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New Media in Language Education

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NEW MEDIA IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Pauline Ernest, Joseph Hopkins, Martina Emke, Aline Germain-Rutherford, Sarah Heiser, Jackie Robbins, Ursula Stickler

Introduction

Technological advances, globalisation, migration and mobility have had a major impact on language needs and language education. The labour market has become increasingly internationalised, meaning that proficiency in a second or in other languages has become a priority for many, and those working in the field of language education are under continual pressure to provide courses which make optimum use of the opportunities that technology offers. In this chapter we outline how continuing professional development, with regard to new media, has evolved, and reflect on the ways that ECML programmes and policies have impacted the changing landscape of professional development for language teachers.

Key issues

Changing nature of continuing professional development in relation to new media

Just twenty-five years ago, technology in language learning meant using audio cassettes for listening to different voices; preparing worksheets with Windows 95,

possibly having previously consulted the Web using a browser such as Netscape; or creating an online exercise using an application such as Hot Potatoes if teachers were lucky enough to have access to computers in their schools. Today, anyone can create a website, teachers and learners have access to a huge variety of online applications and social networks, and we talk to family, friends and colleagues around the world every day.

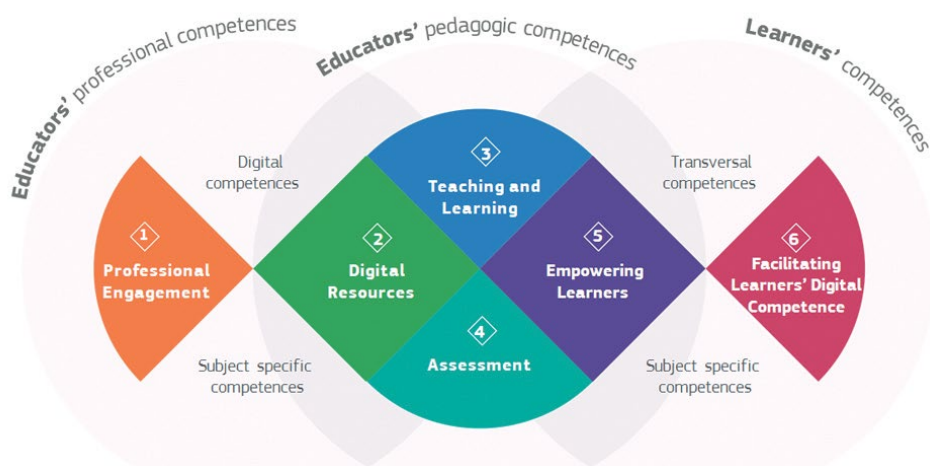
In the early days of the internet, opportunities were scarce for formal continuing professional development (CPD), focusing on the use of new technologies for language learning and teaching. However, there were a growing number of practitioners of self-directed approaches (Nunan 1996; Richards & Lockhart 1994; Wajnryb 1992) who recognised the affordances of incorporating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into their teaching. These largely self-taught teachers made use of online tools and resources, such as discussion forums, html editors, blogs and wikis, to create activities designed to enhance their students' learning. These keen early adopters, often working in isolation, used technology despite a lack of any explicit requirement, encouragement or support from their institutions to do so. Gradually, however, thanks to the vision, perseverance and enthusiasm of these "lone rangers" (Taylor 1998), policymakers began to become aware of the potential of technology for language teaching and learning.

Thus, institutions began to organise workshops, conferences and other CPD events, with talks and hands-on sessions devoted to the use of technology in language education. Audiences grew as teachers started to overcome their fear of losing their jobs to automation. Indeed, initial reservations were replaced by overt enthusiasm, and the next phase of teacher engagement saw an overwhelmingly tool-centred approach to training; every new gadget and application found its way into training workshops – often only for a short time. These sessions tended to focus on introducing specific tools with prescribed ways of using them in order to keep learners engaged, instead of developing language professionals' awareness and understanding of the ways in which technology can support the learning process. In some instances, this has led to a sense of frustration and disillusionment with technology, with teachers feeling they are constantly playing catch-up and that without the "right" technology, they may as well not use it at all.

The UNESCO *ICT competency framework for teachers* (2011) is an important milestone in highlighting the need to go beyond basic digital literacy skills for teachers' professional development. The three developmental phases of the framework, **technology literacy**, **knowledge deepening** and **knowledge creation**, seek to help countries develop comprehensive national teacher ICT competency policies

and standards and integrate these in overarching proposals for incorporating ICT in language education. More recently, there has been an increased awareness of the need for teacher development to go beyond basic digital literacy skills, or the mere “how-to” of using various technological tools. The latest approaches, therefore, aim to increase teachers’ ability to incorporate technology not for technology’s sake, but rather in a way that provides true added value to their teaching and their students’ learning. However, whereas technology is evolving at an extremely rapid pace, the underlying pedagogical principles behind sound teaching practice, whether it be with or without technology, remain largely unchanged.

