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June Srichinda
Lecturer
Universite Catholique de Lille
France

Kate Price
Lecturer
Universite Catholique de Lille
France

Iria Vazquez Marino
Lecturer
Universite Catholique de Lille
France

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June Srichinda
Lecturer
Universite Catholique de Lille
France

Kate Price
Lecturer
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Iria Vazquez Marino
Lecturer
Universite Catholique de Lille
France

Abstract

As educators, one of our main goals is to adapt our teaching methods to that of an ever-changing world of education. This paper will focus on the importance of a professional learning community (PLC) for teachers and how an educational tool, such as tablets, can lead to greater collaboration and cohesion within the PLC and produce a more powerful student learning experience. The Clarife language center at the Université Catholique de Lille, France, created a project which encompasses the exploratory educational initiatives within the Horizon 2020 framework. The project, known as Re@langues, involves a community of 48 foreign language teachers of 10 languages who share their experiences, current practices and innovative ideas within the PLC both in a physical and virtual space. In turn, a more productive and collaborative working environment is created which enriches the students' learning experience. The trend in higher education is moving toward technology-based teaching however, the implementation of this approach often lacks a solid foundation. This paper will discuss how Re@langues is also following this general trend but is overcoming said shortcoming through the establishment of a PLC, appropriate ICT training for teachers and the successful integration of innovative pedagogies which include technology-based teaching such as utilizing tablets (with relevant applications) in the foreign language classroom. In addition, teachers will be able to share and discuss the knowledge that they have learnt both in training and in the classroom within the PLC, where they can scaffold concepts and develop ideas into best practices as a community. Re@langues encourages teachers to move forward with their ideas in both learning and teaching with the use of technology. In the context of our project, teachers are empowered through training and support allowing them to employ best practices and tools to assess the key competencies of foreign language learning (reading comprehension, writing, listening and speaking) with a technology-based

approach. At its core, the concept of a PLC rests on the premise of improving student learning by improving teaching practice (Vescio et al. 2008). The Re@langues PLC will continue to develop in both a physical and virtual space where teachers can contribute materials, ideas, case studies, and various other teaching practices as a community. In creating a sustainable model, Re@langues equips its teachers with the knowledge, confidence and support to match the evolving learning styles of our students. As the project advances, Re@langues would like to share its experiences with other disciplines at the university and external institutions.

Introduction

Without the resources of a language lab, teachers and students do not have the tools necessary to accomplish goals or excel to the best of their ability when it comes to learning or teaching a language. How are teachers able to monitor a student's language progression in a classroom of 24 students without the proper tools available? When a classroom with this many students, who learn at varying rates and with different styles, come together to learn a language, how can one teacher feel confident and ensure that they are truly doing their job. Having tablets available as a tool to help facilitate the application of appropriate pedagogical strategies means that language teachers can achieve their objectives efficiently and in turn, help students to learn more effectively and autonomously. Coming into an era where pedagogy and technology work hand in hand, it was only a matter of time before tablets would replace language labs. It is in fact, what educators now call, a mobile language lab. The possibilities at the fingertips of both the teacher and student are endless. Being able to easily access the numerous education applications available allows the teacher to monitor each student individually and recognize what that student needs in order to excel.

Clarife, the language center at the Université Catholique de Lille in France, uses tablets for educational purposes in order to implement innovative pedagogical strategies in the foreign language classroom, as well as, to aid its language teachers who form part of the Clarife - Re@langues professional learning community (PLC). As a community, they aim to move forward and develop pedagogical strategies that can further education for both students and teachers.

The main objectives are to see how the use of tablets can effectively improve the learning environment and enrich the educational experience for both students and teachers while ensuring the development and implementation of innovative teaching practices and professional learning activities at the Clarife. Being able to focus on interactive collaboration, engaging and motivating activities that meet diverse learning needs, as well as targeting the main objectives for the class will be optimised through the use of tablets in class by students and teachers. The applications used will focus on the four essential competency skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) when learning a language.

CALL and Collaborative Learning: An Interdepenent Relationship and How It Has Developed Toward M-Learning

Since the birth of the Internet, the world around us is being incessantly transformed. Not only the way we currently communicate with other people, but also how we learn and teach. Given that a learner's first aim when studying foreign languages is generally to be able to communicate with native speakers, and is currently achieved by way of telephones and tablets, teachers should adapt their courses to reach this goal. Through the implementation of meaningful

tasks in which students have to work together to accomplish different projects or digital tasks, each learner has the possibility to negotiate toward a shared creation in class or in an online classroom.

