Course Topic: Language Teaching and Technology

Course Instructor:

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Course Synopsis:

This video presents an effective process with which to critically assess a technology for language teaching purposes. The process includes assessing the 'value-add', constraints, and applications of the technology. We will then put this process into practice by evaluating a technology for use in the language classroom. By the end of this video, participants will be able to confidently and effectively evaluate new technologies for integration into their teaching repertoire.

Course Agenda:

1. The Issues with Using Technology
2. The 'Value-Add' of a New Technology
3. A Critical Evaluation Process

1. The Issues With Using Technology

There are four main groups of factors that influence how successful the implementation of a new technology will be. Some of these factors we have control over and some of them we don't.

Teacher Factors

- It takes time to explore the features of a new technology.
- Teachers require training in the use of a new technology.
- One teacher may embrace a technology, another teacher may completely reject it.
- Student technical expertise may exceed teacher expertise.
- Technology can be used to do something we already do in the classroom or it can be used to do something completely new.
- A piece of technology may be more relevant to one particular teacher than to another.

Student Factors

- Different students have different levels of technical expertise.
- Student technical expertise may exceed teacher expertise.
- Technology through the students' eyes versus technology through the teacher's eyes - these two perspectives might be quite different.

Organization Factors

- Level of technical expertise in the organization as a whole.
- Level of technical expertise of the organization's management.
- Whether or not the organization has a mandate to use technology.
- Different education organizations have different levels of availability of technology.

Technology Factors

- How quickly the technology will become obsolete.
- The intended use of a technology - as a teaching tool or for organizational purposes.
- The type of device or hardware required to use the technology.
- The designers intended purpose vs. how the technology is actually used in the classroom.

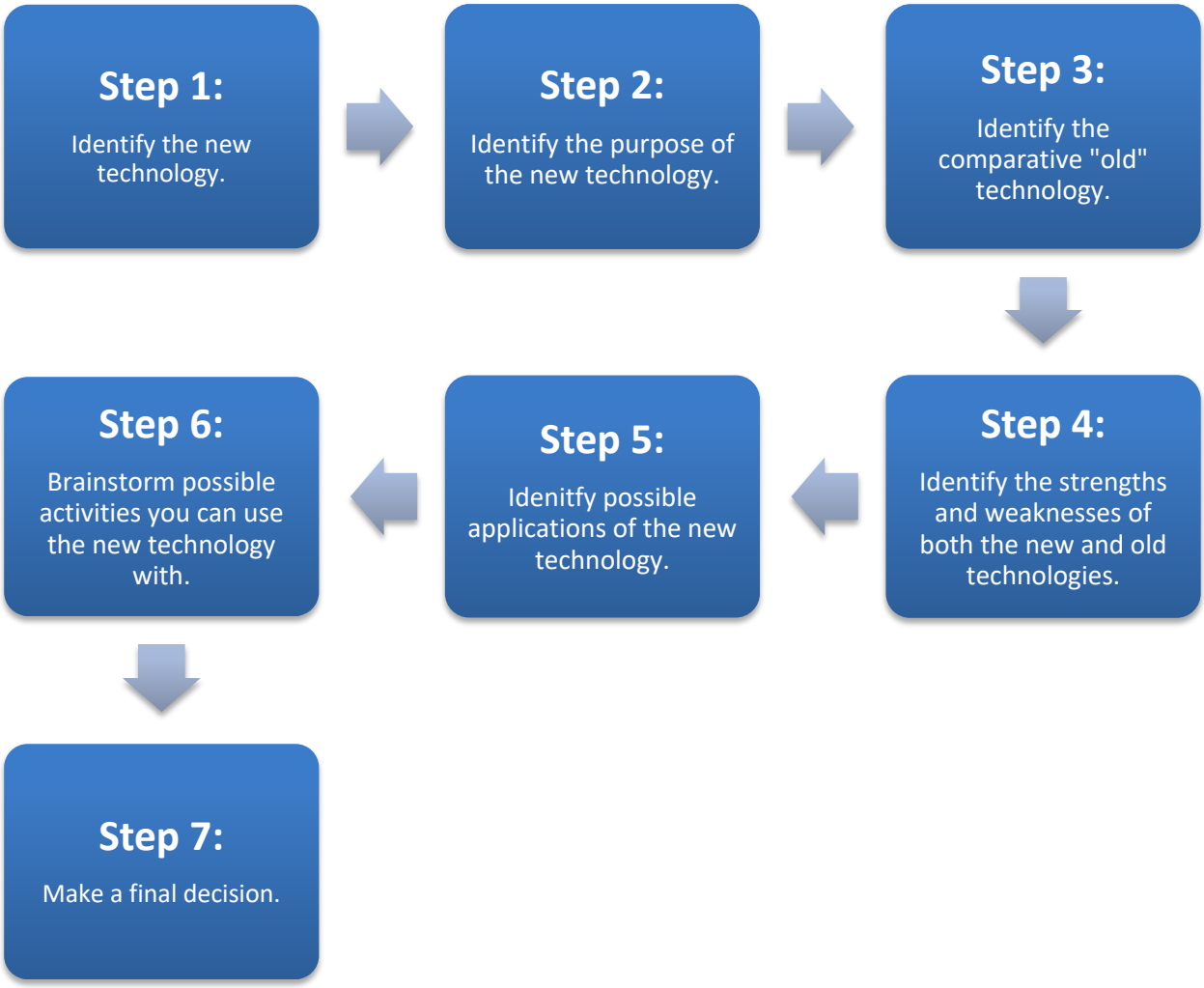
2. The 'Value-Add' of a New Technology

When deciding whether or not to use a new technology, it is important to first determine its 'Value-Add'. Start by asking yourself: *"What does this technology bring to my language classroom?"* The technology must allow us to do something better, or do something that we couldn't do before. Use the checklist below when evaluating new technologies for use in your own language classroom.

