# Synchronous communication in a web-based senior high French course

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# Purpose of presentation

Report on partial results of a qualitative case study of interaction in a context of use of Vclass$^{TM}$ synchronous communication tools for instruction in a grade 10, web-based French course in Newfoundland and Labrador

# Presentation plan

## Overview of context

- WBL in NL
- Senior-high French
- Vclass™

## Overview of study

- Aim
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions

# Web-based learning in NL

- Center for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI)

- 2002-2003 18 web-based, senior-high courses in 74 sites

- Courses designed according to provincial curriculum guidelines

- E-teachers deliver the courses

- Location of teachers is independent of the location of students

# Web-based French 2200

- 60% synchronous communication supported by vClass$^{TM}$

- 40% asynchronous component supported by WebCT$^{TM}$

- 20 students dispersed over seven schools

- Two school districts in Labrador and northern Newfoundland

- One e-teacher located in St. John's

# Vclass™ overview

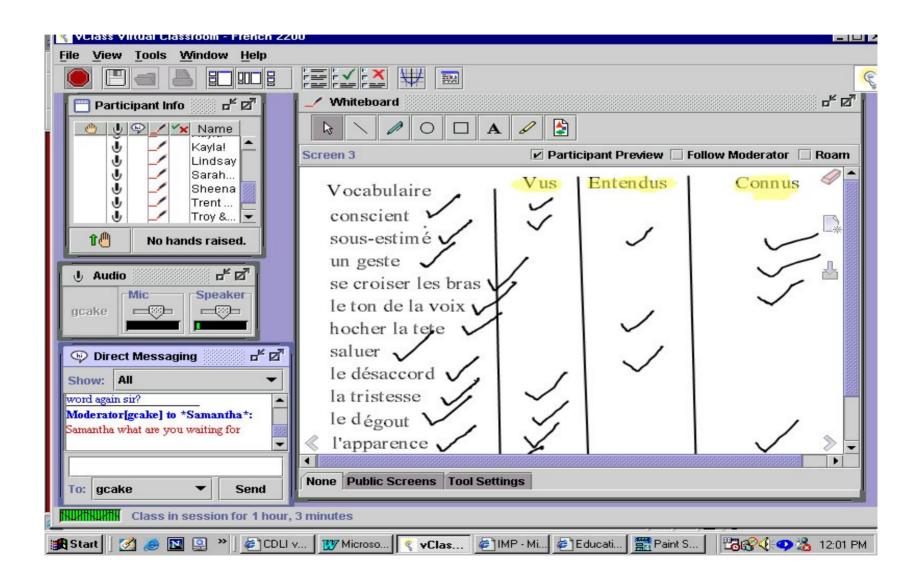- A real-time collaboration environment

- Offers a suite of tools accessed through a graphical interface

- Low bandwidth requirements (28.8 kbps supported).

# Vclass™ tools overview

- . Two-way audio
- Shared whiteboard
- Text-based direct messaging,
- Hand-raising with sequencing
- Private & public polling
- Application sharing

# Vclass™ interface

# Direct messaging

# Aim of the study

Describe the interactions
in relation to the tools'
affordances and constraints
& in relation to the
goals of instruction.

# Aim of the study

Describe the types of interaction according to four types:

1. Student - teacher

2. Student (s) – student (s)

3. Student - content

**4. Students/teacher – tools**

# Data collection

**1.** Six, semi-structured class observations

**2.** Three, small-group interviews with students

**3.** Two interviews with e-teacher

Vclass™ used for observations and interviews

DM & WB records saved as printable files

# Affordances & constraints

An affordance is a potential or perceived capacity of an object to enable the assertive will of the actor
(Ryder & Wilson, 1996).

A user interacts with a tool in an effective way when he/she is able to maximize its affordances and minimize its constraints in relation to the goals for using the tools.

# Goal of instruction using Vclass™

- P2P, S2S interaction

- Aural/oral communication

- Use of French as target language

- Comprehensible input and output

# Affordances of Vclass™

- Private, multiple interaction using text-based DM.

  O2O, P2P, S2S,S2T communication


  - Public, unique, interaction using two-way voice.

    - O2M, T2S communication

# Constraints of Vclass™

- Does not support video-conferencing

- Does not support multi, private one-to-one communication with two-way voice

- Does not support use of the microphone by more than one person at a time

# Findings: Student-tool interaction

-Favoured DM

-Communicated in English

- P2P interaction

- S2T for queries re marks, assignments etc.

- Used it spontaneously without instructor prompt

# Findings: Student-tool interaction

- Used WB with teacher prompt

- Used WB for P2P interaction when assigned individual WB privileges

- Used 2WV with teacher prompt

- Communicated in French using these tools

# Findings: Teacher-tool interaction

- Favoured use of WB & 2WV

- Used French with these tools except with DM

- Relied on T2Ss, O2M interaction

- Sometimes used tools in support of one another

# Main findings

- Students favored P2P tools

- Teacher favored T2Ss tools

- Vclass$^{TM}$ affords more support for O2M, T2Ss interaction than for P2P

- Vclass$^{TM}$ can potentially reinforce traditional teacher-centered approaches

# Conclusions: Maximizing affordances

- Pedagogical approaches, techniques, activities need to be tailored to the context

- Mindful design & choice of types of interaction

- Use of tools in combination with one another

- Assignment of tool privileges to students

- More reliance on DM for instruction

# Conclusions

- Teachers using Vclass™ could benefit from PD opportunities to appreciate the affordances and constraints of the tools in relation to the goals of instruction

  - Private audio in new version will potentially support goals

- More bandwidth & two-way video would provide greater support for curriculum goals and outcomes

# References

- **Ryder, M. & Wilson, B. (1996).** *Affordances and Constraints of the Internet for Learning and Instruction*. Paper presented to a joint session of the Association for Educational Communications Technology, Indianapolis.

- **Saloman, G. (1993).** On the nature of pedagogic computer tools: The case of the Writing Partner in Lajoie, S. and Derry, S. (eds). *Computers as cognitive tools*. Lawrence Ehbaum Association. New Jersey.

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**No tool is good or bad in itself:**
its effectiveness results from and contributes to the whole configuration of events, activities, contents, and interpersonal processes taking place in the context of which it is being used.

Salomon (1993)