Through technology, CSCL (Computer Supported Collaborative Learning) has developed, as Koschmann says (2002:12): "It is a field of study centrally concerned with meaning and knowledge building practices in the context of joint activity, and the ways in which these practices are mediated through designed artifacts." Teachers should have in mind that learning together is more than just carrying out a task, learning is a social activity and teachers should not forget the social aspect of learning in teams, according to constructivist principles. (Ellis, Greaney & MacDonald, 2006).

Thus, the main aim when a teacher decides to use the Internet and digital tasks, is for learners to enhance communicative competences in the target language by doing real communicative activities through mobile artefacts, also currently referred to as mobile learning. This kind of learning is based on the idea that students are going to learn the use of collaborative techniques with other students, the implementation of tablets and the use of pedagogical applications, not to mention, relying on their teacher's helpful knowledge. The role of tablets is most valuable with this kind of learning style, especially since it offers media that can support interaction among students and provide technology resources to promote social acts that lead to better learning through interaction and collaborative work within a training process.

Moreover, according to Dudeney and Hockly (2007), using focus on tasks in addition to m-learning as methodology for the implementation of collaborative projects based on the Internet provides a structured way for the teacher to gradually integrate the Internet, web 2.0, iPads and telephones in the language classroom as a tool with which students can learn better. The Internet provides multiple resources where learners can look up almost anything, and can search for information that also facilitates students' access to authentic multimedia and interactive learning environments. It also provides students with the possibility to publish their work and extend the learning process beyond the face-to-face process.

It is important for us to remember that, despite all the technology we have today within our grasp, the purpose of learning is not solely to perform a task: it is a social activity which should not forsake learning in collaborative groups, according to constructivist principles (Ellis, Greaney & MacDonald, 2006). Tasks are thus designed to be student-centred, to encourage learners to take an active role, collaborating and negotiating in groups (Hauck & Hampel, 2005).

As teachers make it easier for students to be in authentic learning environments, it is also important to foster social interaction and collaborative work inside a sociocultural context. So, if our aim is to help and guide learners to use language in real-world situations, then it seems accurate to implement online activities as they can be found in the real world. This has just been said, according to Vadillo and Klinger (2004), and now more than ever we noted that applies even better if we add the use of tablets and activities that motivate students to learn, albeit, in ways they never thought.

Thus, the CSCL is a field of study that is based on the idea that the learning process is constructed as a joint activity, and this knowledge is made mediated by different devices, such as computers at first, and mobile devices (phones, tablets) with increasing frequency today. The relationship between CSCL and mobile learning is both obvious and clear, and although CALL and what is also known as MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) have the same objective, given that they support the process of learning a language through different devices, first the computer and now mobile phones or tablets, there are some differences that should be noted. Since our most important responsibility as teachers is to be able to focus the course for interactive collaboration and using activities that motivate and engage students in their own learning, we should recognize what their needs are so we can decide what we want to learn through the use of tablets/smartphones.

For years Chinnery (2006) stated that there could be two different types of learning through mobile devices, one face-to-face and the other from a distance. What the author was trying to explain is that there are educational applications that the student, or even the teacher can delimit during the learning process through the sequencing of activities that the student carries out after school hours.

There is still no complete agreement on the definition of mobile learning, since it is a field that changes very fast and also because the mobile word is ambiguous, since it may refer to the fact that it encourages student to learn while it is moving (on public transport, at home or school, etc.) or based on technology (Traxler, 2009, en Kukulska-Humes, 2009). The prevailing idea is that it is a type of learning that takes place with any device that is small, autonomous, and can be take along at any time. (Trifanova, 2004 in Kukulska & Shield, 2008). According to Geddes (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield 2008: 271), mobile learning is identified with the idea that we have a mobile device "anywhere, anytime."

There are multiple advantages to using tablets or phones in the classroom instead of computers. Some authors have found it easier and more intuitive to use tablet computers themselves, because of keyboards and mice. Computer applications are usually a more complex installation and need some requirements (such as maintenance) that are not only more expensive but also take longer. Among other things, some authors like Chen, Lambert & Luidry (2010) found positive relationships between the level of student engagement and educational technology, especially in order to promote and facilitate collaborative learning interaction among students.

As noted, apart from what has been said, there are other advantages and disadvantages of implementing mobile learning and use of iPads in education, the scholars mention the following: (Peters, 2007 and Brazuelo & Gallego Gil, 2011)

- Promotes active learning and personalization of learning (process-centered learning) and at the same time, enhances a more meaningful and motivating learning process.

