INSPIRING LEARNERS ... AND TEACHERS TOO

Ewan McIntosh, Musselburgh Grammar School

INTRODUCTION

What is ICT?

ICT - these three letters can mean many things to modern foreign language teachers: enthusiasm to some, but concern, fear, and even loathing to others. For this practitioner, however, these three letters have been bread and butter since the age of six, when I first started to write programs on my brother's Sinclair ZX Spectrum. The first program was a jagged Ferris wheel that spun slowly ad nauseam on a yellow background. It took about eight hours of programming, where every detail had to be given to the computer in order to create the image and then the animation. I recorded the program onto audiocassette, crossing my fingers that the cassette wouldn't jam. Sometimes it did and I lost everything. Eight hours is a lot of work for a four-year-old to lose. Those days, thankfully, are past. Information Communication Technology is more about the user having some information he or she needs to communicate, than about the technology required to do so. Indeed, Information Technology (IT) really began during World War Two, where MI5's Registry started using a card index system to keep tabs on 250,000 people believed to be spies. IT comprises anything that makes information easier to digest. The communication part was added with the advent of radio and, later, the Internet. We certainly don't want, nor do we need, a generation of computer-programming language teachers. So why do we bother having conferences about ICT? It should all be so simple.This paper has several aims. One is certainly to convince teachers that ICT is important to them and their pupils, not just a gimmick, but a central part of making teaching and learning better. The second is to show through some examples how teachers' imaginations, and not their know-how on a PC, are the way towards improving the use of ICT in language teaching. The third aim is to show how new technology is not, necessarily, about new ideas, and how we must not forget the most important aspect of a teacher's trade: sound pedagogy.

Equipment

For the purposes of brevity I will assume that most Modern Languages classrooms have at least one PC, some software (programmes) to make it work, an Internet connection, and a couple of power sockets. Here are two relatively new pieces of equipment, which can make dissemination of ICT to 30 pupils easier.The Interactive Whiteboard, or i-Board, is the latest craze in language education. However, it can easily be misused, underused, overused or abused and is only truly interactive in a few situations. It acts in the same way as (1) a whiteboard which can save what you've written to disk, (2) a projector screen where anything on your computer screen (CD-Rom, prepared activity, Internet material, word processed document) can be seen by the whole class, and (3) all of the above, but where you can move or activate the material on screen (graphics, words, Internet links) by touching the board with your finger or special pen, instead of using the computer keyboard or mouse.I do not work with an i-Board but have done so, both successfully and unsuccessfully in the past. However, I am lucky to have access to a data projector. The data projector connects to the back of my computer and throws up everything on my computer screen onto my standard, greasy, dirty whiteboard. But it works, and there is no cable to trip up on between the computer and whiteboard (a fatal problem with the i-Board). I can turn my traditional whiteboard (cost approximately £150) into a pedagogically sound competitor to the i-Board (cost £1400) by adding some coloured board markers to the equation. This is what I call the i-Board alternative. Its uses are described in the next part.

PRACTICAL USES OF ICT IN MFL

Attitudes to Internet use
All schools in Scotland have connections of some description to the Internet, which includes the pages of the World Wide Web and email access. In many schools pupils have their own personal email access at school. Practical points to bear in mind when considering using the World Wide Web in your lessons are

- Have there been any announcements that service will be interrupted (for maintenance or repair)?
- Can you view the pages you want on school computers? Administrators often block what they consider 'undesirable' material. This has been known to include anything with the word 'French'!
- Will the site information change between you setting a task and the pupils carrying out that task? For example, pupils 'booking' a French cinema ticket will find the films change on Wednesdays in France, not Fridays, and news sites change several times daily.

The part of the Internet called the World Wide Web provides several uses, and in each use there is some evidence of over-kill.