Also along these lines, the *European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators* (DigCompEdu; Redecker & Punie 2017) provides a model for teacher development which details specific competences in the following six areas: **professional engagement, digital resources, teaching and learning, assessment, empowering learners, and facilitating learners’ digital competence** – as shown in the figure below. In stark contrast to earlier “how-to” approaches to CPD regarding the incorporation of technology in teaching, the DigCompEdu website states: “The focus is not on technical skills. Rather, the framework aims to detail how digital technologies can be used to enhance and innovate education and training.” (<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcompedu>)



The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu), areas and scope (Redecker & Punie 2017: 15)

Training needs: teachers, trainers, policy makers

A changing landscape

Increasing opportunities for formal and informal language learning, development of digital skills, and the growing affordances provided by technology contrast with the crucial question of whether the training of language teachers has been able to keep up with these developments, and whether it provides them with appropriate pre- and in-service programmes for their professional development. As stated by Siemens and Collis and Moonen:

“The last decade of technological innovation – mobile phones, social media, software agents – has created new opportunities for learners. Learners are capable of forming global learning networks, creating permeable classroom walls. While networks have altered much of society, teaching, and learning, systemic change has been minimal.” (Siemens 2008: 1)

“Among the many analyses of factors that influence the use of technology for pedagogical change in formal education, common problems have emerged: the pedagogies, supported by new technologies, that could lead to innovation are not enough known to instructors, not enough valued, and are perceived by instructors as too difficult to implement in practice.” (Collis & Moonen 2008: 96)

Lack of adequate training for language teachers results in a mismatch between the affordances offered by technology and its restricted uses in many educational institutions. In addition, changes in our education systems are too slow to keep up with the “exponential progress” of technology and the needs of an agile and entrepreneurial workforce, according to Johan Andreson (quoted by Radosavljevic 2018).

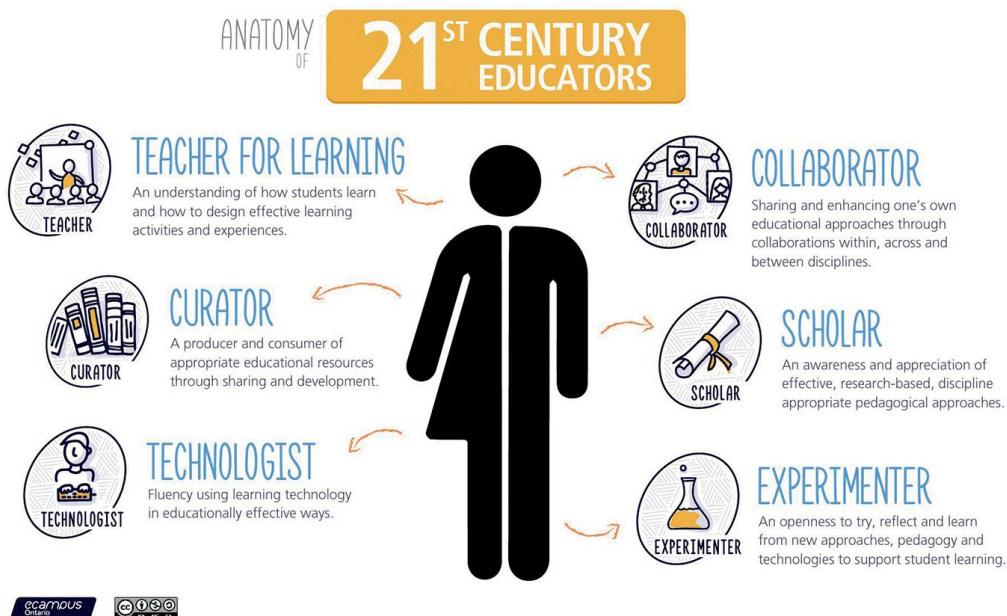
A mind shift

In the 21st century, we need to move beyond formal and discipline-centred education models. Given the important role of technology in our social and professional lives nowadays, we need to seriously rethink our educational practices and teacher education. As part of this reflective process, language teachers may also find that they need to shift their mindset towards interconnected and global education

models, where inquiry-based, collaborative, inclusive, experiential and community-based learning, often using technology, is at the heart of the pedagogical thinking process. “Learning is knowledge networking rather than knowledge acquisition, internalization, or construction” (Siemens 2005: n.p.)

