The Features of Multimedia Teaching

Du Yaomei
Beijing Institute of Technology

Abstract:
With the emergence and strengthening of global communication, higher demands and goals in teaching have been placed on English teachers. In order to heighten our English teaching variety, creativity and efficiency, we teachers have to put particular efforts on more fully preparing our lessons. Multimedia English teaching is of great importance in the digital age.

Key Words: English teaching, Feature, New age

I. Introduction
Multimedia English teaching is of great importance in the digital age.
More and more English teachers recognize the flexibility and vividness that multimedia teaching brings about and begin to put it into use in their teaching practice. Multimedia is a term that generally describes a computer based program that integrates several forms of media that may include video, sound, animation, graphics and text. The term "interactive" implies that the media responds to some input from the user. While a high level of interactivity is common in computer based games, interactivity in educational applications is frequently reduced to the level of page turning. Interactivity in educational applications should attempt to engage the learner so that a deep approach to learning is encouraged. A taxonomy of interactivity is proposed by Sims (1995) that sees each classification as "not mutually exclusive events, but elements which can be integrated to provide comprehensive and engaging instructional transactions". The levels of interactivity in this model range from "object interactivity", where the system respond to a mouse click to display an image or play a sound, to a form of interactivity that allows the user to play a role in a simulated environment, and where input from the user provides the opportunity to experience changes in environment which results from the manipulation of conditions.

II. Potential educational applications of computer
Before a decision is made to apply technology to solving an educational need, there needs to be a careful analysis of the problem to identify the most appropriate solution. Many attempts have been made to show that educational multimedia programs produce significantly better outcomes than conventional modes of instruction. The improvement usually focuses on differences between
control and treatment groups, and apparently shows that the students undertaking computer based instruction achieve higher scores than the control group. Apart from the threats to validity that plague such studies, it must be asked why conventional and computer based learning programs are being compared, when the major reason for using computer based resources must be that the pedagogical approach cannot be easily achieved by conventional means. Claims that the technology alone is responsible for learning gains are questioned by Clark and Craig (1992), who find that "multiple media, including videodisc technology, are not the factors that influence learning; the measured learning gains in studies of the instructional uses of multimedia are most likely due to instructional methods".

The following table shows the differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Traditional (instruction)</th>
<th>Extended (knowledge construction)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher role</td>
<td>Fact teller and expert</td>
<td>Collaborator and sometimes learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student role</td>
<td>Listener and learner</td>
<td>Collaborator and sometimes expert</td>
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<td>Learning emphasis</td>
<td>Facts and replication</td>
<td>Relationships and enquiry</td>
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<td>Concept of knowledge</td>
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<td>Demonstration of success</td>
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<td>Quality</td>
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<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Norm-referenced and multiple guess</td>
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Interactive multimedia may be used to deal with a specific learning problem, or to deliver an entire course. It may be used in a support role only, such as an electronic encyclopedia, or have teaching strategies embedded within the program. So in this regard the technology can be used as either a tool or a tutor, or both. A third function identified by Jonassen (1996) is that of tutee, in the form of cognitive tools. Instead of a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge (the tutor model), the computer is used as a tool that allows the learner to construct knowledge. "Instead of specialists such as instructional designers using technology to constrain students’ learning processes through prescribed communications and interactions, the technologies are taken away from the specialists and given to learners to use as media for representing and expressing what they know. Learners function as designers using technologies as tools for analyzing the world, accessing information, interpreting and organizing their personal knowledge, and representing
what they know to others” (Jonassen, 1996).

III. The features of modern teaching

1. The obvious character of a multimedia teaching system lies in that it has to incorporate into its own the synchronic teaching vs. the diachronic teaching in different time “zones”. As we can see, in comparison with the former traditional teaching, the English teacher, armed with a new multimedia system, has to put emphasis on the active tutoring and effective guidance to the students. His duty is to help to bring about natural communications with them and to demonstrate directly the best teaching materials. During the whole teaching process, the teacher’s role is to make full preparation for the teaching materials and present them in a more real-to-life multimedia way, for example, he or she can present the teaching material in a form of pictures, sounds, graphs and so on. As a result, emphasis should be put on the students’ own self-study and self-controlled practice of the language items, which, needless to say, is favorable for the learners to develop their own personality and improve the efficiency of their knowledge and skill reinforcement. The priority of such multimedia approach is that the learner can arrange and control their own time and energy and the whole teaching schedule in close accordance with their own actual situations and interests.

