The computer - facilitator in language teaching

"Any teacher that can be replaced by a computer, deserves to be."
David Thornburg[1]

🐱 How can we use ICT – information and communication technology – to enhance teaching and learning abilities?

🐱 Is the computer just a ferocious time eater or can it make life easier for language teachers and students?

To be a teacher is a multifaceted job including many roles, some of them new as a result of ICT-based practices, changes in curriculum and pedagogical methods:

instructional designer; trainer; collaborator; student; silent partner; team coordinator; enabling advisor; monitoring and assessment specialist; knowledge navigator; facilitator; resource; observer

Computer technology can help us provide multiple paths to learning. However, there is no model that suits all – in my lecture I will hint at some possibilities.

What do we need?

Basic tools:

✓ Computer with Internet connection

Can be developed into

✓ store spaces
✓ interactive spaces (communities, blogs, chat rooms, bulletin boards, etc)
✓ web pages
✓ mulimedia language studios

Sending E-mails and attachments is basic but it is better when used in combination with the tools above. Many people use the e-mail boxes to store files: not a good idea as there is limited disk quota in the mail-boxes and limited structuring possibilities.

Two approaches
– with growing degree of interactivity

🐱 **From the teaching point of view**
   - what can I do and how?

   ▪ course building: put digital archives, study plans, exercises, documents on the Internet
   ▪ interactivity: students' hand-ins, e-mails, blogs, chat, message boards, discussion fora, questionnaires

🐱 **From the learning point of view**
   - distance learning, autonomy

   ▪ useful software: both free and costly
   ▪ multimedia language studios

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[1] Dr. David Thornburg, an award-winning futurist, author and consultant, is one of the top 21 speakers in the United States.
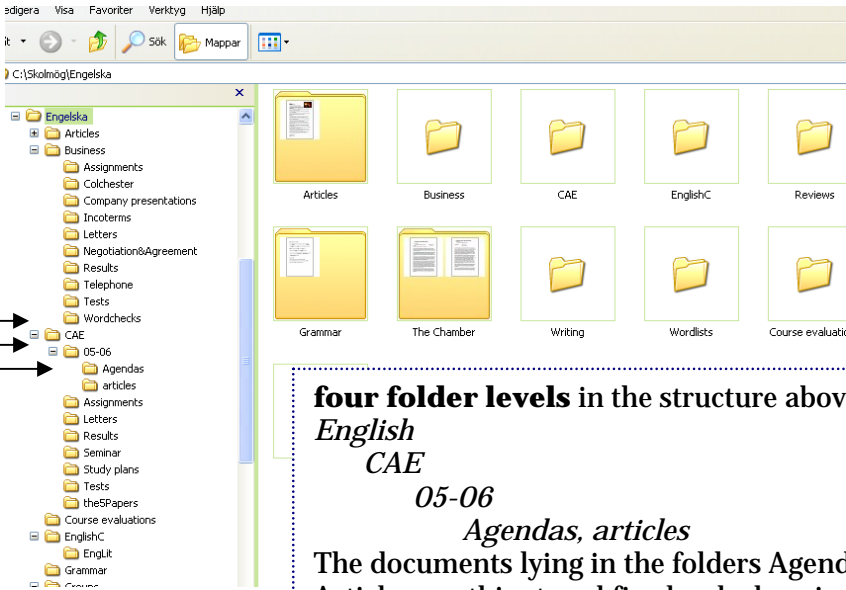
FROM THE TEACHING POINT OF VIEW

Digital archives
- for your own use

- ✓ Forget about analogue ring binders and files and learn digital file handling properly (build structures, create folders, understand how search paths work)

- ✓ Keep archive both on hard disk and on line (update on hard disk and send to server)

- ✓ Easy to search for lost document on hard disk

Example of structure:

four folder levels in the structure above:
English
    CAE
        05-06
            Agendas, articles
The documents lying in the folders Agendas and Articles are this stored five levels deep in this example

Course planning on the Internet
- Where shall I put it?