Curricula should focus on helping learners develop new skills as critical thinkers and communicators and collaborators, civically engaged and globally aware. Today’s students need skills which will ensure a responsible and critical use of media. In addition to fostering communicative competence, language educators should help instil an increased awareness amongst learners of global issues such as the emerging digital divide, digital harassment, and hate speech. Along these lines, Byram (2010) proposes that language teachers can explicitly draw on global citizenship education “enriching it with attention to intercultural communicative competence” (p. 320).

Similarly, teachers also need to explore new roles and develop new expertise to support this new generation of learners. The 21st century educator needs to be multi-skilled: understanding the added value of educational technology; designing effective learning environments and activities; curating relevant learning resources; collaborating with peers to improve skills and knowledge; researching and assessing pedagogical approaches; and experimenting constantly. (See figure below)



The Anatomy of 21st Century Educators
(eCampus Ontario: <https://extend.ecampusontario.ca>)

Rethinking professional development

Professional development should be viewed “as a career-long, context-specific, continuous endeavour that is guided by standards, grounded in the teacher’s own work, focused on student learning, and tailored to the teacher’s stage of career development” (Slager & Fusco 2004: 124). It is not just a succession of workshops and training courses. Nor is it only a question of mastering different digital tools and applications, since the latter are developing at an unstoppable speed and learner expectations vary accordingly. Instead, professional development should be seen as a reflective process that involves consideration of our own experiences in applying knowledge to practice (Argyris & Schön 1996), where teachers ensure that they keep up to date with the myriad changes inherent nowadays in all areas of communication. It is a journey embedded in practice.

A sound example of these principles in action is the workshop format developed in the ECML *DOTS*, *MoreDOTS* and *ICT-REV* projects (see Hampel & Stickler (2015) for a comprehensive description of activities related to these projects), which provides a space for participants to actively engage in the creation of their own learning journey before, during and after each workshop. Grounded in participatory pedagogy (Askins 2008; Siemens 2008), and based on research undertaken in distance teaching institutions (Hampel & Stickler 2005; Ernest & Hopkins 2006), the workshops are experiential and participant-focused, the emphasis of the training is not on technology for technology’s sake but on pedagogical principles and the added value of integrating ICT in language learning. During the workshops, participants discuss their own professional journey in relation to technology use in their classrooms; they reflect on the benefits and challenges of using new media, critically evaluate offline versus online activities, and design new learning activities using technology that they can then cascade in their own professional context. They engage in a succession of tasks:

- practical, hands-on tasks completed before, during, and after the workshop;
- collaborative reflection on the affordances & challenges of ICT in language learning and teaching;
- discussion of pedagogical principles relevant for designing learning tasks;
- exploration, development of knowledge of different ICT tools and learning applications;
- designing of learning activities appropriate for participants’ professional context;

- establishment/reinforcement of synergies among bulletparticipants;
- promotion of dissemination and cascading among participants' colleagues.

Participants are also surveyed 6 months after the workshop in order to monitor the impact of the above on their teaching practice.

How the work of the ECML addresses changing teacher education needs

Looking back

The ECML's programme has included projects dealing with ICT since 1996. While one of the first, the *Stars project (Information and communication technologies and young language learners)* created a website to facilitate communication in the second language for young learners, two other ICT-related projects had at their core the realisation that teachers in the 21st century would need to understand and employ technologies in the classroom. The project *Exploring Cutting edge applications of networked technologies in Vocationally Oriented Language Learning (E-VOLLution)* focused on vocational education while the project *Information and communication technologies and distance language learning* highlighted distance teaching and the consequences of a lack of face-to-face communication.

The following years brought digital competences and the training needs for language teachers increasingly to the attention of teacher trainers and policy makers, as evidenced by the success of the *Developing online teaching skills (DOTS)* project and its successors: *Using open resources to develop online teaching skills (MoreDOTS)* and *Use of ICT in support of language teaching and learning (ICT-REV)*. A ground-breaking initiative starting in 2011, which linked the ECML with project funding from the European Commission, focused on just two areas of language education: technology and assessment.

The need of language teachers for in-service training in the use of ICT in language teaching has led to over 45 workshops (*DOTS, MoreDOTS, ICT-REV*) conducted in 28 countries and involving more than 840 teachers. Based on a unique, participant-centred model, workshops have been tailor-made and adapted to the needs of teachers at different educational levels (from kindergarten to university), in different modes (distance and face-to-face teaching), and different technological

affordances (from highly equipped classrooms to teachers struggling with lack of internet connection and occasional loss of electricity).

The latest offers from the ECML in the area of new media for language teaching include an ongoing support for *Training and Consultancy (TaC)* workshops at the request of member states, and a task-based project providing information on digital literacy for language teachers (*E-LANG*).