- Connectivity at any time and place helps to have more social interaction between students and teachers. Through this connectivity it encourages participation and collaborative learning.
- Greater access to information effectively by both the student and the teacher.
- Probably most important is that its portability, you can wear it all the time without being disturbed and students always have their study materials in their possession. (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012).

As we know, though increasingly, mobile devices are used more every day in the language classroom, although there are still some drawbacks that need to be improve. For example, some years ago it was unlikely to have good quality sound. Until recently, it was impossible for students to take online interactive activities to practice speaking, because as mentioned before, the quality of the internet was not really good and it made it very difficult to hear. Fortunately, this is changing and schools are addressing the students use of always being connected (Valarmathi, 2011).

Another disadvantage or inconvenience to keep in mind, is to change the vision of how and why we use mobile devices in class. Until not long ago, mobile learning activities were a part of recreational activity, and also a kind of blended learning or semi-face learning, where students had to do things outside of the face-to-face hours and to do that, they used their mobile phones.

We believe it is necessary to consider the great potential for the implementation of mobile learning as part of the syllabus of a foreign language course. Not only should language teachers be able to propose authentic learning environments, it is also important to promote social interaction and collaboration among students. For this reason, if our goal as language teachers is to help guide students to use language in real situations, it seems appropriate to integrate online activities into educational programmes since virtual environments, as for example social networks, constitute the real world of students.

Establishing and Developing a Professional Learning Community (Plc): The Highs and Lows

Introducing anything new into a system requires a certain amount of delicacy, care and consideration. The establishment of a Professional Learning Community (PLC), no matter how beneficial in theory, is no exception. This type of *community* can empower a group, however, it must be clear to potential members that such an entity is dedicated to dialogue based on member's concerns, needs, experiences and discoveries, not to mention the support. A PLC is in fact an agency for discussing and solving common challenges as well as sharing outcomes and successes to move a group forward together. The creation of the Re@langues Professional learning community (PLC) was a natural choice in order to achieve the goals of the Re@langues project:

unifying and empowering a group of 48 foreign language teachers, sharing innovative pedagogies, experimenting with emerging technologies and implementing best practices.

The Re@langues project has 4 main focuses: Evaluation, ICT training, the Professional Learning Community and Professional development. The Professional Learning Community however is the agency that connects and empowers its members. The establishment of the Re@langues PLC was marked by the first ever PLC workshop which involved a process of action learning to set clear goals for the future with the members by using a framework of three themes: Evaluations, Innovative pedagogies and ICT. The members were mixed into three groups and participated in a travelling round table where they had to brainstorm and address the themed table topics. The diversity present among the foreign language teachers of 10 different languages contributed immensely to a broader vision when discussing the goals to set and attain. Within this environment, members were encouraged to recount their experiences, concerns, obstacles and ideas, then action was taken to plan how to attain these goals (Aubusson, 2009). The output was recorded in real time on a document in Google Drive and serves as a guide of obstacles to tackle and goals to attain at future workshops. Perhaps the most important result of the first workshop was not necessarily the production of goals to attain but rather the bonding that occurred within the newly formed community. The members, teachers of different languages, discovered their common challenges and came together to ponder and resolve their own dilemmas, taking on the roles of agents in their agency to produce viable solutions. Successfully established, the Re@langues PLC's success was further enhanced by subsequent repetitions of the first workshop so as to guarantee the inclusion of as many members as possible. This strategy has been adopted for all subsequent workshops.

After reviewing the output of the first workshop, the members of the Re@langues PLC expressed their collective desire to investigate innovative pedagogies and emerging technologies starting with the use of the 50 iPads which were acquired to support the Re@langues project. Since the PLC members have a range of experience with mobile and other digital technologies, from being completely inexperienced to having extensive experience, the second PLC workshop focused on tablet use for foreign language educators.

The parallel goal of empowering teachers through a PLC is to foster a culture of trust, collaboration and confidence where teachers have the desire to investigate emerging practices and create. This will in turn allow a shift toward student-centered learning and the selection and utilization of best practices for teachers. As the Re@langues PLC continues to grow and establish, it has become clear that a solid relationship among members will lead to success.

Case Studies: The Classroom Experience

The following case studies will show the different ways teachers can utilize tablets in the classroom while sticking to the main competences in a

foreign language classroom. The main competences that will be discussed are reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Case Study #1: Storyboarding: a Focus on Writing, Speaking and Listening

In this case study, the student's objective was to create a storyboard in which they will use their own ideas based on a theme given by the teacher. As a collaborative group, the students worked together to build a storyline which incorporated Freytag's pyramid, also known as a narrative structure (Freytag 1863). Freytag's pyramid consists of how a story progresses from the beginning to the end with a climactic moment in the middle. The two main applications that were used when creating these storyboards were *ComicBook!* by 3DTOPO Inc. and *iMovie* by Apple.

