

Proposal

Internet Colloquium: Technology in Language Instruction

Overview

The proposed project will support the creation of a global Internet Colloquium on the uses of technology in the teaching of foreign languages. This "virtual colloquium" will bring together the leading researchers and practitioners in the use of advanced computer and communication technologies, and make their work and insights accessible to language teachers and researchers throughout the world. This international, collaborative project will be led by faculty and research staff at the MIT Center for Educational Computing Initiatives (United States), the University of Bergen (Norway) and EAFIT University (Colombia). The project is motivated by the following considerations:

1.) There is an explosion of interest in the uses of technology to teach foreign languages, but there are a relatively small number of individuals who have actual experience in this field. Teachers throughout the world can benefit enormously by having access to those experienced leaders in the field.

2.) MIT has been one of the leading centers in advancing the state-of-the-art in this area, particularly in the use of multimedia and computer networks.

3.) The technology for distributing information through the Internet has matured to the point where high quality audio, still images and text can be made accessible to much of the world, and the capabilities to distribute full-motion video are becoming more widely available. Genuine discussions are possible (through E-mail) to most countries, and these capabilities for interaction will continue to improve.

4.) Many institutions around the world are just beginning to experiment with using technology for teaching languages. Sharing the lessons from previous experience can avoid having the same mistakes repeated over and over again. Also, we believe that there are unique opportunities to support a global creative process.

5.) The growing ties among countries have expanded the need for improving language education, particularly in the rapidly developing economies that have large numbers of school-age children.

Design of the Colloquium

The Internet Colloquium on Technology in Language Instruction will be implemented in three distinct phases: major overview lectures; a resource exchange; and a fully developed pilot project for international-scale research collaboration.

1.) The first phase will emulate (in virtual, electronic form) the first, highly successful UNESCO-sponsored colloquium in emerging infectious diseases run by Yale University.¹ Experts in the field will be invited to give major lectures on their work. These lectures will be digitized in several forms, including plain text, digital audio, and perhaps full motion digital video. These resulting files will be integrated into a World Wide Web site operated at MIT (and possible mirrored at other collaborating institutions). Scholars and teachers throughout the world will be able to access these lectures via their Internet connections. In addition, the invited speakers will moderate question and discussion sessions over the Internet. Participants will be able to ask questions that will be posted to the World Wide Web site any time after the presentation. The speaker will moderate an open discussion by commenting on the question, though anyone involved can add comments subsequently. The "thread" of discussion can continue indefinitely. The moderator may change over time depending on the level of interest of the original speaker and the extent to which other people are interested.

The selection of speakers will be determined by an International Steering Committee that will be created in the first two months of the project. This group will represent a range of geographical areas and languages to ensure that the topics and individuals asked to give seminars reflect the full range of interests, and best and latest ideas around the world. We expect the members of the steering committee to work together primarily through electronic mail.

¹ <http://info.med.yale.edu/EIINet>

2.) If the first phase is successful, we propose to seek additional funding to expand the colloquium to provide ways for the participants to share teaching resources. For example, the very successful work by Prof. Shigeru Miyagawa at MIT on JP Net has been creating materials for teaching Japanese that can be accessed over the World Wide Web. These materials include teaching exercises such as: vocabulary information, kanji drills, grammar notes, reading materials, listening activities and ideas for communicative activities. Similarly, work ongoing jointly at MIT and the University of Bergen on the Spanish language is creating materials that are designed for access over the Web. We envision extending these examples to a global scale, where teachers throughout the world can add new materials and search for things relevant to their own teaching.

3.) A still more ambitious, third phase is the creation of a pilot international research consortium in which the participants use the Internet as the foundation technology for working together. In theory, these groups could involve teams around the world to create digital media for language instruction. These groups might create entirely new curricula for particular languages or develop new software tools that can be customized for many different languages. We expect that many of these teams will be funded entirely outside the colloquium (for example, from the publishing industry), but that they might use the information resources of the colloquium for their organizational work and as a way to disseminate their work throughout the world. We also envision creating an international electronic journal that can report on ongoing projects in this field.

Phase 1 - Budget and Schedule

The first phase of this project will encompass 12 months. The first three months will be devoted to organizing the steering committee, inviting speakers, and establishing the formats in which the seminars will be stored and transmitted. The Colloquium will operate for the remaining nine months, during which we expect to have between one and two speakers each month, making a total of approximately 12 overview lectures from leaders in the field available to teachers and researchers worldwide.

