Teaching Media Literacy and English as a Lingua Franca: Learning by Doing International Projects - An Approach to Teaching Professional English in Higher Education

The advent of global citizenship in the 21st century posited intercultural communication and the need for efficient communication as the cornerstone of teaching English as a foreign language. Global digitalization has not only influenced how people communicate world-wide but has given higher education institutions the task of preparing learners for the global market.

English language teaching goes beyond a good command of linguistic structures to equipping learners with the competencies to perceive and understand cross-cultural differences and collaborate and negotiate meaning. Nowadays it is unarguable that communication is increasingly digitally mediated and for students to be competent communicators and get ahead in the workplace, they need digital skills. The challenge is to develop these digital and media literacies parallel with teaching English by promoting collaborative problem solving in technology-rich environments using English as a Lingua Franca (Seidlhofer 2005). This includes the ability to create and communicate digital information, the ability to research and evaluate information online, and the ability to solve problems in technology-rich environments. It also requires teaching learners to build strategies to enable a multitude of literacies to work hand in hand. 21st century competencies require learners to experience real-life tasks in authentic scenarios that are complex (Hallet 2014). Learners use media and Web 2.0 tools to communicate and collaborate with others and create joint knowledge (Dooly 2008) using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

This paper aims to provide an overview of the data and analysis of a telecollaboration project between three universities that focuses on teaching 21st century competencies. The European Dialogue Project (EDP) started in 2013 and has given students from Germany, Italy and Portugal the opportunity to work jointly online and developing new skills and different literacies. After four successful years, we have developed an approach to teaching professional English using technology and ELF, as well as examining how technologies are best used for learning, more specifically Web 2.0 skills. Furthermore, we have developed a set of guidelines in designing and implementing student collaboration projects for higher education institutions.

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