

**DEVELOPING ONLINE LANGUAGE TEACHING.
RESEARCH-BASED PEDAGOGIES AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICES -
BOOK REVIEW**

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Book details:

Developing Online Language Teaching. Research-Based Pedagogies and Reflective Practices

Regine Hampel and Ursula Stickler (Eds.)

Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015, 206 pages

ISBN: 978-0-230-28249-0 hardback

ISBN: 978-0-230-28250-6 paperback

£58,00

Introduction

Developing Online Language Teaching. Research-Based Pedagogies and Reflective Practices

by Regine Hampel and Ursula Stickler is the latest publication from *New Language Learning and Teaching Environments Series* edited by Hayo Reinders. The book was released by Palgrave Macmillan in 2015. In the introduction, the editors promise “a journey towards

successful integration of ICT elements into the online and blended teaching” (Hampel & Stickler, 2015: 6) and they seem to have kept the promise.

The spectrum of the book’s addressees seems broad as it encompasses: pre-service and in-service teachers interested in developing a set of ICT skills and pedagogically transformative practices and also researchers whose field of study relates to online teaching and learning. It was designed with the aim of getting the readers to reflect over their current instructional practices and further developmental options. The authors of eleven chapters truly believe in adaptive teaching, where educators balance the needs and abilities of learners with the affordances of the tools used in class and also the demands of accreditation and assessment. In a very approachable way, they present and discuss the ways to become not only digitally competent but most importantly pedagogically aware of why and how to use ICT tools to facilitate learning. In line with their assumptions over an outstanding role of collaboration in learning, they recommend scrutinizing a number of options and tools the Internet offers for practitioners who are seeking support in their professional development, e.g. Free Online Training Spaces, Open Educational Resources, Online Communities of Practice or the DOTS projects’ websites.

Presentation

The structure of the book, as the editors emphasize in Chapter 1, is modular, not linear. This undeniably is an advantage of the book, especially when one considers using some parts of it relevant in their pre-service teachers’ classrooms.

In Chapter 2, entitled “European Language Teachers and ICT: Experiences, Expectations and Training Needs”, Aline Germain-Rutherford and Pauline Ernest present the results of 3 DOTS (Developing Online Teaching Skills) surveys (2008, 2011 and 2013) and the qualitative data gathered from participants of more than 20 workshops on DOTS. The results reveal the learners’ willingness to take part in technology-enhanced lessons and the teachers’ need for high quality and ongoing forms of online training. It appears that educators want to know how and why the use of the latest technologies can contribute to learning apart from requesting to be trained on which tools to use.

Chapter 3 by Ursula Stickler and Martina Emke, whose title is “Part-time and Freelance Language Teachers and their ICT Training Needs”, enables the reader to learn about the whole scale of teaching contexts where a considerable number of teachers are part-time and freelance practitioners. They often aspire to change their professional situation in

order to get a full-time job by participating in various Continuous Professional Development forms. This is not an easy goal to achieve since it usually requires applying logistical skills, devoting one's time and money to be able to take part in CPDs or even struggling to cater for the possible conflicting demands of various institutions they are employed at. When it comes to what these professionals appeal for, it seems the training formats that involve learning by doing, collaboration and reflection are the most frequently mentioned on the wish list. The teachers do not find cognitive approaches with limited reflection tasks sufficient and fully meeting their needs.

Chapter 4, entitled "Online Language Teaching: The Learner's Perspective", was written by Linda Murphy. The author presents the data gathered in 2008 and 2011 from two questionnaires filled in by 850 students who look for certain skills and qualities with regard to their teachers. It turns out the learners yearn for the shift to a greater use of online elements. As opposed to what some prophets of doom used to claim at the dawn of online language teaching, students still find the teacher indispensable in the classrooms where instructors incorporate technological tools into their practices. Subsequently, the expected teacher's functions in the aforementioned context, namely: systemic, affective as well as cognitive ones, are presented in the chapter, too.

Part 5 by Ursula Stickler and Regine Hampel, entitled "Transforming Teaching: New Skills for Online Language Learning Spaces", encompasses the discussion over the skills that are needed for OLLS. The authors propose the skills framework, where the skills on level 1 involve: matching pedagogies and technologies, on level 2: developing social cohesion and fostering communication, on level 3: enhancing creativity online.

Chapter 6 (by Joseph Hopkins, "Free Online Training Spaces for Language Teachers"), Chapter 7 (by Anna Comas-Quinn and Kate Borthwick, "Sharing: Open Educational Resources for Language Teachers") and Chapter 8 (by Aline Germain-Rutherford, "Online Communities of Practice: A Professional Development Tool for Language Educators") are successful attempts to systemize the available tools for CPD development. The authors provide the reader with thorough analyses of the tools, they present the opportunities the options allow but also discuss the barriers and challenges involved. The readers will certainly find the typology and examples of the OERs extremely useful. What is more, some recommendations for a self-development plan, tips on setting one's own library of free online training spaces or designing a community of practice may appear precious as well. Those who need specific examples illustrating how all these tools, repositories and

communities work in practice will be directed to sample websites where they can read, learn, share their practices, and as a consequence, evolve in their professional identity and knowledge.

