

**FROM THE EDITORS:**

**STEPPING STONES TO TEACHING LANGUAGES WITH TECHNOLOGY**

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In order to teach languages with technology, we as teachers have to accept our role as revolutionaries (see Tsvetelena Taralova, this volume). However, we also need to bear in mind that revolutions in education often consist of a series of slight shifts in our attitudes and teaching practices. In other words, lofty aims need to be translated into a series of small steps towards a

common goal: a collaborative and communicative learner-centred language classroom – a classroom where technology enhances language learning.

This special issue presents a number of these stepping stones on the way to language teaching with technology. The guest editors are members of the project Developing Online Teaching Skills, DOTS (<http://dots.ecml.at>). This is one of 20 projects supported by the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages ([www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)), converging around the common theme of empowering language professionals.

This issue comprises seven contributions – six papers and an interview – showcasing various aspects of the shift towards the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in language teaching. Overall, the articles illustrate a wide range of contexts: from self-trained teachers working alone in their classrooms, to formal and informal networking with others, dissemination of experiences, teacher training and collaboration on international projects.

The first article, *Needs and Challenges for Online Language Teachers – The ECML Project DOTS*, presents our own project. Reporting on the results of a needs analysis survey sent to teachers, we present a wide perspective on using ICTs in language teaching, tackling three major issues: (1) the need for the development of teacher training in ICT use, (2) institutional, social and professional factors constraining language teachers' aspirations to use ICTs in their classes and (3) factors influencing teachers' implementation of ICTs in the classroom. The DOTS project presents a practical way of addressing these needs, dealing with the obstacles and hopefully paving the way for effective ICT use. The overall aim is to develop bite-sized online training activities which can be integrated into teacher training courses or used independently by part-time and full-time teachers.

It is clear that motivated teachers are crucial in this endeavour. This is precisely what we see in the contribution by Tsvetelena Taralova: *The Use of eTwinning in Secondary Schools in Bulgaria*. Tsvetelena is a Bulgarian teacher from Sofia, who presents her experience and self-training in ICT. The article starts with the general context of societal changes and, in particular, changes in the social status of teachers in Bulgaria, and then focuses on her own institution, including institutional support, teachers, students and ICT resources available. Tsvetelena then exemplifies her successful implementation of an online foreign language activity through the eTwinning platform ([www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net)) – an interactive site for the collaboration of European

schools. Her experience shows how a motivated teacher's interest develops into a networking experience, empowering the teacher and her students and meriting international recognition.

Empowering teachers means providing them with appropriate tools so that they can respond to their learners' particular needs. Two articles describe such tools. In her article, *Intermediate Online English: An Attempt to Increase Learner Autonomy*, Ana Gimeno-Sanz presents *Intermediate Online English*, a language course for engineering students offered by the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia in Spain. The course was created using the *InGenio* Authoring Tool and Learning Environment designed by the CAMILLE Research Group at the university. This software can be used by registered teachers to create their own materials, and the students' evaluation of the English course confirm that it was indeed the right tool – the overall level of satisfaction was unanimously high.

María Luisa Ochoa Fernández outlines the design principles of *English Language Improvement*, a virtual course for the study of English for Tourism, set within the pilot project of the Andalusian Virtual Campus in Spain and designed using the WebCT platform. The article *How Can English Be Taught Fully Online? The Example of an Intermediate Course in Tourism* considers how an online English course can be put into practice, includes learner feedback and academic results, and suggests a definition of the student and teacher roles within this online environment. María Luisa's dedication in producing an online learning environment for her students has earned her a national teaching award.

Some teachers may need easing into the ICT world, starting with changes they can easily take ownership of in order to progressively develop into ICT experts. Hervé Thily (*Using a Digital Presenter as a Mixed Solution to Teaching and Training*) argues that using a digital presenter is one way to disseminate digital literacy and foster teamwork while keeping pedagogy at the core of teaching practice. The author illustrates how a digital presenter can be used in face-to-face tasks and goes on to explore how to combine this with virtual learning spaces. This is a clear example of taking small steps to reach the final goal.

Taking ownership of ICT in language courses is also the focus of Laura Loder Büchel's article entitled *Convincing Instructors and Students to Contribute to Online Settings*. The article describes a number of face-to-face and online computer-based activities and argues that learners who live in close proximity can still benefit from participating in online activities. Laura works in teacher education, a focal point for spreading ICT literacy and her article provides arguments for

student participation in and instructors' hosting of learning opportunities in computer-mediated settings. As a result, her trainees are more likely to integrate technology into their teaching with enthusiasm and confidence.

The issue concludes with an interview with Magda Maver, a secondary school teacher and teacher supervisor from Split, Croatia: *Teachers' Use of New Technology in Croatia*. In her conversation with Ursula Stickler, the DOTS project coordinator, Magda describes the path she took, starting out as a teacher of English who originally used ICTs to be able to reach her students more efficiently and moving on to becoming a teacher supervisor who disseminates good practice and organizes seminars nationwide on various academic issues, including ICT use.

Accepting our role as revolutionaries in teaching languages with technology means taking a series of seemingly small steps: being open to the use of new tools and new technologies and willing to undergo training; investing our time in day-to-day teaching and research; communicating with our colleagues and disseminating best practice. We do all this in order to achieve a collaborative and communicative learner-centred language classroom.

This special issue reflects on some of the ways that language teachers at various levels, in different countries and from a variety of backgrounds tackle these tasks. Read on – and find out how you can contribute or how you might already be contributing to this process.