2. A class based on lecture with the benefit of multi-media supplement has not only been a bit more interesting, but also more effective in an individual's education. According to research findings and based on the author’s personal experience, learner-centered activities are effective. The use of multi-media as a vehicle for examples and variety in principles classes may draw more individuals into the science. First impressions are the most important, and this by no means stops with education. The first semester in any department is where the individual finds his or her first impressions of the department and science as a whole. Imagine the first year student (or any year for that matter) who is lectured to three to five days a week in upwards of an hour at a time and begins to dread the constant hammering of theories and presentations of the abstract without any variety and real world applications. It quite frankly would alienate anyone. However, it will be quite different in classes where video and audio tapes have been presented, along with the real world applications that can be asserted in class and incorporating newspaper articles, videos, audio tapes, and public lectures/forums to enhance the curriculum. In multimedia teaching, it is easy to do so.

The teacher creates the learning environment, and the learning that occurs within this environment becomes meaningful when the learner situates the knowledge in their own world. The academic knowledge should be situated in some context to allow the student to make sense of the knowledge as it applies to their own world. Without this opportunity the knowledge remains
abstract and lacks meaningful interpretation.

With the multimedia system as means for teaching and learning, students can be, and in many ways, actually are, taken as the center of the whole teaching practice, while the teacher is only the instructor or organizer. He should not intervene into the learners’ study process too much. Computer-aided teaching programs have already greatly changed the traditional “duck-feeding” teaching method in hope for the learners to control the whole teaching process so as to cultivate the students’ self-exploring spirit. Everything to teach is “prefabricated” as the main points in the software menu. What the students need to do is to enter into specific program to learn the detailed materials to be presented on the screen. Turning on the program and looking at the large quantities of language materials, the student can analyze and digest them, summing up all the basic grammatical points and finally mastering the key words or phrases so that the new language items they’ve learned aid to the old ones of their own.

3. The combination of audio and visual effects can help to make the whole language knowledge and skill transfer and impartation more dynamic, immediate and more easily accessible. As Jack Longergan points, “When we use teaching materials to promote communicative activities, they rest upon the idea of an information gap.” For example, in class, the teacher can make some students just watch the VCD or video silently without earphones, while the other group just listen with their eyes closed or sitting back to the screen. That means some students have knowledge of the facts, other students must use English to find out what this is. This helps to create an information gap—the listeners lack vital information and must ask their own counterparts about the setting, the characters in the game and so on. Then, students can inquire and share information among themselves. Such practice also helps to create a guided speaking practice, which can also contribute to the improvement of students’ communicative fluency. A better environment for English learners should be created. We must create a language learning environment that suits the target language’s country’s local conditions, customs and cultural background, and offer foreign language learning resources and facilities. Environments are both hard and soft. For the former, we must update our facilities. Regarding soft environment, we should offer best services with the updated hardware and creat a good academic atmosphere for learners. In conventional teaching, the teacher acts as the storyteller. While this style of delivery is effective in some situations, it clearly fails to provide the support needed to deal with difficult topics - there is little opportunity to identify misconceptions and initiate remediation.

4. In modern English teaching, a computer assisted teaching system can provide the students with its own feedback in sound and pictures form to react to the learner if their answers are right or wrong immediately the students finish their assignments in the computer. In addition, the
system can help the students correct their own errors instantly as they need.

The teacher sets a task goal and the student acts to achieve this goal. The teacher gives feedback on the student’s action, and the student can then modify their action in light of this feedback. Computer programs could deliver training at a time and place convenient to all parties, provide flexibility in terms of progression and pace, generate and score tests, record all interaction between the learner and the system and produce detailed reports of this interaction. These systems allowed a student to use a computer as both a tool and a tutor - the tutor would provide step by step assistance in the performance of specific computer related tasks, in much the same way as help "wizards" incorporated within many Microsoft products try to anticipate users needs in designing a new spreadsheet or database.

With the software programs as an aid the classroom activities can be organized in a great variety of ways. By not only “inputting” information from a video, VCD or other moving pictures, but also “outputting” information in the organized and guided activities, students listening, speaking, reading and writing are all trained in this process. Traditional education can help the students to lay a sound foundation in grammar and vocabulary, but its disadvantage is that it can’t give the students enough chances to practice what they learn when they are not immersed in it.

5. Modern English teaching can take the advantage of the Internet and intranet which can work by providing different programs in integrated and comprehensive multimedia way for students to share coursewares and teaching resources among different colleges and universities for wider information and knowledge exchange. Therefore it can be expected that some day the educational network of the whole world can be joined together into a large one.

