EDUTAINMENT AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES TEACHING

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the edutainment in foreign language teaching. The authors describe the new approach advantages and disadvantages for high school. They propose to use such new tools as edutainment web-sites, software and films as additional tool for foreign languages teaching in non-linguistic higher educational institution.

Key words: edutainment, education, approach, foreign languages, methods.

1 Article

The growth of television, computers and then the Internet has changed the way of our life and the way of getting information significantly. Teachers and scientists widely use new ways for educational purposes. No wonder they try to exploit every possibility to make the education process both interesting and useful. Edutainment is one of such approaches.

Edutainment is a neologism (new term coinage), similar to infotainment, that expresses the marriage of education and entertainment in a work or presentation such as a television program or a Web site. The most educationally effective children's programs on television (Sesame Street, The Electric Company, Mr. Rogers) could be classed as edutainment. Outstanding Web sites that "edutain" include Learn2.com and HowStuffWorks.com. [1]

Motion pictures with educational contents appeared as early as 1943, such as Private Snafu, and can still be seen in modern films such as An Inconvenient Truth. There are many television programs that incorporate Entertainment-Education as well. [1] Some professors have adopted the practice of edutainment in order to keep the interest of adult students in long classroom lectures. The instructor entertains the students while meeting course objectives. An important teaching technique of education is to use variety, by utilizing various mediums such as video, in-class skits, demonstrations, and Power Point slides along with lectures. Within the lecture, the instructor can add interesting elements and discussions of personal experiences of the professor or students. [2]
One of the theories used in edutainment is social learning theory. Pedagogy involved with Entertainment-Education includes Relevance, Incremental Learning, and Distributed Learning.

Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen has spent a great deal of time researching the educational use and potential of computer games and has written many articles on the subject. One paper dealing specifically with Edutainment breaks it down into 3 generational categories to separate the cognitive methods most predominantly used to teach. In his papers he is critical of the research that has been done in the areas of the educational use of computer games cited their biases and weaknesses in method causing them to lack scientific validity in their findings.

So we can find numerous instruments for edutainment. This method has a lot of supporters. The producers of such materials are in this category. Many teachers are for this way of learning too. However, opponents tell about danger of adapting computer technology into education so enthusiastically. They emphasizes learning is seen as fun and entertainment. Learners who are exposed heavily to the Internet, video games, and ready-made images presented by multimedia develop a new attitude towards learning. According to Bloom and Hanych, equating learning with fun suggests that if students are not enjoying themselves, they are not learning. In other words, learning becomes an obstacle that learners need to overcome. To Bloom and Hanych, “such an approach doesn’t promote learning; it trivializes the learning process.”

The most widely articulated argument for the use of edutainment materials is that such software motivates students to explore topics in greater depth. Because students are highly motivated through rich, interesting and engaging learning experiences, their understanding of the subject is enhanced. Moreover, their senses are enthralled and stricken on all levels, as one of the software in the market claims. Therefore, students cannot help but pay attention to information that is presented in dynamic and memorable ways.

However, a few points must be considered before acknowledging the appeal of edutainment materials in motivating learners. Here, research is needed to clarify why and how motivation happens to evaluate the role of technology to support engagement. A number of scientists, such as Lepper, M. R. and Chabay, R. W. [7], Middleton, J. A. and Tolu, Z. [8] indicate that motivation depends upon a complex mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation is defined as a tendency to engage in activities for their own sake, just for the pleasure derived in performing them or for the satisfaction of curiosity, while extrinsic motivations include compliance, recognition, and grades and rewards, which are unrelated to the act of learning [9]. According to Guthrie, McGough [10] and Van Meter [11] it is possible that students might be influenced by several of these factors at once, with a complementary relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic processes, but studies show that intrinsically motivated students tend to persist longer, work harder, actively apply strategies, and retain key information more consistently.

Therefore, to realize the full potential of computer technology and to engage students in learning, one needs to look beyond the packaging and special effects, as McKenzie wrote, that make computers engaging in the most superficial sense. Motivating learners is more than adding entertainment value to lessons or tests. Otherwise, as Healey puts it, learners will not be motivated to learn but just to play with the computer.

We can be for or against edutainment but it is very useful for English learners. One very important point about language learning has to be noticed: a language is learnt through using it, through using it in authentic situations. Disembodied words or sentences don’t get learners anywhere. Parallel with the danger of monotony and boredom runs the danger of mechanical drills, the danger of blind parroting and of meaninglessness. A foreign language must be brought to life in situations by gestures, by handling or touching things, by actions and incidents, by pictures, by dramatization, by interesting stories spoken or in print, and not least by contests and games. Playing computer games, watching educational films or programs in English, just playing games for training vocabulary and grammar speaking and listening skills in class, students are motivated to study the language. In addition to games, puzzles, and songs,
multimedia has also played a role in edutainment. Students learn in different ways and through a variety of different mediums. Although multimedia has often been considered computer-based learning, more recently many educators view multimedia to include various forms of communication. “Blending of visual, textual and auditory information enhances the environment for the learner and aids in the understanding of information.” (Bettes and Tousignant) The benefits of multimedia in the classroom are engaging and motivating material, opportunities to try new things, heightened project-based learning, enhanced audio/visual learning, and the showcasing of student-generated work. One student said, “I find more traditional methods created more stress and did not motivate me. It's more interesting with computers and other technology. Otherwise it would be boring.” Of course, we educators want our students to learn, and absorb academic material. But we also need to keep our students returning to class, and multimedia plays a crucial role in this process.

To use the advantages of this method a teacher need to choose the proper material and motivate students to work with it. It is possible not only work with existence items. It is quite good for school or foreign languages courses where the task is to learn general material. But if we teach students of higher educational institution the task is different. To use edutainment for this purpose we need to remember what skills and knowledge are need to be developed. We should collect the material according to the curriculum. We even can creat programs for our specific purposes. For example the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a tip sheet available on its website that provides additional guidance for writers and producers. [14]

As nowadays edutainment is the method which is widely exploit to educate pupils and students we should use it for foreign language teaching. The first step is to use existed materials: films, software, TV-programs, method guides developed by foreign methodologists. The next step is to choose the necessary materials according to the curriculum and to develop method guides for materials we need for developing necessary skills and knowledge.

Literature


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