

# TECHNOLOGY WORKS IN THIS CLASSROOM

The intent of this article is to give you a glimpse into technology and how it has altered my teaching style. Admittedly a "non-techie" for most of my professional life, the vision of computers with Internet access in my classroom was something I imagined as curing the need to hunt down realia whenever I physically visited a Francophone country.

The High School of Science and Technology in Springfield, MA, a large inner-city school in the west end of the state, opened its doors in September 1996 on the long-block schedule (A/B), and I requested a transfer. The technology gradually appeared, and the teacher computer on my desktop was operational several months later. Internet access was achieved the following autumn and eventually the six other Power Macs in the classroom were on line. All computers were wired on the perimeter of the classroom, three on one side, three opposite, and the teacher computer in front of me.

When the teacher computer was the only Internet access available, I grouped 3 or 4 students who had finished their work on a simple assignment, using only my bookmarks as a *pathway toward researching* information. The students were often told to read a news report capsule which interested them for possible further exploration. Certain topics were dismissed by the students point blank, particularly those of a political nature. What they liked were articles which chronicled American events or events native to their varied countries of origin. They quickly realized that they understood with some ease the topic, and were amused at the slant that foreign correspondents sometimes put on local events. Next, they chose one article to print out for entire class study the next A/B day. The less-focused students were annoyed, however, and I realized that another type of rotation had to be devised to involve all the students in the classroom. Daily lists were charted on the door of the classroom, indicating which group was to do what from the beginning of the class period, thereby insuring a fairer distribution of on-line time. The bookmark list was made more extensive, and soon the students researched their own markers, with Madame 2-3 feet away watching their screens.

Soon the entire room was operational as far as the Internet was concerned, and it became a question of balancing the necessary structure in a sequential French program, consulting the National Standards as we progressed, and integrating simple Internet tasks as smoothly as possible.

Occasional "time allowed" mistakes were made, "error restart" messages flooded our monitors, and system shut-downs were there when we least expected them. This year, for example, our April Fool's Québec treasure hunt had to be completed on April 2 and 3 because of a glitch, with the teacher more disappointed than the students, because the class knew that sooner or later the work would be done.

Because Springfield, MA was a pilot site for the National Standards, I was particularly curious to see how one site could connect to each of the 5 Cs: Culture, Communication, Comparisons, Connections, and Community—all the more reason to give this medium some serious attention.

About a year ago, the "hoopla" on *La Coupe du Monde* started to appear on the Internet, and its homepage was linked everywhere on French search engines. My intuition told me that soccer was important to roughly 35% of my students, but the pages were so attractive, I decided to spend some time developing these lesson plans, with a focus on the Internet, to examine how many of the 5 C's would be touched automatically and how I could work in whatever C was missing in planning for varied levels of French.

Countries vied for spots in the World Cup, and we followed *la liste des pays qualifiés* as it grew in number from 24 to 32. Students were alternately dismayed as their chosen favorites failed to make the cut, or cheered as the countries did indeed progress to the final stages over a span of several months. I cheered privately as I realized that my geographical study of countries would be limited in the lower level classes to only those countries which succeeded. Portugal never made it, and my veteran soccer players were dismayed, not to mention my Portuguese-heritage students. Saudia Arabia, the Low Countries, Romania, Cameroon all became familiar to us as we scanned the weekly updates last fall. Link pages from the official *Coupe du Monde* site featured entertaining comics in *Tranches de foot-images web foot* and we struggled together to comprehend the French sense of humor therein and had the opportunity to recycle both textbook vocabulary as well as new vocabulary from the official Web page.

As I examined the Cs more closely, Communication standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 were included as students engaged in conversations, expressing their feelings about World Cup elimination rounds. When they reported back to their classmates with soccer vocabulary and information ob-

tained by understanding the Web pages in front of them, the three Standards were touched upon.

The Culture standard 2.1 was mirrored in the gestures and greetings of the players presented in video clips on the Web pages. Comments from specific coaches and players about the importance of that particular sport in France and throughout the world served to reinforce the standard.

Through cognate recognition and previous knowledge of soccer rules and study of the basic metric grades used on the construction of the various soccer stadiums, the students connected to standards 3.1 and 3.2. English class, Physical Education, World History, and Math were direct tie-ins to the Connection Goal.

While cognates touched the Connection Goal, it was inherent in the Comparisons Goal as well. The fact that the Official World Cup Soccer Page was written for native speakers of French at first glance made it threatening for a non-native. By comparing similar vocabulary in two or three languages, (many students are of Hispanic origin) the class developed insight into the nature of language and culture.

When the students brought their friends into the class from language classes other than French to verify information on line (i.e. the fact that Portugal did not make the final qualifying round!) the Communities Goal was presented as well. The follow-up information which is still on-line will make us revisit the site this fall to see what is new.

The same page can be used easily in various levels of classes; the tasks assigned to such pages are what differentiates a beginner from a more advanced learner. The discussion of the stadium preparation in France was challenging: *pose de la pelouse, le lavaterre, rétention d'eau* caused some students to revert to creating word banks to facilitate comprehension. Some classes prepared treasure hunt questionnaires for other classes. Simple quizzes about information gleaned from the site were student authored. Basic interrogative constructions were utilized to form questions and sentences from *la page Foot*.

The non-soccer players in the class were not happy at this point. The NBA was often their focus, and because Springfield boasts the Basketball Hall of Fame, it was time to move on to another link which would prove that the teacher was listening to their complaints.

Quite coincidentally, *USA Today* ran an article which featured *le basketteur français* Olivier Saint Jean (now Tarik Abdul Wahad) who plays for the Sacramento Kings. My

preliminary searching on the Web had found that this recent convert to Islam had declared to the press that: *son objectif dans la vie était d'être bon musulman, rendre heureuse sa famille, continuer ses études d'histoire de l'art pour devenir un jour professeur...*

We found his homepage, and although the Sacramento Kings' page was less enticing for my Celtics, Bulls, and Lakers fans, interest was contagious as we discussed and compared the terms for offensive foul, rebounding, etc., in the target language.

In conclusion, the Internet is my personal gopher which searches out interesting articles with which I can supplement my regular classroom work. I must remember that I am teaching in a sequential language program. How does one "add on" without "taking away" from required structure in level 3, for example? It is not a question of substituting comics for the subjunctive, it is a question of spotting a subjunctive in a comic, and very often that the subjunctive is everywhere because of the nature of the personal opinions of on-line contributors and readers.

Flexibility and patience are the key words; a back-up activity is a must when technology is "down." A Web page that was there on Monday may be gone on Tuesday; rechecking URLs is a necessity but is so easy with bookmarking.

We know that technology will never replace the teacher, and I believe that wholeheartedly. But if technology can facilitate learning and involve all my students simultaneously, the talented, the gifted, as well as the "academically challenged," then the minimal effort involved on the part of the teacher makes it all worthwhile.

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**Note**

Web sites discussed above include:  
[<http://Kingsfan.com/findex.htm>] and [<http://www.france98.com/french/index.html>]