Chapter 9, “Theoretical Approaches and Research-Based Pedagogies for Online Teaching”, is an overview of theoretical approaches, which may be useful for both novice and experienced researchers. The author, Regine Hampel, presents a number of methods and research tools to be utilised when conducting studies regarding different aspects of OLT. In fact, there are several hints over the areas and directions of research marked throughout the whole book. One may find them inspirational when looking for one’s own potential area of expertise.

The last two chapters – entitled “Developing Online Teaching Skills: The DOTS Project” and “Using DOTS Materials for the Professional Development of English Teachers in Turkey: Teachers’ Views”, are the accounts of the projects which can perfectly serve as proofs to successful application and utilisation of DOTS materials. Apart from describing a sample DOTS project’s details (2008-2010) around activities, tools and approaches undertaken, Mateusz-Milan Stanojević (Chapter 10) recommends a number of practical suggestions for reflection, which seem invaluable when teachers want to apply the DOTS approach for their own benefits. Süleyman Başaran, Emrah Cinkara and Neşe Cabaroğlu (Chapter 11) conclude with the discussion over another DOTS project’s results, which show participants’ positive views about DOTS materials, DOTS modules’ application and the project’s impact on the participating teachers’ attitudes being it surprisingly significant. The investigation into the benefits and drawbacks is balanced, however, and presented in an unbiased way. The chapters may be treated as the evaluation of the approach promoted by the book, which reveals the great potential of OLT and emphasizes the continuous need for it to be tested and broadly researched, too.

Evaluation

The book is a kind of an awakener for one’s professional development inspiring to reflect upon one’s teaching and further development. Secondly, it is a source of stimulating ideas for research and research tools. Furthermore, its flexibility regarding the target readers needs to be appreciated. Everyone interested in the approach will find something for oneself no matter if they are pre-service, novice or in-service teachers and more or less experienced researchers. Furthermore, the sensitivity towards the whole spectrum of potential addressees of the book

ought to be emphasized. The reader-friendly language use can be sensed from the very start of the publication. What is more, reflective tasks each chapter finishes with are highly advantageous for mentors or lecturers providing instruction to pre-service teachers. They are relevant, ready-made tasks designed for immediate use in and outside the classroom. Finally, the organisation of the book deserves appreciation, too. It is the well-thought-out order of articles that ensures the flow and coherence of the content, due to which one can “digest” the book easily.

At the end of the introductory chapter, the editors placed a word about the medium – a traditional book – they decided to use in order to scrutinize Online Language Teaching. They wish to explain the decision which may seem at odds with the approach they are trying to advocate in the book. As they pointed out, they want to reach the readers who make their first steps in using technology in their classroom. Moreover, the authors hope for the book to be a source of knowledge and ideas that will be useful in the educational context in the future as well, not only at this particular moment in time of the development of ICT in teaching. Thus, a fixed format may be more easily approached and taken advantage of in school contexts farther along. There is one more point that should be added to the ideas above. Some people are still slightly conservative when it comes to the choice of a medium and the experience of reading itself. According to the research commissioned for Publishing Perspectives Designing Books for Millennials¹ conference, which took place in March 2015, young people in Britain and the USA prefer buying print books to e-books. Some studies in other countries, e.g. in Poland, reveal similar results². That is why, a great number of readers are probably very grateful to the authors for publishing the book in the paper version.

Recommendation

To sum up, *Developing Online Language Teaching. Research-Based Pedagogies and Reflective Practices* is worth recommending. When one decides to take part in the journey the authors invite him or her to, they will not regret it. There is a high chance of ending up as an

¹ Gleed, A. (2013). *Booktrust Reading Habits Survey 2013. A national survey of reading habits and attitudes to books amongst adults in England.* Retrieved from <http://www.booktrust.org.uk/usr/library/documents/main/1576-booktrust-reading-habits-report-final.pdf>

Zickuhr, K. & Rainie L. (2014). *A Snapshot of Reading in America in 2013.* Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/16/a-snapshot-of-reading-in-america-in-2013/>

² Wasylewicz M. (2014). *Książka papierowa czy elektroniczna – preferencje czytelnicze dzieci i rodziców w dobie ekspansji nowych technologii.* Last accessed May 10, 2015. http://www.ktime.up.krakow.pl/symp2014/referaty_2014_10/wasylewicz.pdf

inspired and ready to act teacher, and most importantly, as a pedagogically aware educator, ready to evolve in one's professional identity.

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