First of all, as a primary source of materials there is a plethora of modern language websites, each one linked to each other, few of them offering the 'one-stop-shop' panacea sought by most teachers. It is therefore understandable that teachers find this method more time consuming than traditional material hunting or creating methods. For some, it is more efficient to make a worksheet from scratch than set out on the Internet with no guarantee of finding something that suits the bill. Also, most teachers say they prefer to use resources they have created themselves. This, however, has not stopped teachers in the past sharing worksheet photocopies with each other, so why the problem in leaving out the photocopier and going for a direct swap on a website?The second use is as a materials creator, using one of a small handful of simple programming sites (www.quia.com, www.hotpotatoes.com). Although the number of such sites is relatively small there are some reasons given for not using them. The requirement to register or pay a subscription fee is a turn-off for some departments, although fees are kept very low and often cost little more than one textbook and the registration process is done online in five minutes. For others, the reason given is lack of time to use the programme. I would argue that the time spent is similar to or less than the time spent on creation of a worksheet. As Graham Davies, the keynote speaker at the Scottish CILT ICT conference in February, pointed out, we don't want language teachers to become programmers. However, knowing how the most basic of processes works may help reduce time and money spent on producing more traditional resources, and introduce an alternative to death-by-worksheets. The interactive games can be played by pairs on the class computer, or played as a whole class, in teams, using a data projector to throw the computer image onto a whiteboard. In this way, important points can be annotated by the teacher or by pupils on the board as the games unfold.The third use of the Internet is as a source of information that pupils use alone on one computer. This is the most frequently practised use of the Internet, but quite possibly the least effective. As a daily Internet user myself, if I don't know exactly what I am looking for (and occasionally even when I do) I find it difficult to find a relevant, reliable source of information. As a pupil looking for information in the foreign language some very advanced searching, sifting and evaluation skills are required, skills that most university undergraduates find difficult to hone down. It also uses up vast amounts of time on the class computer if such surfing is done in class time. It is not the most effective use of the class computer one can muster.

Far more effective, but requiring some forethought by the teacher, is a more heavily structured Internet Challenge. (I originally heard of these from Mark Pentleton, of the Partners in Excellence programme, and examples of Internet Challenges will soon be available on a new website created by the author.) This is a fourth use of the Internet, a series of tasks carried out individually or in pairs by pupils who must answer very specific questions from a question card. The question card gives them the precise website address and then more or less help to find the parts of the website they need to access in order to answer each point. This is an exercise with several positive gains for pupils in terms of reading and writing. First, pupils practise skim reading, as a homepage provides a large variety of information through which one must sift, together with graphical clues as to the meaning of words. Secondly, pupils can access audio and video material related to what they are reading, and the experience becomes truly interactive. The Internet is also home to online dictionaries and translation tools in every language. Translation tools are notorious for coming up with strange translations, but the information is normally correct and they can be used to translate whole web pages at a time. For example, if you want an S1 class to sample Equipe newspaper, they will certainly need some degree of translation to reap the benefits of this piece of realia. Rather than rely on the teacher to do the work for them, they can choose the passages or the pages they wish translated. (Try Babelfish on Altavista.) Online dictionaries make more difficult texts accessible to all, because the process of looking up words is made quicker and less frustrating. This is useful where a pupil may have the cognitive ability (intellect) to understand the concepts in a text but may find the language just a little too difficult. A full translation is not required but there are more unknown words than

can be feasibly looked up in a conventional dictionary. Some might argue that the text is simply too difficult and should be simplified by the teacher or scrapped altogether. However, if we want our pupils' reading skills to improve we must give them more and more complex texts to read (see Cummins, J, *e-Lective Language Learning*, **TESOL Journal**, Spring 1998, University of Toronto). The online dictionary makes the process far quicker and less frustrating for the learner, who in turn will be able to spend longer on comprehensible yet difficult reading activities. The importance of reading in relation to overall language competence (see Cummins, J, *ibid*) means that this is a very worthwhile venture for all language teachers and learners.Once the language teacher's skills have been tried and tested (and this may be over a few months or a few years) there is the distinct possibility of using the Internet to publish one's resources, by creating a web page. This is described later.But the Internet is not the end of ICT in Modern Languages. It is but one tool in our kit.