The first thing the students had to do was write a story which had a setting, characters, a climactic moment and a moral issue. Being able to use the tablets to show their story, allowed for the writer to show the reader two visions of how their story took place, both visually and auditory. Once their stories were written, the students used the tablets and took pictures using *ComicBook!* (See figure 1). *ComicBook!* is an application where you take pictures that look drawn. The collection of comic-like pictures helped the students visually see their story from beginning to end.

Figure 1. *A Student's Photos Using Comicbook!*

Once they were finished with their photos, they then used *iMovie* and pieced their stories together to play out like an actual movie. The features in *iMovie* gave them the ability to extend time on a certain picture, change the frame if needed and also to add a recording (See figure 2). The recording that the students used was of them reading out the original story that they had first written.

Figure 2. *A Sample Using Imovie with Comicbook! and Voice Recording*
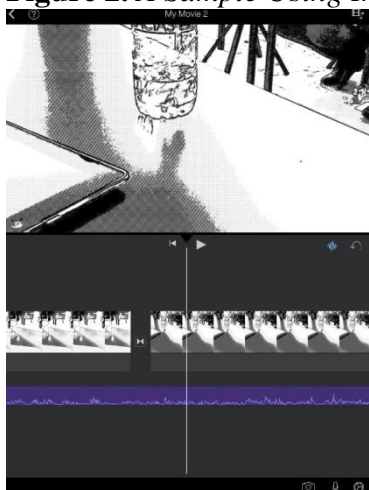
Conclusion

A case study like this seeks to engage student activity along with progressing their language skills in any level class and in any subject. As a language teacher, bringing to light these competences and why they are effective is substantial when motivating students to learn and become active in their education.

1. Writing: Having students write stories allow for them to organize their thoughts and to communicate in a variety of ways. They would be able to understand grammar and punctuation rules, as well as, sentence syntax and vocabulary.
2. Speaking: The students focused on pronunciation, intonation, word stress and fluency. To be able to speak clear and annunciate was one of the main goals for the students. Having them record themselves really helped the students recognize what they need to do to improve their speaking skills.
3. Listening: Having them constantly listen to their recordings and how they spoke allowed them to concentrate and narrow in on the key points needed, such as mood, feeling or specific information that they really needed to make their story whole.

Case Study #2: Artistic Poetry: A Focus on Writing and Reading

This case study will show how art is incorporated in a class lesson, specifically in poetry. In groups of two to three, students worked together to create poems which were based off of images chosen by another group in the class. The applications used in this lesson were *Pages* by Apple and *Safari*, which is an internet browser, also by Apple. They also used the *Airdrop* function to send images and poetry to each other from one tablet to another.

Before the beginning of the lesson, the students already had a clear idea of the different structures of poetry given to them by the teacher in a previous lesson. This helped them to choose a 'voice' and a form for their poem. The first thing the students did was use *Safari* to search for an image. Once they finished, they sent that image using *Pages* to another group, using *Airdrop*. *Pages* is a word processor on IOS that allows you to create documents easily and creatively and works hand-in-hand with *Airdrop*. *Airdrop* is a Bluetooth function, also on IOS, that allows you to send things to other tablets. With that chosen image, the students used what emotions they felt while looking at it and wrote poetry about it, while sticking to the structure they previously agreed on. While writing their poems, they continued to use *Pages* so that they were able to send both their photo and poem to the teacher and to each other, via *Airdrop*. One of the criteria of assessments in this class is peer review, so being able to use *Pages* and *Airdrop* as a fast way of delivery, really helped the students evaluate each other's poems. In the end and as a group, they composed poetry that they felt were meaningful, descriptive and interactive (See figure 3).

Figure 3. *Artistic Poetry, Group A*

Life is full of rush and stress
That makes me feel kinda depressed.
I wish there was a secret place,
A temple - calm, relaxed - feel no pain
That's what I am dreaming of ...

Where I can feel I am the best,
Stop thinking stop working.
We just want a moment of peace,
I refuse to talk and act like a beast.
I wish for a place where I can be smiling.

Like the moment when the day is about to end,
And the lights around us slowly start to fade.
Sometimes I wish I had a secret getaway
A place where sunsets and summers never end,
Sometimes I wish I had a place to rest...

