Martina Emke, Ursula Stickler & the MoreDOTS project team

Teaching and learning online – Developing your skills to develop others

1. Introduction

The widespread use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in language learning has not only provided more varied forms of learning for adults but has also posed a number of challenges for language teachers who now need to be multiskilled: They have to be knowledgeable about the ICT tools available for language teaching, able to decide whether a particular tool is consistent with their underlying pedagogic approach, and confident in the use of suitable tools so as to ensure that these tools meet the needs of their learners. It is therefore crucial for language teachers to receive support and encouragement to use ICT tools (more) confidently and to develop their skills further.

The DOTS (Developing Online Teaching Skills, http://dots.ecml.at) and MoreDOTS (Using open resources to develop online teaching skills) projects, which have been supported by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML, www.ecml.at) since 2008, address teachers' needs for support by providing a Moodle-based workspace (http://moodle.dots.ecml.at) containing bite-sized training modules and the opportunity to share experience and language teaching materials with other language teachers in Europe (Beaven et al. 2010; Stickler et al. 2010).

Our work as a project team[1] is based on a socio-constructivist theory of learning (Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch/Tulviste 1992). We believe that enhancing the quality of one's teaching needs to be based on an understanding that learning takes place when the learners can explore a new environment and actively engage with it, supported by scaffolding in the form of a) carefully designed

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[1] The MoreDOTS project team consists of seven members: Martina Emke, b.i.b. International College, Germany; Pauline Ernest and Joseph Hopkins, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain; Aline Germain-Rutherford, Middlebury College, USA; Regine Hampel and Ursula Stickler, The Open University, UK; and Mateusz-Milan Stanojević, University of Zagreb, Croatia. The eighth member of the DOTS team (2008-2011) was Tita Beaven, The Open University, UK.

materials, b) timely, constructive feedback, and c) available continuous peer support. While more traditional pedagogy claims that learning takes place by top-down feeding of information from experts to novices, constructivists describe learning as the building of knowledge, with peers, in a social learning situation, thus creating joint meaning and understanding. Real learning occurs when the "novice" is able to explain to peers and other learners the newly acquired knowledge and understanding, thus becoming "expert" in his or her own right (Boudourides 1998; Glasersfeld 2001). Constructivist principles have been applied to language learning (Rüschoff n.y.; Rüschoff/Ritter 2001) and to online learning (Dougiamas 1998).

The DOTS team realized that raising teachers' awareness and providing ICT training workshops would on their own not suffice to ensure confident and professional use of ICTs in language teaching as this neglects a crucial element: the teachers' beliefs. Dadds (1997) has pointed out that many teaching reforms have failed because the teachers' self-perception and the beliefs and values underlying their teaching were not considered. To engender truly sustainable change in teachers' practice, a higher level of training needs to be addressed (see Kennedy 2005), for example, by engaging teachers in the co-construction of new practices.

The DOTS training approach is based on first establishing the needs of teachers through needs analysis questionnaires, and then creating training materials that will meet these needs. Parallel to this, we have developed tools to elicit representations of language teachers' attitudes, values and beliefs with regard to the use of ICTs in language teaching, and categorized these representations into a framework of different teacher types. To make it easier for teachers to identify with these types and to find their own place in the framework, narrative representations have been chosen and presented in the form of "vignettes", describing – initially – six different teacher types. Finally, all workshops are tailormade, as far as possible, in order to meet the expressed needs of participants and take into account the different types of ICT users amongst language professionals.

This paper will present our experience from the DOTS project and subsequent initiatives and discuss to what extent our research can contribute to a better understanding of the different needs and self-perceptions of teachers in online language teaching and enhance teacher training.

tice and could spark discussions about online language teacher training establishing a much needed theory-practice interface.

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