Email use

Email has helped bring us back to seeing the importance of reading and writing in our curriculum, and sharing this link with pupils seems an obvious way to encourage them to enjoy these aspects of language learning. The exchange of traditional letters (snail mail) with foreign school pupils seems redundant when a quicker more versatile means of communication is open to - practically - all. Moreover, school exchanges on email are not limited to one school. One email can be sent to as many people as required without any extra effort. If one school fails to reply in a timely fashion the chances are that another school will provide food for thought for the next lesson with a particular class. Finding schools with whom to communicate is easy, too, with sites like www.momes.net offering a notice board for those interested in hooking up. More sites for email exchanges, taken from ICT4LT are: Hands On Europe, Windows on the World, The British Council, European Schoolnet, and PICT.

Preparing emails also encourages the drafting and redrafting discussed in the following section on word processing. Language can therefore be of a high quality thanks to the a-synchronous communication of email, that is, because each party chooses when to reply and is under no pressure to respond immediately. It is also conceivable that pupils would work collaboratively on emails, learning from each other and the teacher, and even having a corrected version of the email returned by the addressee.Email is not restricted to the sending of words alone, however, as almost anything can be sent as an 'attachment'. Pictures can be downloaded from digital cameras, scanners or the Internet to show off the class, the town or the country to the other school pupils. Small audio and/or video files can also be attached to emails, making a written medium become a learning tool for speaking, listening, writing and viewing, to the benefit of your pupils and the pupils of another school in another country. And, being an a-synchronous means of communication, the Speaking element practised in the creation of an audio file can also be better prepared, of a higher quality than if the Speaking were done in a synchronous fashion, over the telephone, for example. All this means that email can be used not only for traditional penpal-type chit-chat about oneself and what one does at the weekend (we do enough of that in class as it is!) but also as a means of really sharing cultures, and seeing how others live. Pupils will quickly see for themselves that the French community, for example, is not restricted to gendarmes and waiters with handlebar moustaches, after having written a request for information about housing to a pupil in deepest Senegal. Above all, the way pupils learn to write and speak in the foreign language will change dramatically by carrying out tasks in this way, and their motivation to continue studying a language, regardless of level, does increase.

Word Processing

Word Processing programmes, notably Microsoft Word, offer a wealth of teaching and learning opportunities. Teachers use this programme extensively to make up worksheets and do their administration, but Modern Languages pupils rarely use word processors to learn. One class computer may be insufficient to take full advantage of what word processors have to offer, but homework can be set in the knowledge pupils have access to the equipment and programme at home, in the school or community library.Word Processors allow us to make mistakes in private, have some instant error correction, delete and change what we have written. Error correction can come from the teacher or, if the pupil wishes to work alone, from the French spelling and grammar check on the machine. Pupils learn how to get foreign accents in their texts. Importantly in this age of producing 'folio' work, it affords another opportunity to draft and redraft written work. Also, it allows easy sharing of work, so pupils can learn from each other. Banks of computers are not required for this activity; it can be done at home, individually or in pairs at the classroom computer(s), or in a session at the school's library, computer lab or room borrowed from Computing Studies. Work can be saved to a school server, pupils' private disk for work at home, or emailed directly to the teacher and classmates.After a pupil has produced the initial text, the teacher can doctor a copy for use as a cloze exercise or highlight good structures (s)he wants other pupils to try using. This can be printed, sent round as an email attachment, or, if you're lucky to have access to a data projector, presented to the whole class as a lesson in editing. For the lucky few, there is the possibility of doing a 'live' edit with the cooperation of the class if there is access to an interactive whiteboard. The teacher

and pupils can actively add text, circle and underline pertinent language points (and mistakes) and learn from each other through being the marker.

PowerPoint
Presentation programmes, such as PowerPoint (for the PC) or the easy-to-use Keynote (for Apple Mac) , are used a great deal by administrators when giving talks on their latest initiative. (Some Apple Mac dealers for education are selling this presentation software with a free update to system OS X, the operating system required to run the powerful presentation software. Schools could save a substantial sum, as well as creating a new learning and teaching resource, if they are already equipped with Macs.) Presentations created on these programmes consequently have a reputation for being nothing more than a fancy way of boring an audience. This can be true. But for the language teacher there is a wealth of pedagogical advance in the ability PowerPoint offers in showing off grammatical structures and linguistic processes. For its initial use a data projector is essential so that the whole class can easily view the material you are showing.PowerPoint allows the teacher to create a set of slides with each slide containing text, picture, video, audio or any combination of the above. Each individual slide is shown on a click of the mouse. Within each slide itself text, picture, video or audio can be made to appear in a certain order, again on the click of a mouse. In this way it is like a traditional OHT, with sheets of A4 being drawn down over the pre-prepared presentation, but, of course, smoother, far more professional and, importantly, saved to disk for use by the teacher or pupil at future dates. Also, you can have video clips and Internet sites appear on cue. *Listing concepts/lesson aims/vocabulary*

