ON THE NET
ICT4LT - Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers

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Foreign language (FL) teachers have long been leaders in the use of technology in the classroom, from short wave radio and newspapers, to film strips, to tape recorders, to records, 16 mm films, video, and now computers, as a means of bringing authentic language and culture to their students. Computer and Internet technologies require significantly more technical training than pressing the play button on an audio cassette player, but the pedagogical skills needed to integrate these materials into a well designed lesson plan are similar in many ways. Because there are FL teachers, and even methods instructors, whose training has not prepared them to use these new tools, it has made sense for specialists to use this technology to provide an introduction to these skills in the form of modules that can be plugged into a methods course or explored by individual teachers to further their professional development. ICT4LT is a very good example of these materials. *Please note that the authors of this article developed another Web site providing access to modules supporting a graduate course on technology in the FL classroom:http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/mm-course/*
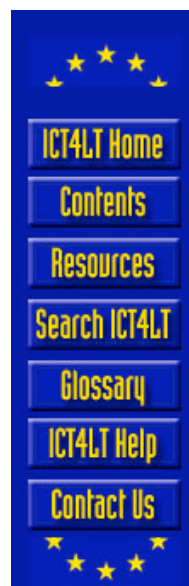

The Project

The ICT4LT project located at http://www.ict4lt.org/, is the result of efforts by five institutions in the United Kingdom, Finland, and Italy and was created with the aid of public funds, namely the Socrates Programme of the Directorate for Education and Culture at the European Commission (EC). Socrates is an EC program that encourages transnational cooperation in education and offers particular help to projects involving the Least Widely Used and Least Taught (LWULT) languages. (This EC official term for languages other than English, French, German and Spanish parallels that used in the United States: Less Commonly Taught Languages [LCTLs]). The emphasis on LWULTs is reflected in the partnerships with project colleagues in Italy and Finland, who developed the multilingual versions of the Web site.

The original target audience was European language teachers vis-à-vis their need for training in technology and its integration into the FL curriculum. The materials were developed and piloted with groups of language teachers and teacher trainers in the UK, Italy, and Finland. Currently, these modules are available online in English, Italian, Finnish and Swedish.* In this review we will only examine the English section.

The primary emphasis of the site is on the integration of technology for the express purpose of furthering foreign language instruction and learning. As such, the modules are pedagogy and methodology based and derive from years of experience held by language instructors keen on enhancing language learning via the implementation of new technologies.

Ancillaries

The overall site is clearly designed and easy to navigate. Basic information about the project goals, history, and authors is readily available.

The ICT4LT site offers several ancillaries, accessible from a sidebar: the home page, contents leading to the teaching modules, Web resources, a search engine for the site, glossary of technology terms, a help page, and contact information. A few of these are discussed in more detail below.

Usage Requirements: Entry Level Ability

This Web site is designed for inservice FL teachers and presumes a nominal level of information technology acumen. In general, knowledge of the following are presupposed: the basics of Windows 95 or higher, word-processing skills, use of a Web browser, and use of email software. To determine this, an ICT Can Do List is offered (on the English site) for self-assessment.

ICT Can Do List (pdf)

This extensive self-evaluation is available for FL teachers to enable them to assess the development of their own technology skills, experience and understanding before delving into any of the modules. While the list of technologies is impressive, only six are fully developed, the others being labeled as "under

construction." The assessments that are present are thorough and include knowledge of Windows, word processors (Microsoft Word), browsers (Internet Explorer), e-mail software, presentation software (PowerPoint), and spreadsheets (Excel). The portions yet to be developed have, at the very least, a definition and brief explanation plus references to associated modules and occasionally links to topically related sites on the Internet. The page is frequently updated by Graham Davies, clearly a time-consuming endeavor, especially in light of the fact that these technologies are constantly evolving. Nevertheless, we hope that Professor Davies will continue to expand on the information offered here and fill out the remaining assessments. The latter include sound, video, and image editing, authoring tools, anti-virus and firewall software, CDs and DVDs, parsers, and concordancers. This section is particularly helpful for teachers who are frequently asked to assess their strengths, weaknesses, and abilities vis-à-vis technologies in order to participate in workshops and conference sessions.

