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The Role of the Teacher and the Blended-Learning Method

In our digital and globalized world it is beyond dispute that we, as teachers, need to renew ourselves both professionally and methodologically from time to time. According to Kristóf Nyíri (academic professional MTA) it is reflected – even in 2018 – on the one hand that in the konwledge society life-long learning (LLL) is compulsory and educating people besides working at the same time, and on the other hand the Internet is supposed to be the usual and natural way of everyday orientation and administration/communication (Nyíri, 2003). The teacher would like to join the new society of knowledge even during the lessons or outside of it as the interferer of science, art, languages etc. In the latest decades the role of teachers (at all levels of education) has been going on tremendous changes parallel with the institution of Hungarian education. The roles had to adjust to these changes and expectations. In my study I would like to highlight the role/s of teachers while using blended/mixed-learning method in-, and outside the classroom especially in university eductaion focusing on language teaching.

Introduction

In our digtalized world it is beyond dispute that we need professional and methodological renewal from time to time. As Kristóf Nyíri (academic professional MTA) briefly summerizes the challenges of the present, which is still valid in 2017, on the one hand in the konwledge society life-long learning (LLL) is compulsory and educating people besides working at the same time, and on the other hand the Internet is supposed to be the usual and natural way of everyday orientation and administration/communication (Nyíri, 2003). The world of Internet influences school life and the whole world of education. The teacher, as the mediator of knowledge, has to join the virtual world during the lessons and outside them. Theoretically we get loads of useful advice from many different sources. Everybody is able to show and tell something new, wonderful and useful. However, if we would like to renew, modernise or make our good-practices more enjoyable for our students without much technical background, it often

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causes some difficulties. In most of the cases we do not even know how to start. We are waiting for some magic (or somebody else) to start it and solve it.

To my mind helping students to become digital citiziens (Ollé, 2012) is also highly important during a cross-cultural language lesson or course, as well. It is the task of the educational institution, from one hand, to improve this process. As Ollé (2012) says „we need to be open and let the world flow in and out". For a teacher it should be basic to be ready for the flow and development of the changes of the educational and informational technological world around us. The digital competences and digital change (Racsko, 2017) that concern the education and its development should be followed by the tutors/mentors. The process of electronical learning environment (Racsko, 2017 p.11) is around us in the classroom, too.

In my study I will present an online English language material which was carried out by myself at the University of Dunaújváros under the HASIT project, which was dedicated to support students' success (SSS) in the higher education to prevent drop-out. (Szabó, 2017) I suppose that many of us have already done test papers, questionnaires or different kinds of materials at home with the help of a computer to motivate our students and to support their success. Many of us have already got a lot of experiences in this field, or at least thesaurus of konwledge from teachers' resource materials. The teachers' intention is to organise and digitalise these materials, which have been collected during many years, so that they could use it whilst teaching.

I will introduce this online material for the inquirer from the earliest steps – form its idea - until the digitalization. I undertake to show how a teacher can start and realise to make online material form his/her own well-tried materials with the help of the technical devices at home or in the institution. I am going to share practical devices, know-hows which the teachers can rely on.

1. The Relevance of the Topic

There are a lot of questions concerning this theme: to use modern or to use traditional materials in the classroom. The experiences are besides using both or mixed version of the above mentioned ones. To tell the truth, we know that it is difficult to realise the right proportion during a lesson. Due to the lack of time we cannot carry out every step we have planned for the given session. As teachers in practice we know that the ammount of materilas is not in proportion to the time we have at a lesson. We need to manage time well and have to hand on as much as we can from the material and according to the abilities our students have.

The acquisition of Informational technologies could be our helping hand. These days every institution and classroom is equipped with ICT devices. However, it is a question how we are able to use them. As far as I am concerned, two crucial problems lie in it. One of them is that often there are situations deriving form the incompleteness of technical devices and their not well-handled situations (for instance the non-existance of an overhead projector cable or a bulb). The other one is when the taecher is not aware of the digital competences. Nevertheless, the situation is not so dark. We can see development of Internet access in Hungary, which merely influences the accessibility and online existence of students and families (concerning the studies). The teachers are trying to improve their IT competences continuously with official and non-official courses.

The children of the digitalized world are highly motivated in using technical gadgets. They are 'digital inborns/Natives' (Prensky, 2001), they were born into it. Nowadays teachers are digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001). The students have demand for using these gadgets at school and not just during IT lessons. We, teachers, need to get closer to Z/Y generation by different tools.

As for me, the method is very important and essential, whose main mediator is the teacher. The personality and smile of the teacher is not to be neglected. The direct smile, the body language, the motivation and the power of live voice are crucially essential in this alienated world (Varga, 1998).

An online material which is connected to traditional, classroom teaching (blended/mixed) can be a tool for treating the above mentioned problem and can make our methods more effective to reach the goals. An own, self-tailored material with a well-tried methodology will be able to provide our students nice results. All we need is willpower and determination!

2. Teaching English in an Online Environment (brief review)

In this section I would shortly glance out how language teaching can be realised in online evironment. We can distinguish three different bigger platforms. Firstly, the web-platform, secondly the network communication tools and last but not least, the CD-ROMs. In my study I would prefer the material accessible on the web-platform.

As Hoopingarner suggests „technology is a kind of tool, which helps the teaching and learning process, broadens the possibilties of input, provides an additional tool for language practice and serves an interactional platform for task-based learning processes" (Hoopingarner, 2009).

