LLTI Highlights

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DESIGNING LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL CENTERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The IALLT listserv continues to be very active, with members seeking advice in areas both big and small. The big issues addressed over the last six months mostly mirror those found in general academic technology conversations of late, focusing on how to best integrate mobile technologies into instruction and create innovative learning spaces. In this review column, I will focus on the topic that generated the most discussion: redesigning language learning spaces, supplementing the list discussion with my own recent experience investigating and utilizing innovative learning spaces.

In January, Carol Smith of Colgate requested input to help her redesign their 15 year-old language learning center. Carol was particularly interested in hearing about SmartBoards, video conferencing systems, and flexible furniture allowing for

multiple uses of space. In May, Roberta Sinyor and Monique Adriaen of York University also sent a request to the list for advice. Both initial posts generated a great deal of discussion. The summary below combines responses to the two requests.

First of all, Felix Kronenberg reminds us that IALLT has addressed many themes related to center design (e.g., moving from a traditional lab to an innovative center, balancing virtual versus physical spaces, and designing for flexibility to take into account rapidly changing technology) in the Language Center Design book available on the IALLT website for $16.00 (http://www.iallt.org/products/publications). He also notes that in addition to reading the design book, members embarking on a redesign should visit other language labs and use a consultant to help them plan.

Importantly, he suggests that members focus on their own institution when determining how to begin a redesign. For example, the goals, spaces allotted for language learning, and at times the student body in a small institution will differ from those of a large institution. He stresses the importance of working together with faculty and getting their buy-in during the planning process, and determining what essential functions the space should provide. Mike Ledgerwood of Samford also notes the value of the Language Center Design Book, and suggests that members view Lance Askildson's (of Notre Dame) videos of his newly redesigned center (http://cslc.nd.edu/).

Other members replied with ideas related to specific technologies. For example, the SmartBoard, a much loved interactive whiteboard used extensively in K-12 and some institutions of higher education, received some support from members. At the same time, others pointed out the virtues of a more recent entry into the mix: InFocus' MondoPad. Hailed by some in the wider tech community as a SmartBoard killer, the MondoPad is a 55 inch high-definition display with a built-in computer (running on Windows 7). (See the product page: http://www.infocus.com/mondopad) for more information. Of immediate interest to our community is its interactive whiteboard and document annotation, ability to share information from one's own device, and flexible video conferencing.

IALLTers such as Thomas Hammond of Harvard have begun experimenting with the MondoPad and have found that it is great for showing DVDs and potentially great for video conferencing, but at 55 inches, it is smaller than most whiteboards. For that reason, its use in this capacity in larger rooms remains to be

seen. (He notes that it can be projected to a larger display, but if that is needed, projecting from in iPad is just as simple and much less expensive.)

At Case Western Reserve University, we have been experimenting with a CISCO Active Collaboration Room (ACR) (http://blogs.cisco.com/tag/active-collaboration-room/) this spring. The ACR contains a SmartBoard, a telepresence system, and another projector (allowing for three sources of projection at a time). We have also purchased MondoPads for testing in other rooms. I have personally found the SmartBoard to be clunky (although I had had high hopes for it after seeing a second grade teacher at my son's school do amazing things with it in a math exercise). In contrast, I find the MondoPad much easier to work with. We use it regularly for meetings, including bringing in staff via Google Hangouts and working collaboratively using Google Apps. However, I have also found its whiteboard capabilities limited. However, the range of uses that the MondoPad offers, especially video conferencing, document sharing, and its touch screen capabilities make it worth an investigation.

Doug Canfield of U of Tennessee notes that his faculty are not keen on the SmartBoard. However, they have had success using the Doceri iPad app (http://doceri.com/) as a personal whiteboard that can be projected to a larger screen.

In terms of video conferencing, some institutions focus on Skype, which of course is free, easy to set up, and well known through out the world. When better quality is needed, Cisco's Telepresence standard, H.323 (e.g., Polycom and Lifesize), and Scopia offer additional solutions. Doug Canfield's team is using Cisco's high quality high definition Edge 95 video conferencing units (http://www.ivci.com/videoconferencing-tandberg-edge-95-85-75-mxp.html) to enable a collaborative transatlantic French course and promote peer-to-peer communication.

At Case Western Reserve University, we have also invested in Cisco's Telepresence. We have set up two meeting rooms with large Telepresence units, one of which is in our international affairs office. We are currently testing the personal client Jabber, which is free to use and connects seamlessly with our larger Telepresence units. Once connected, Jabber is just as easy to use as Skype and allows for simple, one-click sharing of presentations. The Jabber to Telepresence solution is great for one-on-one connections. Additional technology (a TelePresence Bridge) is required to bring in multiple speakers, and allow for easy connection between most other types of video conferencing (with Skype being an exception).

We have made the investment of setting up a TelePresence Bridge at Case, and while it is not cheap, we are very pleased with the flexibility it provides in enabling distance collaborations.

Focusing on the Center design, Joseph Kautz of Stanford and Mike Jones of Swathmore offer additional ideas that expand the functionality of the language and cultural learning center. Joseph points out the benefit of incorporating a production studio as part of the center. He notes that additional lighting, video capture carts, and even greenscreens and configurable backgrounds will enable faculty and students to create "TedTalk" quality presentations. As many institutions explore the benefit of blended learning, Joseph's suggestions will enable faculty and students to create high quality video that can be reused.

Mike Jones discusses the success of his year old, newly redesigned studio learning space. He points out the excellent resources provided by Educause: http://www.educause.edu/LearningSpaces focused on learning space design as an additional source of inspiration.

As we move toward our next IALLT meeting, the topic of Language Center design will surely continue to play an active role in our conversations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tina Deveny Oestreich, Assistant Director of Faculty Support and Academic Technology at Case Western Reserve University, works with faculty and students to investigate and implement the use of new technologies in teaching, learning, and research. Recent projects include working in the areas of blended learning, international collaboration, and data visualization. Her background is in the teaching of languages and cultures, language center management, faculty support, and instructional technologies.

ABOUT THE COLUMN

LLTI Highlights is a column that examines current issues within the Language Learning & Technology International (LLTI) Listserv community.