GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

Ed Dixon, University of Pennsylvania, USA

This collection of five articles is based on the work of language instructors who presented their findings on the pedagogical value of Web 2.0 and computer-mediated communication technologies at the annual conference for the Northeast Association for Language Learning Technology (NEALLT) at the University of Pennsylvania in 2011. The authors of these articles are experienced and skilled language educators in both the classroom and in new learning spaces afforded them and their students through Web 2.0 technologies including wikis, blogs, video chats and virtual realities. This volume presents the combined effort and perspective of practitioners and researchers, who investigate the impact of social media and networks on language learning and development. Through their experiences in the physical classroom and also in virtual spaces, the authors are able to compare student outcomes from both realms and show how Web 2.0 technologies and CMC can be applied to a wide range of educational contexts and thus do more than simply enhance classroom activities. These technologies are opening the classroom door to new learning opportunities that are reshaping the way teachers and students experience and use language for more authentic communication and social collaboration with language partners worldwide.

Bax (2011) raises the question about the nature of digital education and looks at the behavior of students and the role of educators in virtual spaces. He then defines five elements of effective educational practice which he identifies as (1) access to knowledge, (2) participation and interaction, (3) expert intervention through scaffolding of activities that check on students' progress, (4) expert modeling, and (5) challenges and contradictions from an expert and from other learners. These five points provide a good context and framework for the reader of the following articles in which to judge the pedagogical values of the digital learning spaces used and described by the instructors to promote linguistic and intercultural competence. The following summarizes the subject matter of each article.

In the context of ever-globalizing business and cultural spheres, article 1 describes a STAR-TALK project for the development of language fluency in Hindi that was funded by the federal government to fill the need for foreign language competency in critical languages. Rather than relying on teacher-centered classrooms, this project took a student-centered approach by introducing video-chat technology to promote meaningful communication in standards-based language teaching and in contexts that build cultural understanding.

Article 2 describes an evolving online platform designed to simulate an immersive environment in a virtual 3-D space for the acquisition of translingual and transcultural competence in Spanish. This project is aligned

with the goals of ACTFL's National Standards and the 2007 MLA report and shows how learning experiences in virtual spaces reconfigured the students' conventionalized norms of participation and lead to more student-centered discussions and meaningful collaborative work.

Article 3 describes an eTandem project between language partners in New York and Madrid. Its goal was to improve the students' writing skills at the intermediate level through authentic exposure to the language in a peer-learning environment. The email exchanges had a positive impact on the way students on both sides of the Atlantic viewed the foreign culture and also revealed a learning experience that traditional classroom activities do not afford.

Article 4 is a case study that examines one French student's personal trajectory in an online, transnational and telecollaborative learning environment and discusses her changing and new understanding of self, culture and language fostered through her experiences in technology-supported virtual communities. This study is rooted in sociocultural theory, with learners actively engaged in their educational development mediated through transcultual encounters, concepts, and reflections in journals and interviews.

Article 5 describes the affordances of social media and networks for teaching online courses in German. Similar to their face-to-face counterparts, the online courses are grounded on the principles of communicative language teaching and learning but clearly expose the potential of these principles to maximize participation, promote learner autonomy and influence student outcomes when applied to collaborative digital learning spaces.

Asking language faculty to reconsider pedagogy and the ways in which they engage students through technology is best supported through research. At NEALLT 2011, Mills emphasized that research and curriculum are closely related and are essential for bridging the gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, the teacher as researcher can make important contributions to changing classroom practices

and the curriculum. The research and findings in these articles provide several examples for how teachers are re-evaluating the relationship of the classroom to technology. Traditionally, teachers and administrators concentrate on the supportive role of technology for improving classroom activities and the curriculum. However, the uses of technology described in these articles suggest a gradual shift in the direction of that focus as the classroom becomes the foundation and vehicle for preparing, training and educating our students to interact and collaborate with each other and their peers from around the globe in these new and emerging social and digital media spaces. The classroom in this way becomes the proving ground or springboard for helping learners to shape what Pegrum (2011) terms their "online presence" and "digital identity" (p. 18). As Warschauer (2011), points out, Web 2.0 technologies may not only be improving education but also transforming it. Preparing students for intercultural and intellectual encounters with native speakers made possible through technology, will require, as the work of these authors suggest, not only trained and knowledgeable language pedagogues but also teachers who are able to effectively and strategically maneuver their students between the learning environment of the physical classroom and that of virtual spaces in the Internet.

Ed Dixon
Guest Editor
IJVPLE

REFERENCES

Bax, S. (2011). Digital education: Beyond the 'wow' factor. In M. Thomas (Ed.), *Digital education: Opportunities for social collaboration* (pp. 239-256). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mills, N. (2011, April). *Action research: Bridging theory and practice in an online teacher education program*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northeast Association for Language Learning Technology (NEALLT) Learning, Philadelphia, PA.

Pegrum, M. (2011) Modified, multiplied, and (re-) mixed: Social media and digital literacies. In M. Thomas (Ed.), *Digital education: Opportunities for social collaboration* (pp. 9-35). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Warschauer, M. (2011). Forward. In M. Thomas (Ed.), *Digital education: Opportunities for social collaboration* (pp. xi-xii). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ed Dixon, PhD in Germanic Languages and Literatures, is a Lecturer for German and the Technology Director in the Penn Language Center at the University of Pennsylvania. He is active in a variety of areas related to classroom instruction and faculty training with technology. He presents and collaborates regularly on papers, panels and presentations at regional, national and international conferences. Ed is president of the Northeast Association for Language Learning and Technology and taught in summer 2010 the first fully online distance learning course in a foreign language for credit from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2011, Ed received Penn's affiliated faculty award for distinguished teaching in the College of Liberal and Professional Studies.