Hardware Requirements

According to the site, in order to complete the modules most efficiently and effectively, access to suitable hardware is essential. This includes the following:

- a multimedia PC (MPC) with a Pentium processor: 350 MHz or higher
- at least 64 Mb of RAM
- 10 Gb hard disk drive with adequate free space
- Microsoft Windows 98 or higher
- a video card capable of displaying a variety of display screen resolutions and high colour
- a CD-ROM drive (12x or higher)
- a SoundBlaster-compatible soundcard, e.g. SoundBlaster
- a microphone
- access to the Internet via a modem (56 kbps or higher) or via an institutional network.
- a browser: Netscape or Internet Explorer
- Microsoft Office suite
- a printer

Although this list certainly represents the most common hardware and software generally found, it seems to suggest that those using other operating systems (Mac) or non-Microsoft software may not benefit from the expertise found here. That is actually not the case because so many of the skills presented are general enough to be applicable far beyond these implied limits.

ICT4LT: English Glossary

This is an alphabetized list of technical terms specific to the ICT4LT project, with cross-referencing indicated by italics. The site managers are in the process of activating the numerous additional URLs so that they are clickable links.

ICT4LT: Resource Centre

This is a nascent section with offerings on getting started on the WWW/Internet, WWW links, professional organizations, select bibliography and reference works, and CALL software information, among other entries.

The Modules

The primary goal of the site is to provide training modules that are divided into *Basic, Intermediate,* and *Advanced Level* sections with five modules each plus an additional section with room for expansion. Each module begins with identification of the authors and a statement of their aims for the module. Several topics follow, depending on the focus of the module. Frequently discussion questions and related Internet links are included as well. The module ends with a bibliography and reference section and an opportunity

for the user to provide feedback to the authors of the site. A listing of the modules offered at the time of this writing follows, grouped according to level.

Basic Level Modules

1.1	Introduction to new technologies and how they can contribute to language learning and teaching
1.2	Introduction to computer hardware and software: what the language teacher needs to know
1.3	Using text tools in the modern foreign languages classroom
1.4	Introduction to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)
1.5	Introduction to the Internet

Intermediate Level Modules

2.1	CALL methodology: integrating CALL into study programmes
2.2	Introduction to multimedia CALL
2.3	Exploiting World Wide Web resources online and offline
2.4	Using concordance programs in the modern foreign languages classroom
2.5	Introduction to CALL authoring programs

Advanced Level Modules

3.1	Managing a multimedia language centre
3.2	CALL software design and implementation
3.3	Creating a World Wide Web site
3.4	Corpus linguistics
3.5	Human Language Technologies (HLT)

An additional module is offered that deals with Computer-Aided Assessment (CAS) and language learning:

4.1	Computer Aided Assessment (CAA) and language learning

The appearance of this final module is felicitous and hopefully signals the continuation of development of this valuable resource. Indeed, the ICT4LT project description found in the Socrates database includes the following notation: "The ICT4LT project is updated on a weekly basis and continues to grow. New modules are under consideration, e.g. Early Language Learning and ICT." Such expansion would be most welcome and would surely add to the knowledge base of integration of technology in FL instruction.

Site Statistics

The ICT4LT appears to be a much visited site, as indicated by the following statistics recorded for the fall of 2003. Numbers are visits or "hits" to the site per day.

- October 2003: 661 per day
- September 2003: 572 per day
- Aug ust 2003: 463 per day
- Average over 3 months: 565 per day

There is even a "top ten countries" list, giving the origins of visitors to the site in October of 2003: United Kingdom, Finland, Spain, USA, Australia, Netherlands, Italy, Canada, Belgium, and Greece. All told, the site had visitors from over 70 different countries in that month. The site also rates the modules for

"popularity" -- a sort of billboard of "hits" in both an Internet and a musical sense. Module 2.2 has held the number one position for nearly three years; perhaps this would be a good place for an initial foray.

The ICT4LT is an excellent resource for any FL teacher interested in becoming knowledgeable about technology and language instruction. The project represents an immense effort to assist colleagues in this endeavor, and it continues as truly a labor of love by the authors who still maintain it despite the end of funding. The modules can be beneficial to individuals learning through self-study as well as teacher trainers wishing to use them for an additional resource in workshops or courses on language methodology and/or integration of technology in the FL curriculum.

* While all language versions contain the entire module offerings, the English site is regularly updated and maintained by Graham Davies, Visiting Professor, Thames Valley University and contains several additional ancillaries such as the ICT Can Do List and the English glossary of terminology.