- ✓ free space on the Internet

- ✓ space provided by the school /municipality

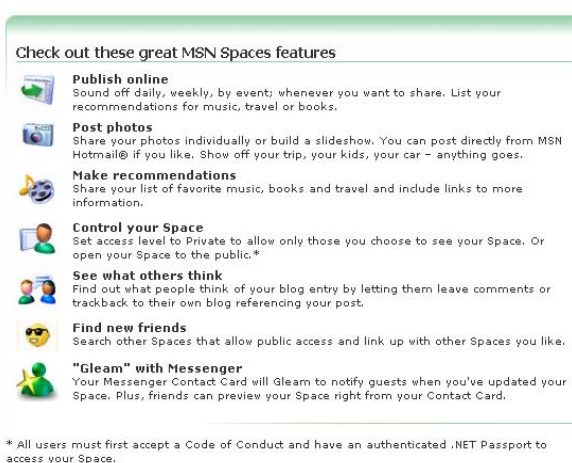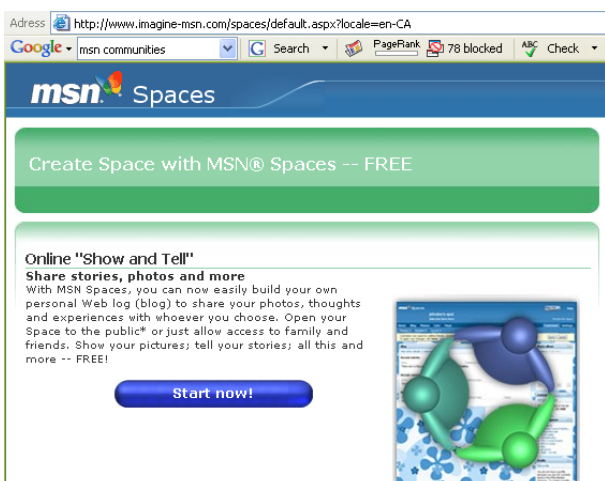- ✓ private space offered by your Internet access provider

Free space on the Internet
combined with free e-mail addresses

Pros: free, built-in webtools, accessible everywhere, some of the spaces easy to handle – a Word like environment
Cons: contains ads and irritating pop-ups, limited layout possibilities, no hand-in tools, no archives, some of the spaces less easy to handle

Windows Live is a platform that offers a combination of services: storage space, chat, blog, photo albums, profile, etc
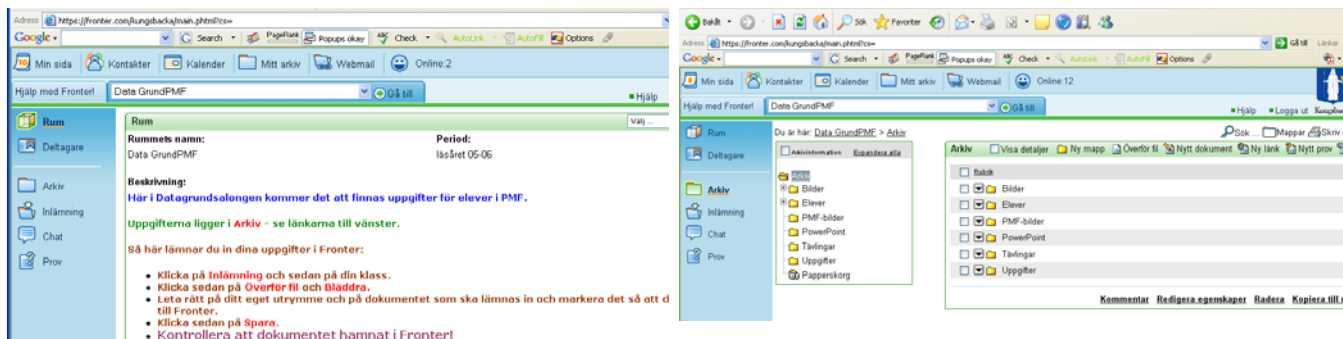
Space provided by the school/municipality
- username and password

pros: built-in webtools, many useful tools (archive, hand-in function, calendar, bulletin board, chat, inquiry tools, no ads, easy to handle, security: only accessible with username and password
cons: limited layout possibilities, costs money for your school, only accessible with username and password

Fronter, an example

Private space offered by the Internet access provider
- work with HTML editor (WYSIWYG- what you see is what you get) and FTP client

pros: freedom of layout – you can make it look exactly (more or less) the way you want (if you work in **tables!**), reliable – if you have a good Internet provider
cons: no built-in tools, you will need web building software (e.g. FrontPage, Dreamweaver, Adobe GoLive) and an FTP-client (software for uploading files to and downloading files from server), Internet subscription costs money

If you don't have an HTML[2] editor, you can write in Word and then *Save as webpage*. Your document will then get the HTML-format which is necessary to make it instantly readable on a web browser. Your Word document, thus turned into a web page (in HTML format), can also, in addition to the text, contain links to other web pages or to documents in formats like Word, Acrobat, Excel, etc. These documents have to be uploaded to the Internet server along with your HTML document. However,

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[2] Hypertext Markup language is the authoring software language used on the Internet's World Wide Web. HTML is used for creating World Wide Web pages.

these documents don't open automatically; they must be opened in the web browser and you must have the format software on your computer.[3]
There is no way of knowing the documents are there unless there are links from the HTML page or you know the URL (address on the Internet – all pages, documents have a specific address).
E.g. www.eloflindalvsgymnasium.kungsbacka.se/upload/Varforsprakstudio.pdf will take you to a pdf document.