Commonality and diversity among ECML projects

All the new-media-related projects supported by the ECML share the view that ICT can be integrated into language teaching as a learning aid, but should not dominate whatever teaching style has been chosen. However, there are certain differences between projects: many focus on one particular tool (*BLOGS*) or way of using the internet (*LanguageQuests*); on one section of education (*E-VOLLution*) or on a specific age or social group of learners (*Stars, EducoMigrant*).

Five projects differ in their attempts to encompass all levels and use a wide variety of tools and different pedagogies. *Information and communication technologies and distance language learning* started by providing insights from individual teachers on how experiencing language teaching in the 21st century differs from previous times. *DOTS* then analysed teachers' views on the tools, skills, and pedagogies they felt they needed to successfully teach with ICT. This was followed, in *MoreDOTS*, by extending the audience beyond "formal" language teachers and offering training to language mediators, and informal language teachers, such as social workers and volunteers. Both *ICT-REV* and *E-LANG* are intended for teachers at different levels. Whereas *E-LANG* provides information and encouragement for reflection through reading and visual materials, *ICT-REV* continues to engage practitioners in workshops. The *ICT-REV* project has also developed the *ECML Inventory of ICT tools and open educational resources*. This online repository of tools suitable for language teaching includes tools that are available for free or at least offer a free version. In this way the Inventory acknowledges the diverse economic working conditions of language teachers throughout Europe and supports the human right and equal access to education (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/right-to-education>).

Conclusions and future perspectives

We cannot foresee a time when language teachers will not request opportunities to be brought up-to-date on using new media in their professional practice. Indeed, according to a survey conducted by the OECD, a majority of teachers still feel ill-prepared for the use of new media in their teaching (OECD 2019). Challenges for language teachers in the future will no doubt include the following: use of learning analytics to guide and also constrain teachers' choices; integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into teaching tasks; increasing sophistication of online translation engines, and greater availability of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Open Educational Practices (OEPs).

This is not to say that language educators will no longer be needed in the future. On the contrary, new, exciting challenges are no doubt on the horizon, with the ECML playing a crucial role in continuing to defend the diverse and individualised approach to learning languages they have always pioneered. There might be a role for the advocacy of AI and online translation, where the control by and even the rights of humans can best be supported by digital means. There is definitely a need for the potential of OERs to provide equal access to educational materials to be fulfilled, given that most OER materials are currently only available in English. Professional translation, text simplification, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) can also be employed to these ends. And the ECML is already in a crucial position to develop and disseminate these initiatives.

Since its inception 25 years ago, the ECML has provided a space where language educators have developed educational projects dedicated to the use of ICT for language learning, teaching and teachers' professional development. While initial projects focused on specific tools, target groups or areas of education, recent projects favour a networked approach. This seeks to connect already existing resources from previous ECML projects with new technologies and environments in order to address challenges in the landscape of language education that arise from rapid technological changes and global trends towards learning analytics, learner assessment, individualised learning and open education. Against this background, the continued support of the ECML is of vital importance for language educators in their daily struggles to meet these challenges and to prepare students for living and working in the 21st century.

Pauline Ernest is a former Director of the Language Programme and Co-ordinator of English language and literature courses at the Centre for Modern Languages at the Open University of Catalunya. She has participated in the ECML projects *DOTS – Developing online teaching skills / MoreDOTS – Using open resources to develop online teaching skills* and is currently a co-ordinator of the *ICT-REV Training and Consultancy activity – Use of ICT in support of language teaching and learning*. Her research interests include web-based language learning and teaching, and the training of language teachers in the use of ICT in their professional practice.

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Martina Emke worked as an English teacher in further, vocational and higher education. She has been involved in the ECML projects *DOTS – Developing online teaching skills, MoreDOTS – Using open resources to develop online teaching skills* and is currently a team member of *ICT-REV – Use of ICT in support of language teaching and learning* at the ECML as a teacher educator, materials developer and co-coordinator. Martina recently completed her doctorate at the Open University (United Kingdom). Her research interests include networked learning, social media and algorithmic education.

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Jackie Robbins is a lecturer at the Centre for Modern Languages at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. She has been involved in the delivery of *ICT-REV* workshops (*Use of ICT in support of language teaching and learning*) with the ECML since 2018. Her main research interests are in learner engagement in online language learning contexts, language testing and course adaptations for language learners with special needs.

Ursula Stickler is senior lecturer in German at the Open University, UK. Her research interests are in autonomous and technology enhanced language learning and teacher training. She has been involved with the ECML for more than ten years, leading and contributing to projects and support initiatives for teachers wanting to integrate digital means into their classrooms.