Value-Add Checklist	
☐ Faster	☐ Allows for more effective skill practice
☐ More interesting	☐ More relevant to daily life
☐ More motivating/fun	☐ More needed in daily life
☐ More versatile	☐ Student-centred
☐ More cost effective	☐ Suitable for current generation of students
☐ More professional presentation	☐ Increase student independence/autonomy
☐ More thorough or complete	☐ Builds student communities
☐ Enables more socialization	☐ Interactive
☐ More reliable	☐ Extends class time
☐ More practical	☐ More diverse teaching style
☐ Integrative	☐ Pushes teacher outside of their comfort zone
☐ Connect to all learning styles	☐ Material is current
☐ Variety	☐ Increases teacher sharing/collaboration
☐ Access to authentic language	☐ Become part of a larger community
☐ More convenient	☐ Decreases the use of paper
☐ Easier	☐ Takes focus away from teacher
☐ More readily available	☐ Increases teacher down time
☐ Provides more teacher control	☐ Adds spice
☐ Provides more student control	☐ Time management
☐ Allows for more accurate skill/ability evaluation	☐ Research tool

3. A Critical Evaluation Process

Let's take a look at the steps involved in critically evaluating a new technology for use in a language classroom. It is important to note that this evaluation may be different from one teacher to the next, even with the same technology. All of the teacher, student, and organization factors come into play. At the end of this process, you should be able to come to a confident decision about whether or not you will use a particular technology in your classroom.



Now let's apply this critical evaluation process to a real technology. For this example, we will use Microsoft Word as our 'new' technology.

Step 1: Identify the new technology: Microsoft Word
Step 2: Identify the purpose of the new technology: Tool for composing, editing and formatting written work.
Step 3: Identify the comparative "old" technology: Pen and paper
Step 4: Identify the strengths and weaknesses of both the new and old technologies:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
New Technology: Microsoft Word	• Allows for easy editing and revisions, with cut and paste. This cuts down on editing time. • Allows students to make different formatting and layout choices. • Students can include tables, graphs and graphics. • Students can create very professional-looking documents. • Program includes spell-check, grammar advisor, automatically fixes some mistakes. • Program includes access to thesaurus and dictionary. • Student work is much easier for the teacher to read. • Ability to write using Microsoft Word is required in most "real life" contexts.	• It is difficult to prevent students from plagiarizing from the internet. • Requires familiarity with a computer, mouse and keyboard that some students may not have. • Knowledge of program features takes practice and training. • Differentiates students who are comfortable on a computer from those who are not—not truly reflective of language ability. • Writing process changes – becomes less linear. • Students may focus too much on how the document looks rather than on its content. • Students may rely too much on spell-check and grammar advisor.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Comparative "Old" Technology: Pen and paper	• Cheap. • Readily available. • Portable. • Easy to use in a variety of settings, not just in a computer lab. • More reliable – not subject to technical failures. • May generate a more accurate reflection of the students' actual writing abilities. • More difficult (but not impossible) for students to copy someone else's work.	• Can be difficult for the teacher to read. • Not reflective of what is happening with the writing process in the real world.

Step 5: Possible Applications of the New Technology:

Language Skill or System	Student Language Level	Types of Interactions
✓ **Reading** ✓ **Writing** ☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ✓ **Grammar** ✓ **Vocabulary** ☐ Pronunciation ☐ Other	☐ Beginner ☐ Elementary ☐ Low Intermediate ✓ **Intermediate** ✓ **High Intermediate** ✓ **Advanced Proficiency**	✓ **Individual** ✓ **Pair work** ✓ **Small group work** ☐ Whole class (students to students) ☐ Whole class (teachers to students) ✓ **Whole class (projector)** ✓ **Teacher to one student** ☐ Student to non-student
Class Size	**Types of Classes**	**Location**
✓ **Private lesson** ✓ **Semi-private lesson** ✓ **Tutorial (3-4 students)** ✓ **5-15 students** ✓ **16-30 students** ✓ **30+ students**	✓ **General English** ✓ **Test Preparation** ✓ **Academic English** ✓ **Occupation Specific English**	✓ **In a regular classroom** ✓ **In a language lab** ✓ **In a computer lab** ✓ **In a library** ✓ **On a field trip** ✓ **At a student's home**
Age	**Assessment**	
✓ **Primary** ✓ **Secondary** ✓ **Adult** ✓ **Senior**	✓ **Yes** ☐ No	

Step 6: Possible Activities:

- Homework that students hand in for writing feedback, including essays, summaries, analyses, and projects.
- Anything requiring a drafting process.
- Students work in pairs to jointly create a story or essay.
- Students are each assigned a computer and begin writing a story. After five minutes, students rotate to the next computer and add to that story. Continue rotating until the students arrive back at their original computer.

Step 7: Final Decision:

☐ Don't use the new technology at all.
☐ Completely replace the old technology with the new technology.
✓ **Use the new technology as a supplement to what you do with the old technology.**
☐ Use the new technology to fill an existing gap in your teaching repertoire.
☐ Don't use the technology at all.

There are so many technologies out there today, and there are new technologies being added every day. You can't use all of them in your classroom, and, frankly, you shouldn't. You have to make decisions about the technologies that are available: Are you going to use a particular technology? If yes, how? And which technologies are not worthwhile to you and your teaching context?

Thanks for participating!

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