Cambridge English

Teacher Development

Integrating technology into your teaching

As technology becomes increasingly embedded in our daily lives, teachers are coming under pressure to use technology in the classroom. From high-cost options such as interactive whiteboards (IWBs), to low- or no-cost options such as learners using their own mobile phones, teachers are expected to know how to use technology in support of language learning – and in a *meaningful and principled* way. Unsurprisingly, teachers find themselves asking questions – questions about *how* to integrate technology into their language classes, about *why* they should be using it, about *what* to use, and about *when* to use it.

In the video accompanying this article, I suggest that there are a number of key questions you can ask yourself when planning to use technology in the English language classroom. These questions can help you plan individual lessons, but are particularly useful to ask when looking at your syllabus, and working out where to slot in specific technology-related tasks and tools.

Here's another way of looking at how to integrate technology into your teaching:

1 Survey the terrain

You can't start using technology and tools until you know what's available. You need to survey the terrain. That is, take a good look at what's out there, get an overview of the tools and software, and think about what each might be good for (or not so good for) in class. Sounds simple, but how do you get up to speed with what's already there, and how do you keep up with the new tools and software constantly appearing? Here are some suggestions:

- Follow a couple of key blogs that review tools that teachers can use. My personal favourites: Richard Byrne's Free Technology for teachers, Cool tools for schools, and Nik Peachey's Learning Technology blog.

- Join online teacher groups that discuss and share information about technology in teaching. My personal favourites: Webheads, and IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG discussion list.

- Build up your PLN (Personal Learning Network) in Twitter, Facebook and/or Google +. Your PLN will share resources and ideas that can help you keep an eye on what's useful for teaching.

- Keep any eye on websites with regularly updated quality content showcasing new tech tools for teaching. My personal favourites: The Consultants-E's Tool of the month, and Russell Stannard's Teacher Training videos site with tutorials on how to use a wealth of tech tools.

2 Get a map

Clearly knowing what's out there is just the first step. More important is knowing how to map the technology onto your curriculum, so that using technology has a particular goal and rationale behind it. Take your coursebook syllabus (or whatever syllabus you use), and physically map the tasks and tools you could use onto it, in a grid. Brainstorm a number of options and ideas with a group of colleagues for each unit of your coursebook or syllabus. When you've got three or four options for each unit, take the next step below to help you decide which to try out and which to discard.

3 Ask for directions

Integrating technology is not just finding a new tool or idea and then trying it out. You need to be absolutely clear about why you're using the tool, and what *added value* it's bringing to the class. Ask yourself the key questions I mention in the accompanying video. Ask about: the outcomes of using the technology, the added value it brings (if any), the time and effort needed to use the tool, the syllabus fit, the skills needed by teachers and learners, the location (i.e. where you will carry out the activity), and role of the technology.

4 Test drive

Try out your activities and ideas with a class. Keep notes of how you think it went and what you could do to improve the lesson, and also get feedback from your learners. You may think that an activity was useful, but your learners may think it was a waste of time. So test drive your ideas, and then check.

This item is based on material from Cambridge English Teacher, the professional membership that supports teaching excellence. This article relates to a talk and a discussion forum with Consultant for Technology Nicky Hockly. Find out more at:
www.CambridgeEnglishTeacher.org