Such diversified and contextualized software programs can actually be made by teachers according to their own real academic basis, which will in turn heighten their study efficiency. The students can also have their web pals or key pals from all parts of the world to keep email correspondence with each other. Therefore, compared to traditional classes, instructional multimedia teaching programs can be easily revised, embellished and refreshed to meet the changing needs of their users. In brief, multimedia computer assisted teaching system may have far more advantages than here mentioned.

IV. The principles the teacher should follow in modern English teaching

The advantages of each form of media in supporting learning has been described by Laurillard (1993), who identifies the ideal teaching-learning process as one containing discursive, interactive, reflective and adaptive elements. Laurillard argues that academic knowledge, unlike experiential knowledge, is a second order of knowledge that the learner cannot directly experience. The teacher therefore acts as a mediator to this knowledge, a process that requires discussion
between teacher and learner, and confirmation that the student has correctly understood the concept. The teacher should follow these principles:

. **Pedagogical philosophy:** does the program merely transmit information, where the learner is a passive recipient of instruction, or does it provide a rich learning environment that addresses unique interests, styles, motivations, capabilities of individual learners: does it provide opportunities to tailor learning environments?

. **Underlying psychology:** does the program consist primarily of shaping behaviors through stimulus, response, feedback and reinforcement, or does it provide a wide variety of learning strategies that foster the construction of mental models?

. **Goal orientation:** sharply focused or more or less unfocused? Are the goals appropriate to the interactive program?

. **Instructional sequencing:** are the problems presented in the program purposefully designed to be intrinsically interesting, problem-oriented and challenging, enabling learners to retrieve and construct knowledge in new meaningful and relevant contexts.

. **Experiential validity:** to what extent does the program provide opportunities for situated learning? How abstract are the learning activities; what capabilities are there for applying learning to real world contexts?

. **Value of errors:** does the package provide opportunities for learning by mistakes, or are the contingencies of instruction arranged in such a way that learners can only make correct responses?

. **Role of instructor:** is the packaged “teacher-proof” - is it merely an authoritarian provider of knowledge, or is it designed to enable teachers or trainers to have critical roles?

. **User activity:** engaging learners in the process of creating, elaborating or representing knowledge. This whole question of interactivity is a critical one.

Modern English teaching in a multimedia teaching manner can be expected to be full of innovations which can be regarded as the embodiment of our educational reform. Such a teaching process also calls for quality education, fundamental education and professional development. An English teacher is expected to promote innovations in his or her teaching and form new thinking and belief as well as confidence in his ever-changing and diversifying language teaching practice.
The role of an English teacher is to facilitate the innovation progress in his or her classroom presentation and demonstration. Palmer (1993) sees the point that “behind every in-service teacher education program there is normally an underlying desire for changes in teaching practice and behavior.” A teacher in the digital age should be an expert both in English and the mastery of multimedia teaching facilities because his or her development and successful implementation of innovations are closely related. To use technology as an effective educational tool, the teacher has to be armed with a strong pedagogical foundation and rebuild his teaching and education principles from the teacher-centred, and the dominant information-deliverer into student-centered communicative one. Good instructors have not only excellent language skills and knowledge about foreign language teaching theories but also the ability to organize and facilitate learning and positive personalities. (Zhang and Li, 1999). They must also possess the ability to observe, summarize and reason from what they see and hear, organizing and facilitating classroom and campus wide English learning activities. The conventional goal is characterized by producing monotranslators, English language and literature researchers and teachers. Yet, China needs more than ever a variety of talents in addition to the ones mentioned above. The goal should help cultivate innovative students with creativity, individuality and potentials of analysis, summarization, criticism and reasoning.

V. Conclusion

Education is not just for purely academic things, but is a means of providing the individual with the ability to learn the various skills and accumulate the knowledge that they will need throughout their lives. Education is continual and evolutionary, beginning when we are born and ending only when we die. The formal education system is in place to try to provide its students with the ability to learn independently which will be worth more to them in the long term than being able to recite a poem. There is no doubt that there is a strong sense of optimism in some people about the possible influence of micro-computers in the future of education, however, before we can decide on its effects, we must first determine what need or use the educational system has for IT. To further improve English teaching in the digital age, we need to adjust our goal in teaching in order to meet the challenges presented by the rapidly globalized economy and the unique needs of today’s college students. Learners’ initiatives and autonomy should be encouraged. A more communication-oriented system are called for. What’s more, creative and effective teaching practices must be adopted.

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