The simplest of options is for a slide to list ideas or vocabulary, thus saving the need to write, erase and re-write frequently taught material on a board. Vocabulary can be revealed a word or phrase at a time.*Adding pictures: flashcards*
Create full board sized flashcards by placing one image on each slide. Images can be procured from the Internet (copyright rules should be observed here. For clip art, Microsoft Design Gallery Live is the best solution, with a wide range of graphics teachers can borrow). Above the graphics you can then make the vocabulary text appear - colour-coded by gender, of course - seamlessly introducing the written word in the early stages. This has proved a big success in lower and higher sets of S1 and S2 pupils' accuracy in writing.

Animating text for subtitles
An idea I originally had while watching *La Dame des Piques* at the Bastille Opéra was introducing subtitles (or supertitles) to make audio easier to understand. With more tricky or lengthy listening tasks, one can reproduce the text line-by-line in a set of PowerPoint slides. As the cassette advances in class, the teacher clicks the text along at the same pace. The 'typing' animation feature of PowerPoint makes text appear on screen at the same pace as the spoken word. Lower sets appreciate the extra help of seeing French as well as hearing it. Top sets can deduce the meaning of more complex language and distractors during and after the listening exercise. The whole process of listening while reading has improved the listening grades of all sets of French pupils I teach, from S1 to Standard Grade - most of my Foundation pupils achieve Grade 3 in Listening exams. The same could be extended to Standard Grade, indeed, pupils are advised from a variety of sources to listen and read transcripts simultaneously. (See BBC's bitesize revision website.)

The scanner
The same type of editing exercise as described in the Word Processing section can be carried out with pupils' original handwritten exercises. The trick here is to scan in examples of good and poor work pupils have produced and then place them as picture files into Microsoft Word or Imaging programmes. Using a data projector to throw the image onto the class whiteboard the teacher then turns his or her class into a group of markers by asking them to spot the errors and good points in their peers' work. The annotation of errors is carried out on the projected image using normal (red) board markers. Pupils respond well to this, liking the 'responsibility' of being a marker, and every pupil gains an enviable insight into how to improve their work because they have seen the practical implications of what they write. Some of my small-scale research has shown grades increase by one or two marks in Standard Grade writing assessments after this process of group evaluation and redrafting. It is important for morale to rotate the edited pupils over time.

ICT beyond the classroom
Much of what has been described here is not just for the teacher to use. Indeed, the point of introducing ICT is to involve pupils more than we do now. Thanks to simple, common programmes, any languages department with the will and some time can put its worksheets, interactive materials, audio files, and examples of good work or PowerPoint presentations online, for pupils and colleagues to access at home.If the thought of a school department going online seems overwhelming, then pupils can and must still have easy access to resources

created by the teacher. Resources should be created with this in mind. A PowerPoint presentation or Internet Challenge must be sufficiently clear so that a pupil can use them alone or with only minimal guidance for revision or to catch up after an absence from school. Musselburgh Grammar School is currently attempting an ambitious project to do just that, and the resources will be open to all. The creation of a website is not just a publicity exercise here, but a chance to bring the ICT and interactive language education the school can offer into the homes of all its pupils.

WHY IMPLEMENT ICT?