We could mention endless benefits of the material reached via online platforms, such as, motivation towards technology, use of the material independently of space and time, synchronous and asynchronous learning possibilities, full of experiences. Hereby I would highlight the role of the teacher which is so important and methodologically dominant as well. If the student only uses the web platform, he/she will not use proper methods to reach the goal. The lack of the presence of the teacher would distort the desired aim. My belief is that those roles of the teachers are needed whom we call a tutor, a mentor or a facilitator.

3. The Introduction of the Process of Making E-learning Material

3.1 The Idea

The intention of the idea was to make an organised, well-structured online material which is dedicated to help students at the University of Dunaújváros to prepare successfully for the intermediate level state examination of English (B2 level). Anyway, this could be any other motivation, for example a project or outside inspiration or assignment.

3.2 The Determination of the Aim

The determination of the aim defines the further steps of the online material development. We have to be aware of the following information: the target group, the age of the group, the language level of the students, the requirements, the time expended (both for the develpoment process and study).

3.3 Structure

The limits are the freedom and fantasy of the teacher. If there is no special requirement towards the developer, then the own demands and methods can determine the structure of the online material. Collecting our experiences onto one platform can be very challenging and inspiring for a devoted teacher. This process is about the organisation of techniques and well-tried methods collected through several years.

3.4 Technical Background

It is a crucial question. It has already been mentioned that this question could be a negative drawback for a teacher mostly in state education in Hungary. The insufficient technical background or knowledge of it can set back the implementation and the realisation of the project. However, with an average personal computer and Internet access at home we can carry

out our goal at a certain level. (We can complete the basis of the material, but it will not be enough for presenting it on a web platform.)

3.5 Filling it up with Content – Time/ Work

This is going to be the lion's share of the duty. As for my opinion, this is the most time consuming and tiring part of the development. We have to collect loads of tasks, methods, ideas so that the material on the online platform could become motivating and attractive. It is the most useful phase of the development procedure. The teacher can archive and organise the tasks into a portfolio. It takes a long time but it is worth.

3.6 Phasing the Operations

The developer needs to consult the information specialists continuously about the possibilities and forms available in the system (in this case Moodle) of the web platform. It can tie our hands and the implementation of the tasks. If they are supposed to be units supported by videos, then studio works will also be needed. It is also a big challenge, but it is needless to say that it is exciting and not an ordinary duty. We can gain experience and learn form it a lot. We have the opportunity to create individual, own-designed video and voice recordings tailored to the language level of our target group.

3.7 Feedback / Making Corrections

A test phase is ought to be done while the mistakes could be filtered. It is really important approaching the end of the work. It is also the time for making refinements. Phasing the experiences and making corrections are crucial.

4. Results, Conclusion

Before the students could have gained the availability of the online material I asked them to fill in a questionnaire in connection with their preferences and demand in advance. The participants of the mini-research were active and passive students of the University of Dunaújváros (DUE), in numbers 35. They took part in a course of English language sponsored by a project which aimed to help the students pass the B2 level language exam by which they could get to hand their degrees. The course lasted for 13 weeks during a semester and it was optional to take the exam or not (if they felt ready for it or not). The age group of students was from 19-35, both part time and full time students were able to take part in the course as a target group of DUE

students. The aim of the survey was to get to know the students' attitude towards the online courses and traditional classroom activities. The results of the micro survey can be seen below:

Questionnaire – Using online language material besides classroom methods

1) Have you ever used online material at the same time with traditional cllassroom course with the help of a teacher?

  Yes 55%   *No 45%*

2) Would you use online learning material in Moodle system to your English studies?

  Yes 75%   *No 25%*

3) Would you like to use material reached via web-platform that you could use any time and place you wish?

  Yes 95%   *No 5%*

4) Would you prefer a language course based on online material mentored by a teacher with classroom teaching as well?

  Yes 85%   *No 15%*

5) Which platform would you prefer to keep in touch with your teacher once a week?

  E-mail 40 %   *Chat 40 %*   *Forum 25 %*

6) Would you likely to use listening and video aids to support your studies in this system?

  Yes 95 %   *No 5%*

7) How much time could you deal with the online material weekly besides the 4 classroom lessons?

  1 hour/week 20%   *2 hours / week 60 %*   *3 hours/ week 15%*

  4 hours or more/ week 5 %

From the results it can be seen that the students are motivated and willing to use the mixed (blended) material. The questionnaire helped me to get to know the students' attitude towards online material. I can state that I gained positive feedback. It means that students at the University of Dunaújváros prefer to use blended (mixed) materials now and in the future as well.

With the help of the survey I also would have liked to know the demands set up towards an online language material. Hereby I would list some of the students' suggestions: precise, easy to handle, transparent, should match the language levels, useful video and listening material, diversified tasks. In the future, concerning the development of teaching aids, these aspects would help a lot to take into account, not to mention that the present online material could be improved along these preferences.

5. Summary

I am at the early steps of my research but I suppose that the practice and theory will mature together. There are a lot of good possibilities in the testing and statistical functions of Moodle system which can be surely a helping hand for the teachers to get more information and feedback. One of the most important benefits of blended-learning method is the possibilty of the personal contact with the teacher. Besides the individual learning process, group teaching could not be neglected, either. The students are able to study independently from time and place and they also have the opportunity to consult the mentor teacher.

As a disadvantage it has to be mentioned that the pupils do not always sit along the video and listening aids at home. This fact is proved by the data provided by the Moodle system.

With this study I intend to encourgae my colleagues to digitalize their well-tried practical teaching materials that could be reached online as well to make the students' development more efficient.

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