

Incorporating Blackboard and other technological devices in the EAP classroom as an effective tool for reaching out to contemporary students on the Insessional English Programme.

Anna Drozynska



BALEAP, Portsmouth 2011

Presentation Overview

- **Why technology in EAP classroom?**
Insessional Programme Experience
- **Case study 1:**
The Benefits and Pitfalls of Using Blackboard
- **Case study 2:**
Presentation and Seminar Skills in Computer Labs.
Limitation to communicative skills or great room for creativity ?
- **Conclusions**

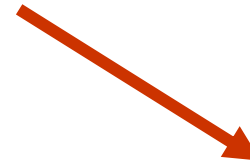
Why are you here?



Students' attitude to their Insessional classes



Negative:
Non compulsory means
'I don't have to'.



Positive:
Voluntary means:
'I want to'.

How can technology improve my students' understanding and using of English?

Teachers should offer English language learners a language-rich environment in which students are constantly engaged in language activities
(Liaw, 1997)

**As simple
as that**

- ✓ Variety
- ✓ Constant monitoring of students' progress
- ✓ Vast Internet resources
- ✓ Individualization (discipline specific materials available in special boxes on Blackboard)
- ✓ Meaningful activities and materials closely related to the subject
- ✓ Independent learning outside the classroom
- ✓ Constant feedback
- ✓ Curiosity

Engaging and Motivating Students in the EAP Insessional Classroom

'Golden Rules' applied in technology- enhanced classroom

- Courses should be student-centred – most students attend in the hope that the course will help them to improve their grades. ✓
- Stand-alone materials are needed as many students drop-in/drop-out depending on other commitments. ✓
- When courses follow a thread students stop coming because they have not done the work. ✓
- Optional homework helps because students come back in order to receive one-to-one feedback. ✓

Ref:

Insessional courses - Baleap Newcastle 27th February 2010 / Golden Rules of the University of Durham

Case study 1

Blackboard-enhanced classes



First Assumption:

~~My insessional students have been growing up in the era of online learning and huge technological development and thus will be keen on exploring the realms of technology-enhanced learning. They will be happy to attend my high-tech lessons, will definitely use a wide variety of resources I prepared, find e-learning relevant and helpful and contribute to our Virtual Learning Environment (i.e. post threads on our online discussion board and make use of other available activities)~~

End of module Survey: What went wrong?

Question 1: Why didn't you use Blackboard?

Cheng Shu:

Sometimes I did but I didn't have time to contribute to discussion board, erm...I didn't have time to sit with dictionary and write comments...

Alexandra:

I wasn't sure if my opinions would be useful, I mean, erm, I wasn't sure about my language and how to express myself on the forum...

Chu Chu:

I used Blackboard materials but didn't post threads as it wasn't useful for me and if I had been less busy, perhaps I would have written something...

Giacomo:

I didn't know if my teacher would be chatting with us on the forum or just us students and I prefer to talk with my teacher to avoid other students' mistakes...

Frank:

I found materials very useful, especially if I missed a class. I posted a thread on the forum but only a teacher replied. I like to have more lessons like that if more students contribute...

“...So, why are you trying so hard to make us use this Blackboard? ...”

Cheng Shu

- ✓ Justify the use of technology to yourself and to the students.
- ✓ Use technology with a purpose
- ✓ OK, It will be snazzy and interesting but will it be useful for my students or will it just distract them from what's important?
- ✓ Don't clutter Blackboard with too much unnecessary homework, make distinction between the necessary and extra materials
- ✓ Technology should be an aid in language instruction, not a substitute for it.

Beginning of Module / Survey on Students' expectations

1. What do you expect from Blackboard? What would you like to find there?

- Good materials from lessons and extra materials to practice at home
- Useful tips
- Teacher's feedback
- Something we do every day at the University, useful for us, interesting