Attitudes towards ICT in education as a barrier

I have argued that practical reasons for not implementing the simplest of ICT ideas are few. All the resources described should be already in schools, either in Modern Languages departments or within easy reach. I have deliberately not written about CD-ROMs, but have shown some ways of obtaining their multimedia effect using some old technology. All the resources described certainly require some training (in the case of PowerPoint this is essential) or time to experiment with (Internet, email). In the latter, there is no reason why some of the experimentation should not take place in the class. Whether successful or not for you, there will always be learning opportunities for pupils in the processes involved in booking a train ticket, researching prices of clothes and food in different parts of the world. Failure in this respect will be virtually non-existent. I am a staunch believer that ICT really does enhance learning. The press and many of those who don't teach with ICT as a tool would have us believe that there are fewer gains than were previously thought. (For a recent example see Michael Wright's article 'Here's soot in your face', *The Sunday Times 'Doors'*, February 23, 2003.)Graham Davies in his conference keynote speech pointed to a more practical example where achievement measured by number of GCSE passes increased by 15% over three years after the introduction of a languages ICT suite and the integration of ICT to the daily languages curriculum. This could be down to the ICT itself or the fact that pedagogy improved over this period, but there seemed to be an obvious link between improvement in grades and the introduction of ICT to the modern language class. There is also a link in the popularity of subjects that have gone for the pro-ICT approach. The Scholar system of Heriot Watt University for the sciences has seen a 22% rise in the uptake of sciences at Higher and Advanced Higher levels, and an increase of 17% in the number of admission to scientific courses at the University despite a national decline of 10%. (From the *Times Educational Supplement*, February 28, 2003.) In other words, ICT has proven its worth, where used appropriately, in increasing motivation and achievement amongst youngsters.Yet few teachers feel able to harness their technology effectively, citing their resources and training as inefficient. I can sympathise with these claims: in education there is often a serious lack of access to hardware (the computers, printers, network access), and almost no thought to keeping software up-to-date and relevant to teachers' needs. Often pupils' and teachers' own PCs and systems at home are more powerful than those in schools.The consensus is, nevertheless, that almost anything in the realm of ICT, with some creativity, can be used in the classroom setting and enhance the learning taking place. (Cummins, J, *ibid*.)

The NEED to implement ICT

We have seen how ICT in all its different guises can be implemented effectively. We know that at least in the short term it is a motivator for pupils - and provided the teacher frequently changes the ideas and formats of information, the motivation should last into the long term.There are some important reasons for implementing ICT more fully in MFL, which are already beyond teachers' control. Firstly, nearly every set of course guidelines specifies the necessity to integrate ICT to our lessons. Secondly, computer-use for every working person outside education is a day-to-day necessity. Finally, for those working with foreign languages outside the classroom, the days of business trips to Paris are the stuff of textbooks. These days, business meetings with our key export destination, France, are often carried out in French - I have taken part in many myself - but most of the talking is done by video-conferencing or email. Therefore, if we are not educating pupils in and exposing them to the use of ICT in Modern Languages, we will be doing them a disservice. Certainly we should avoid exposing pupils to types of language and skills they are unlikely to need. An example: the disembodied voice on the tape player is useful for those speaking on the telephone. But video-conferencing allows the user to see the lips and body language of the interlocutor, and to see drawn, written and animated explanations simultaneously on an area of the computer screen. Our lawyers, bankers, businessmen and women and call centre workers of the future will be using these very skills every day - but they are unlikely to perform well unless we can instil the most basic practical ICT habits and distinct linguistic skills required for these jobs.

CONCLUSIONS

ICT arguably is a motivator, capable of bringing more success to our pupils and making them more useful to employers when they leave school. It is also a means of bridging the gap between strong linguists and the floods of pupils whose forte lies elsewhere. It provides a motivating, interesting and challenging way of including a

maximum of pupils in language learning - not just challenging for pupils but also for teachers. ICT is not the be all and end all of language teaching and learning, but it is a very important aspect of it. Languages and ICT are inextricably linked. Our pupils will be using their languages in later life; they might not know it yet, but whether their careers take them to Brussels or to a Central Belt call centre, they will need to make the link between computer-use and communication in a foreign language. But we can only help them make the link by realising its importance ourselves. As teachers, we also realise that our bread and butter - sound pedagogy - is not about to change drastically. We just need to think about what good teaching should be. What was not possible ten years ago is possible now. Today, technology is the means by which we communicate our information.