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### **Possibilities of foreign language blended learning**

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Blended learning, i.e. learning augmented with digital technologies, rather than working in physical classrooms is becoming more and more popular. Using technologies makes it possible to cover areas of the curriculum that there is just not enough time for in the busy world of formal education.

Learning of any foreign language can be enhanced by the following technological tools [1].

*Video conferencing (VC)* that links your class to other classes around the world. This technology provides learners with the opportunity to communicate with others, often native speakers of the language they are learning, or other learners studying the same language, but who don't share the same home language, so they are forced to make use of foreign language to communicate. VC is being used to bring learners together over distance so that they can communicate in a common language and share cultural experiences. Virtual worlds afford learners the possibility of 'living' within a 3D space, collaboratively developing content and interacting with peers through virtual experiences: debates, role play, exhibitions, performances and the like. When students write or speak for a broader and more international audience,

they pay more attention to polishing their work, think more deeply about the content they produce, and consider cultural norms more thoughtfully.

In certain situations VC can be one of the few methods available for exposing learners to native speakers and for facilitating cultural exchanges. VC can also bring specialist foreign language teachers into classrooms for direct teaching as well as modeling good practice for the mainstream teacher.

Using *Skype* to invite guests to the classroom gives learners the chance to use English to speak to someone from abroad and to find out about their culture, especially if the learners are studying the country the guests are from. It would be beneficial to make recordings of the conversation using MP3 SkypeRecorder to make recordings of Skype interviews, which allow the learners to listen to the interviews afterwards and understand the information.

Today's learners have become particularly adept at creating and collaboratively developing content for a wide variety of purposes, for example so-called Web 2.0 tools such as *blogs, forums and wikis (asynchronous tools)*.

At the heart of Web 2.0 is the blog, short for web log. At its most basic, a blog is an online journal that can be used by teachers to publish information about a course.

The other popular online publishing platform that has become well-used by teachers and learners is the wiki. The term comes from the Hawaiian for 'quick' and a wiki is a collaborative web space allowing for pages that can be created and edited by multiple users easily without any knowledge of web design. The wiki is similar to the blog in that it allows for quick and easy publishing, but the more flexible structure of the wiki means that it is good for project work, whilst the blog is better as an ongoing record of classwork as the latest work is always displayed at the top of the page.

Another development of Web 2.0 is the podcast, which comes from the combination of the words iPod and broadcast. Podcasts are audio or video files that are broadcast via the internet and can be downloaded and listened to on a computer or mobile device.

One more area that technology supports very effectively is *project work*. Getting learners to do work about topics that are of interest to them, or topics that are taught in other parts of the curriculum (sometimes called Content and Language Integrated Learning or CLIL) is a great way to improve their skills.

*Talking photo albums* have been successfully used to create stories or non-fiction texts with an oral narrative. Here photos and text can be inserted into each page of the album and the user can subsequently record a corresponding narration.

*Case studies based on different IC technologies* can be used to increase learners' access and participation as well as supporting their development of oral competency, reading and writing. *Talking books* can be created in specialist software like 2Simples's Create-a story, finished products can subsequently be published as an e-book ready for reading via iBooks (for example on a mobile device such as an iPad), on blogs, websites or released in e-book format.

*Digital games* are proving popular because they can be successfully used to facilitate teachable moments and they also tend to incorporate elements of problem solving that promote student collaboration. When students work together to solve problems there are opportunities for teachers to develop well-structured language learning activities. An online game can be chosen with the criteria for choosing based on the fact that they are easily accessible online, they are free, the graphics are cartoonish and appealing and the content appropriate for his learners.

A related activity to digital game-based learning is *interactive fiction (IF)*. IF is a purely text-based digital game in which the readers participate in the storytelling process by becoming the main protagonist, directly influencing how the narrative unfolds in the choices they make during the interactive reading process.

*Mobile Assisted Language Learning* is one of the most interesting emerging types of technology enhanced learning, especially now that mobile devices are carried by more and more people every day, and that the mobile phone has evolved from a simple voice device to a multimedia communications tool capable of downloading and uploading text, data, audio, and video – from text messages to

social network updates to breaking news, the latest hit song, or the latest viral video. The applications for language learning are numerous.

Any teacher can create his electronic resource pack with his own materials, including language exercises using *Hot Potatoes*, which are delivered via the virtual language environment.

The internet is not only being used to help students learn English by accessing authentic materials or chatting with native speakers, but it has become one of the environments where professionals meet, communicate, collaborate and work.

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