

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Let's get digital: Digital Learning Objects for Languages on Te Kete Ipurangi

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At Massey LangSem held this year in Napier, they joined with their colleague Fiona who works in the area of Educational Technologies, to present a plenary session on the use of Digital Learning Objects (DLOs) as found on Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website. The key aspect about this teamwork is that the successful use of technologies require a learning context and that using the DLOs shouldn't be about 'doing technology'; rather it should be about carefully linking appropriate technologies with existing good practices in language learning.

About 15% of the people at the plenary had heard of the DLOs, about 8% had seen them and less than 2% had used them. This is quite surprising given that schools have been able to access DLOs across learning areas since 2004. Knowing about the Digital Learning Objects and having access to them however, is only part of the equation, it is knowing what to do with them that counts. The TKI website gives some useful descriptions of the DLOs as a starting point. For example the following Japanese DLO 'Dressing Up', the website states:

- Explore clothes worn in Japan to school, skiing or a lantern festival;
- Identify clothing items suitable for each activity;
- Follow instructions to dress a boy or girl. Students identify suitable items of clothing and vocabulary related to dressing for school, skiing and a lantern festival; and
- Follow instructions given in Japanese.

<http://www.tki.org.nz/r/digistore/protected/objects/?id=1022&vers=1.0>

These points certainly give an indication that there are some cultural aspects as well as vocabulary items to be explored through these DLOs. Recent research by Ellis (2005), also provides a useful set of principles to guide language teachers' classroom practice that have been drawn from a wide range of literature on effective second language pedagogy, (See end of article for a list of these ten principles). These principles can be applied when selecting resources for classroom use such as the Japanese DLO above. For example, it could be useful to ask the following questions:

- What formulaic expressions might students be exposed to? e.g. instructions (Principle 1)
- What target language will students read/ hear? (Principle 6)
- How will this DLO help students work at their own pace? (Principle 9)



Another DLO we presented as an example for use with higher level students of French was the following 'Photo Album- school life' which gives students opportunities to

- Look through a photo album showing everyday life of schoolchildren in France;



- See photos of activities such as a camp during the school holidays, an after-school dance class, and getting results of the baccalaureate exams;
- Match each photo to a brief description of the activity;
- Answer a question about each activity; and
- Complete a quiz that includes questions on all of the photos.

[my bullet points]

Once again, it would be useful to ask questions about the language that the students would be exposed to or

using when working with this DLO.

<http://www.tki.org.nz/r/digistore/protected/objects/?id=5953&vers=1.0>

As well as questions similar to those used above one could also ask:

- How are students given opportunities to negotiate meaning? (Principle 2)
- How will students focus on form when using this DLO? (Principle 3)
- What are some next steps for language output or interaction with others? (Principles 7 & 8)

As with any new resource the ultimate question however is "What does this resource offer that other resources do not?" This is always the key consideration when choosing appropriate resources and will often determine whether we incorporate them thoughtfully into the classroom programme. Be mindful of possible pitfalls and be discerning about which learning objects to choose. With some 292 DLOs available across five languages (Chinese, Japanese, French, German and Indonesian), there is a lot to consider, if you have not yet worked out what you are looking for. It is important to choose specific DLOs that are going to meet the needs of your students. Having made a selection, the next step is to become familiar with the content of the DLO. It is not intended to be a 'set-it and forget-it' activity. The use of these DLOs in the classroom requires input from the teacher to engage and extend students. Careful planning for their use is the key to successful integration of these DLOs into your language teaching.

Remember: Learning Objects are only as good as the teachers who use them.

Participants at the plenary had been immersed in a whole day of professional learning, DLOs were only one part of the digital story (other sessions looked at other technologies such as use of podcasts, internet radio, DVDs, interactive whiteboards, email, to name a few). All of these can become part a regular languages programme, which can increase student engagement through the use of technologies commonly accessed and used by our learners.

The TKI website reminds us that Digital Learning Objects are most effective when:

- incorporated into an existing programme of learning;
- supported by relevant offline experiences (before and after use);
- selected according to the needs and interests of the learner (informed by evidence);
- supported by effective teaching;
- combined with other relevant digital content and learning experiences;

- students work collaboratively
- learners make discerning choices about their selection and use. They need to be familiar with the learning object in order to maximise its potential
- used flexibly to meet the needs of the learner. They can be shared and re-used in a range of contexts, for a range of purposes.
- Learning objects are particularly useful when a concept is hard to represent, difficult or dangerous to replicate, or when repetition is required.

(http://www.tki.org.nz/r/digistore/learning_e.php)

To get the most out of these DLOs we need to see good languages teachers using them well. If you too want to start using them, you could contact your Regional Languages Advisors, TKI support or other languages teachers who are already using them – this could be the Maths or Science teachers in your school! When you have incorporated some of the DLOs into your learning programme, please share your story with others so we can all benefit!

To access the DigiStore

- Go to <http://www.tki.org.nz/r/digistore>
- Login (your school will need to be registered first)
- Go to - Browse - Learning Languages

For Catalogues of DLOs and additional information:
<http://www.thelearningfederation.edu.au>

10 Principles for Instructed Second Language Acquisition

1. Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence
2. Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning
3. Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form
4. Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge
5. Instruction needs to take into account the learner's built-in syllabus
6. Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input
7. Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output
8. The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency
9. Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners
10. In assessing learners' L2 proficiency it is important to examine free as well as controlled production.

Ellis, R. (2005). Instructed second language acquisition: A literature review. Wellington: Ministry of Education

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