2. Are you going to use materials on Blackboard?

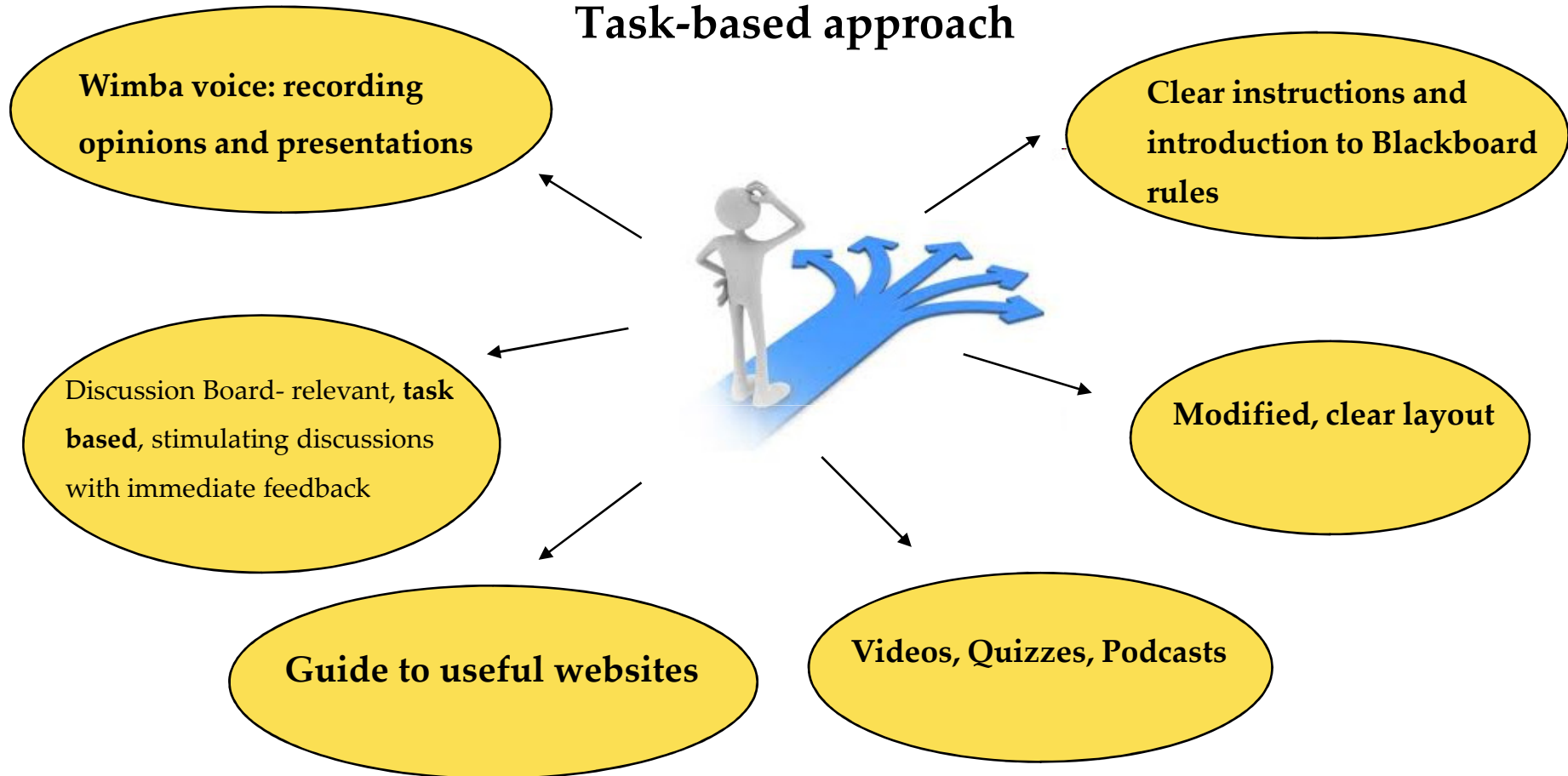
- Yes, if they are of good quality, useful and interesting
- Perhaps, but I am usually very busy with my studies

3. Are you going to contribute to the forum? Why / Why not?

- Yes, if it's relevant for my studies, well explained / easy /straightforward
- Not sure, if I have time and if there are interesting topics connected with our lessons, I would like to practice at home as well

Course of action

Task-based approach



Case study 2

Seminar and presentation skills in a computer lab – limitation to communication or a great room for creativity?

Students' opinions before the 1st session in the lab:

"It will be good for us because of convenient access to the Internet, but I guess it will be hard here to have a face-to-face conversation."

"It's great that we have headphones and we can work at our own pace but I am used to discussions 'in a circle.'"

"It's really good for us to have access to videos and websites and use headphones for listening exercises. I hope the teacher will show us some useful websites we can use after classes to practice..."

The changing face of modern communication

Keeping up with contemporary students

Student-centred sessions in the lab. Possible ideas and benefits:

- Recording
- Working at student's own pace
- Independent learning
- Online chatting
- Using Audience Response System

Conclusions (1)

End of term survey. Students' opinions.

- It was great to practice speaking with the teacher outside the classroom
- I found it very useful that we had access to course materials 24x7
- I submitted my presentation draft electronically via Blackboard and the teacher replied the same day giving me suggestions for improvement
- I enjoyed quizzes on Blackboard because I could revise materials from my lesson. I wish there were more but sometimes they could be more difficult.
- I participated in online discussions. I wish more students did that because there were only 3 people who wrote anything.
- I didn't think at first that online chatting in class would be useful. Later, I noticed that I had to write complex structures and practice that way.
- It's good to have constant contact online with the teacher, e.g. for questions about material
- I really liked individual approach from the teacher
- I appreciate variety of materials at different levels uploaded on Blackboard, because in our group we had different levels of English. Thanks also for some tips on scientific presentations.

Conclusions (2)



Final checklist

Avoiding 'techy' pitfalls

- Make sure the lesson enhances students learning and helps them practice academic skills.
- Control your students' work in the lab even if they are supposed to work on their own. Check their progress on your screen at all times.
- Test the technology before the start of your lesson. Have a back-up plan when the technology fails you.
- Technology should be an aid in language instruction. If you create a warm-up in a form of an online chat, don't just leave them chatting. Make sure you see students writing and make sure they know about it.

Blackboard – Creating Online Community

Talk about students activities on blackboard and comment on every post. Such attitude triggers curiosity and makes other go online, either to check it and add their own posts, or just to look at the uploaded materials. Once students realize they are a part of a virtual community, they are more keen to contribute to it and cooperate online.

If you design good materials online, 'advertise' them to students through the reminder email as they are usually busy with their studies.

Thank you

Any questions or comments?

a.drozynska@qmul.ac.uk