Nota Bene:
Don't publish any documents protected by copyright unless you have asked the copyright holder for permission! If you plan to publish names and photos of your students it is ethically advisable to ask for permission before publishing.

FROM THE LEARNING POINT OF VIEW

- ✓ **Educational software**
  - Much is free on the Internet and many sites provide excellent learning material for free (grammar and word exercises, quizzes, language courses, etc
  - course book software – grammar, vocab, communicative exercises, etc
  - Interactive Language course software –advanced like **Tell Me More**

- ✓ **Internet tasks – « directed»**
  - Information searching; give specified tasks and, if necessary, specific links. Vague assignments like "Find something about Napoleon" will most certainly end up in *cutting and pasting* which is the reverse of the magnificent seemingly endless Internet source of information.

- ✓ **Virtual cultural exchanges – communicate with partner schools**
  - e-mail
  - web pages
  - blogs
  - chat & message boards

- ✓ **Language Multimedia studio**

- ✓ *What can be done in a language studio?*
  - Dialogues
  - Recordings on digital players
  - Create groups for different activities
  - Communicate from the teacher's computer
  - Observe student computers
  - Presentations
  - Build up Archives with training material

  Pedagogical gains
  - Individualisation, flexibility, variation
  - Integrating the four key capacities in language learning listening-speaking-reading-writing
  - Authentical and current material
  - Motivating – students get feedback
  - A natural complement to class-room teaching
  - Work in mixed ability groups

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[3] For example: unless you have Acrobat Reader, you won't be able to open pdf documents.

CONCLUSION

- ✓ computers and Internet are tools, not a panacea, nor a goal in themselves

- ✓ ICT can help make teaching and learning more interesting and engaging

- ✓ however, the medal has a reverse:
ICT is easily used for "LTP" pedagogy (Let Time Pass) - mindless games, random aimless surfing on the Internet or peer-to-peer chatting ...

How can we use ICT – information and communication technology – to enhance teaching and learning abilities?

We have seen some examples of ICT as facilitator and it's evident that modern computer technology has great potential to enhance teaching and learning. And we haven't seen the end of it! However, to turn this potential into practice is a complicated multifarious task.

The important thing is not the number of computers purchased but how they are being used. Educational visions and didactical ideas must come first: What goals do we want to reach and how can we use the computer as a tool to reach these goals? Pedagogy should lead technology and technology should support teaching and learning.
ICT should meet the needs of teaching and learning and not vice versa.

Is the computer just a ferocious time eater or can it make life easier for language teachers and students?

The answer to both questions is yes. In the first case, unfortunately yes, and in the second case, fortunately, yes! A threshold has to be passed; its height varying from person to person. Getting more acquainted with the software makes next step easier. And the time eating factor is determined by patience, ambition and passion and of course the level of computer and Internet literacy.

USEFUL LINKS

Links have a tendency to disappear – you can "google" the tools you search for:
e.g. "free storage", "free web tools", etc

Free web tools:
www.bravenet.com/ - guest books, forums, hit counters, mailing lists, e-mail, space, etc

Free spaces:
home.spaces.live.com - combined with Hotmail/MSN Messenger http://people.live.com
www.freewebspace.com/

Communities - spaces with many web tools: e-mail, message boards, bulletin board system, chat, archives, etc:
www.facebook.com/
http://www.myspace.com/

Fronter http://fronter.info/com/
First Class www.firstclass.com/

FTP clients:
www.smartftp.com/
www.thefreesite.com/Free_Software/FTP_freeware/
http://filezilla-project.org/

File hosting - free store space online
www.box.net
www.freewebspace.net/guide/diskstorage.shtml
skydrive.live.com (Windows Live)

Yahoo sites   **Yahoo chat** (download Yahoo Messenger)
www.yahoo.com   http://messenger.yahoo.com/
http://m.fr.yahoo.com/   http://fr.messenger.yahoo.com/
http://de.yahoo.com/   http://de.messenger.yahoo.com/
http://m.es.yahoo.com/   http://es.messenger.yahoo.com/
http://it.yahoo.com/   http://it.messenger.yahoo.com/

Free online language courses
www.word2word.com/coursead.html

Language multimedia studios
www.tandberg.se/

Inspiration
Distance learning course in Romanian at Lund University. Course created by Coralia Ditvall, coralia.ditvall@rom.lu.se, a pioneer in the subject.

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www.fiplv.org
http://vazduh.se   (my PP-presentation and this hand-out)