Designer Learning: The Teacher as Designer of Mobile-based Classroom Learning Experiences

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Nicky Hockly's paper *Designer Learning: The teacher as designer of mobile-based classroom learning experiences* describes a two-week, small-scale study conducted using smartphones. The author discusses six parameters for effective mobile task design, which she generated based on the study.

Although I think Hockly's study itself might not be very convincing, due to its short time frame (only one week for each group) and small number of participants (only 8-12 students in each group), I do think that the six parameters she proposed as the key to designing effective mobile-based tasks for communication language classroom are very helpful for teachers who are new to MALL. For the majority of teachers, because MALL is still a relatively new concept which requires knowledge and skills for both pedagogy and technology, even if they are given the mobile devices and the connectivity (Wi-Fi,3G, etc.), they often still don't know how to design an effective language task. In the school where I work, all teachers and students are equipped with iPads and MacBooks, but only very few teachers actually use these devices to design tasks in the classroom. Among these teachers, even fewer can design tasks that are beneficial to students' learning experiences.

Hockly points out that devices and connectivity alone are not enough to design an effective activity. Teachers also need to take learners' technological competence and linguistic competence into consideration. Tasks that are not suitable for these two competences may cause too much frustration among learners and thus create a negative impact. In addition, learners' expectations and preferred learning styles also need to be considered. There are learners who do not like using mobile devices to learn. Some of them may change their opinions after learner training, but some may not. Teachers have to know their students' preferences in order to minimize any negative influence. Thus the guidelines provided by Hockly are all very helpful.

Technology nowadays has generated many possibilities; learning has become more flexible with mobile technology. I think MALL is a great idea to help learners learn. However, my concern is whether we are using mobile technology because it's beneficial and effective, or because it is new and fascinating. My experience with CALL tells me that technology has become so popular that every school and every program feels obliged to implement it into their curriculum. It has become an indicator of the success of a program. However, the quality of technology use can be questionable, because some teachers may use technology only for the sake of using technology. The situation with MALL is the same. How do we know a smart phone activity is better than other activities? How do we know all the time we spend on mobile device activities is worthwhile? I think this issue may come down to the question of how we evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of MALL. Is MALL beneficial because it increases learners' motivation? Or is MALL effective because it helps learners learn faster? How does MALL's value change in different learning contexts?

In order to promote positive outcomes of MALL, more research on its effectiveness and more teacher training should be conducted. I believe that teachers cannot fully master MALL unless they know why and how to do so. Research tells them why, and training can tell them how. Therefore, I think organizations like TIRF could fund such research, and host online or in-person teacher training sessions.

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