creation of video files that document keystrokes, mouse clicks, text produced, and speech. These records yield invaluable data about other facets of task completion processes not captured in the present study. Camtasia requires high levels of technical capability, as well as a willingness to deal with very large amounts of data.

As a lone researcher the teacher may hold conferences with one group at a time using a stimulated recall protocol focusing on the PP design process. This way data can be secured using Camtasia on an external storage device or videotaped, for instance. Another possible research project can record and analyze speaking performance from a communication strategies perspective, covering both verbal and non-verbal components.

Yet another study can focus on the teachers' instructional strategies. Teachers can draw on Meskill's study of "Mrs. M" and her use of "triadic scaffolds" (2005: 48). Of interest would be what Meskill calls the "other scaffolds" teachers provide naturally while visiting the groups as they gather around the computer. Data for this project can be secured using a computer tracking device and an external video recording device. As mentioned above, to make the task manageable one group or two can be selected for the data collection rather than the whole class. Even studies carried out on a restricted scale can provide illuminating feedback to practitioners about scaffolds in computer-assisted learning environments and guideposts for better teaching practices.

Conclusion

This paper describes my attempt to connect technology use, Internet use, and oral communication skills in one course. Thanks to the retrospective data from students, it was possible to draw the paths they followed while completing the project assigned and to

learn about what challenges they faced. Caveats at the level of course design were identified and addressed as suggested above. The data provided assurance that the instructional design was engaging. Students successfully completed their projects and had a hands-on experience with web searching, the management and selection of information, and the reformulation of ideas.

The instructional design of the IT skills course described in this paper followed a constructivist perspective, blending the teaching of ICT with language learning. This study provides support that using such a perspective is possible and worthwhile. It helped create a challenging learning environment at LVN where active, purposive learning and autonomy were stimulated and initiative and creativity fostered among the cooperating students. Attempting to teach ICT as a set of isolated skills would have meant not giving these students the chance to use technology to carry out a purposive communicative task.

One student (S1, G2) described her previous personal experience with using the Internet in a vacuum: "It's not the first time I use the Internet but it is the first time I organize work like that using the Internet. I usually search for information just to take the information; not to do work." The educational answer to fill the gap is the type of project work described in this paper, where access to the Internet is connected with a task that allows the transformation of information into knowledge (Cambridge, 2007).

As revealed in the interview data, this research-based, computer-enhanced collaborative project proved to be a novel experience for the majority of the students. As can be inferred from the data, students will not forget this experience very soon. While it is clear that the teacher's pedagogical plans did not coincide totally with the students' expectations, the learners in this study did not contest the complexity and extra demands the assignment put on them. As a modest teacher-initiated research endeavor, this study illustrates what teachers can learn from their own students about what becomes of the tasks they design. A teacher may by intuition feel that something is wrong (or that all is well) but her own guesses can be contradicted by asking the learners what they think.

The results obtained in this study are a case in point. I would have never noticed during the hurly

burly of daily teaching the task completion paths, the collaborative processes the used, the distribution of role(s), nor would I have been able to identify their new learning needs as the situation unfolded. This study serves to add a bit more data about ICT use as a tool for learning in specific language teaching contexts (Cox & Marshall, 2007; Webb, 2002) and as experienced *from within* by the teacher and her students. All in all, it was a valuable experience for both the learners and the teacher/researcher.

Notes

¹The Online Appendices can be found on the *ORTESOL Journal* website, including the final project assignment sheet, oral presentation guidelines, peer response form, and rehearsal guidelines.

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Appendix A: Course Outline for IT Skills

Session 1 08/01/07	Introduction to the course The Internet and the World Wide Web
Session 2 08/02/07	Web search strategies - DEMO Use of search engines, databases and directories
Session 3 08/03/07	Web search strategies - Application <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Using keyword and phrase search and Boolean operators- Downloading documents and saving them.
Session 4 08/06/07	Project assigned <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Choice of topic and composition of groups- Starting to spot appropriate resources- Task: Evaluation of the identified resources (finding evaluation criteria and carrying out evaluation tasks)
Session 5 08/07/07	E-mail (Part I) Introduction to e-mail: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Creating e-mail accounts- Setting preferences- Customising addresses- Sending a first message
Session 6 08/08/07	E-mail (Part II) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Using e-mail attachments (sending and receiving)- Raising students' awareness to some risks related to e-mail attachments
Session 7 08/09/07	PowerPoint (Part I) – DEMO <ul style="list-style-type: none">- General presentation- Launching a new PowerPoint presentation- Combining PPT effects (colour, animation, images, etc.)
Session 8 08/10/07	PowerPoint (Part II) – APPLICATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Integrating information collected during previous sessions into a PowerPoint presentation- Applying design and communication criteria (cf. worksheet “tips”)
Session 9 08/13/07	Project Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- In-group presentations- Teacher and peer feedback
Session 10 08/14/07	PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS OF SELECTED PROJECTS (Lecture Room)