There will also be an active program to advertise the existence of the colloquium to as

broad a constituency as possible and obtain feedback from the participants. There are professional organizations for the teaching of languages in many countries that will be informed of the Colloquium's existence and which we hope will encourage participation by their members. In addition, we will explore how various electronic mailing lists and other Web sites might be used. For example, we might get a general agreement with existing Web sites to "cross-link" their site with the Colloquium's.

We request funding of USD 30,000 from UNESCO to start the first phase of the colloquium. This funding will support the early activities, including the cost of speakers (travel and small honoraria), digitizing the resulting seminars, operating a World Wide Web site and staff needed to communicate with the participants. As the program is started, we intend to solicit funding from additional sources. These may include individual governmental funds, regional funds (such as the European Union) or funds from corporate donors.

The scope and budget for subsequent phases is at this point unclear and will depend on the feedback we receive during the first phase. We expect to solicit reactions from speakers, steering committee members and participants around the world to understand what the strengths and weaknesses of the virtual colloquium are, and what next steps they believe will be most useful.

Qualifications of Core Participants

The project will be directed by Prof. Ana Beatriz Chiquito of the University of Bergen, Norway and Prof. Steven R. Lerman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA. Dr. Lloyd Etheredge, Director of the International Scientific Networks Project at the non-profit Policy Science Center, will be an advisor to the project.

Prof. Chiquito is a tenured Associate Professor of Spanish and Literature at the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies, University of Bergen, Norway. She has worked as a video and multimedia producer and has authored electronic and printed materials for teaching Spanish. She has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in

Hispanic literature and history, theoretical and applied linguistics, translation, Spanish business language, Latin American economy, and design of computer-based applications. Her research and publications focus on theoretical and applied Spanish linguistics and the use of educational technology in second language learning and teaching.

Prof. Lerman is the Director of the Center for Educational Computing Initiatives (CECI), the research unit of an MIT-wide research center devoted to studying the application of computational and communication technologies on education. From 1983 to 1988, Professor Lerman directed MIT's Project Athena. This project developed a campus-wide distributed system of advanced computer workstations at MIT. Athena's facilities span the entire MIT campus, providing computational support for the MIT curriculum. The project used grants of hardware, software, maintenance and staff support from Digital Equipment Corporation and IBM. It also included a multi-million dollar program of support for the faculty and students of MIT to undertake the development of a new generation of educational software to be used at MIT.

Dr. Lloyd Etheredge is a Trustee and Director of the International Scientific Networks Project at the Policy Science Center, a non-profit foundation in New Haven, CT. He is a former Director of Graduate Studies for International Relations at Yale University and a specialist in the study of institutional innovation and learning.

Qualifications of the Participating Institutions

Though MIT is known primarily as a leading education and research university in the areas of science, engineering and management, there has been extensive work at MIT in the area of using technology in education. The Foreign Languages Section of the Department of Humanities has been a leader in this field. During the 1980s, various members of that group developed some of the most innovative uses of multimedia in teaching Spanish, German and French. More recent work has expanded to include the teaching of Japanese. Several of these initiatives have led to multimedia software that has been published and distributed throughout the world, including *la rencontre de Philippe*, *The Star Festival* and the soon-to-be-released *No Recuerdo* CD-ROM.

The University of Bergen is an internationally oriented, Norwegian research university with extensive cooperation with the European Union in several of their major research and educational programs. It has also strong ties with Eastern Europe and the Middle East. It is a leading Scandinavian center in using computer technology in the Humanities, and its staff has been active in the area of developing applications and using technology in education. The University of Bergen has collaborated with MIT in general software development and developing a multimedia application in Spanish.

EAFIT University, Colombia, is a leading university in the fields of management, engineering and language education. Its CONEXIONES project, funded by COLCIENCIAS (Colombian Institute for the Development of Science and Technology) is an Interscholar Network that aims to provide new impetus to curriculum renewal with the support of telecommunication technologies. This project is an important node of Ribie, the Iberoamerican Educational Network. EAFIT Language Center is one of the most complete in Latin America offering education and research in several languages, including less taught languages such as Japanese.