Conclusion

Having students exposed to art is ideal when learning because it allows them to see the many different aspects in the world and allows them to be open-minded about certain situations (LeNoir 2002). The use of art in the classroom can be used at all levels and in all subjects as long as the teacher guides the students in whatever activity the teacher chooses. In this specific activity, the students were able to focus on their writing and reading skills.

1. Writing: The students were given a choice of what kind of structure and form they wanted to write their poems about. Giving them that freedom, opened up their minds to the endless ideas that came to them when they first looked at their image. Based on what structure they chose for their poems, the teacher evaluated voice, descriptive image, form and word development.
2. Reading: Through peer review, students had the opportunity to evaluate each other's poems. In this particular competence, students had to really assess their peer's poems by interpreting what meaning they believed to be true in what they read and from what they saw.

Case Study #3: Test Preparation For A Listening Exam: A Focus on Writing, Speaking, Reading And Listening

This specific case study was used to help prepare students for the Cambridge Advanced English (CAE) exam, Paper 3: listening. Although this was used for a specific purpose, anyone can use these methods and adapt it to any listening activity they would like to do in their classroom. The applications that were used were *Pages* by Apple and *Voice Recorder* by BejBej Apps. The *Airdrop* function was also used during this activity.

In pairs, the students worked together to create all four parts of the listening exam (Part 1 will be mentioned in this case study). Each part of the listening exam is specific in terms of format and timing, which all of the students were well aware of before doing this activity. They had the opportunity to be creative, funny and imaginative in each extract that they created.

Part 1 of the CAE listening exam consists of three extracts that last between 1 to 1.5 mins long. For each extract, there are always two people having a conversation and two multiple choice questions based on that conversation. For this particular activity, the students were asked to work in pairs and recreate a conversation using *Voice Recorder* and to prepare two listening comprehension questions with three possible answers using *Pages* (See figure 4).

Figure 4. *Listening Example Using Voice Recorder and Pages*

They agree that…
  a. they like eating out
  b. they prefer eating home
  c. they usually eat at the canteen

What do they complain about?
  a. the crowded canteen
  b. food quality at the canteen
  c. the price of canteen

Once the students were finished with both tasks, they sent their questions/ responses and recording to the teacher via *Airdrop*. The teacher then projected the questions/responses and played the extracts so the whole class can take the test.

Conclusion

In this activity, the students had the opportunity to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of their writing, listening and speaking skills.

1. Writing: The task of writing both a dialog and questions/answers helps the students have a clear idea of the goal at hand. It allows them to concentrate specifically on their main points and also try different tactics such as confusing the listener with false responses and/or redirecting one main idea to another.
2. Speaking: Pronunciation and intonation is a focal point when understanding the different extracts. Varying in different styles and accents also give the listeners a different feel of what the speaker is saying.
3. Reading: Reading and understanding the different questions and responses really made the listeners concentrate, especially since there were multiple answers available.
4. Listening: This allowed the students to focus on the main points mentioned especially when listening to specific details and information.

It really helped the students prepare for the actual test that they will be taking.

Conclusion

There are multiple advantages to using tablets in the classroom over laptops or workstations. Applications designed for touchscreen interfaces have been found to be simpler and more intuitive than those requiring keyboard and mouse for input. Computer applications tend to have more complex installation and setup requirements, not to mention the additional maintenance required to keep the desktop system running smoothly and securely in general. Finally, tablets are often cheaper and more power-friendly than their larger counterparts. Moreover, Chen, Lambert and Luidry (2010) have found positive correlations between the use of educational technology and student engagement, notably to promote an active and collaborative learning and student-faculty interaction.

Previous research has shown that tablets in the classroom can benefit students and further their ability to acquire more knowledge than in a traditional classroom. The idea of having tablets in the classroom essentially means that the teacher is providing a language lab at the students' disposal. Since teachers have such a small amount of face to face time with the students, usually about 15 to 24 hours a semester, it is important that the teacher utilize as much of the time they have available as possible. Tablets can shorten the feedback loop between the student and teacher by allowing the teacher to observe student progress in real-time. Tablets are capable of generating exercises for students on demand allowing students to work at their own pace. Auto-grading with teacher oversight also provides students with instant feedback while allowing the teacher to observe the students strengths and weaknesses in the classroom. Having tablets available will provide the students and the teacher the tools through the use of technology that is already driving education into the future.

Technology, with the use of Internet and iPads/tablets, gives teachers and students new opportunities for authentic tasks, activities and materials. IPads will offer excellent opportunities for collaboration and communication between learners in and outside the classroom. As technology is becoming increasingly mobile, it provides us with new ways to practice and acquire main language skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading.)

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