

Preface

Language teaching has seen the development of a variety of methodologies and approaches over the past decades. These have included the grammar translation method, the total physical response method, the silent way, and the communicative approach. These practices have involved the use of a range of tools, including the cassette player and VCR and DVD players, and have concentrated on the development of language skills, grammar, vocabulary, and communicative competence. They have also, in the main, relied upon teachers and course books as the principal sources of information and guidance.

After the birth of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in the late 1970s, foreign language teaching and learning saw the introduction of the use of micro and networked computers and the development of hardware and software designed specifically for language instruction. Since the end of the 1990s, with the popularization of synchronous and asynchronous communications and the Internet, a number of CALL research papers and projects have focused on the use of e-mail for language teaching and the establishment of cross-cultural communication activities (Chapelle, 2001).

More recently, CALL methodologies have gone a step further, this time to embrace not only the new technology but also methodologies and approaches brought about by the use of the Internet and virtual learning environments. These take into consideration the needs and interests of both students and institutions within the context of a technological and democratic society.

It was in this context that the idea for putting together a publication germinated. The initial thoughts of organizing this book stem from several research projects carried out by the editors on computer-mediated learning. From the first investigations, Marriott and Torres sought to propose methodologies that would develop a student's critical sense, methodologies that would overcome the more traditional teaching methods centered in the reproduction of content. They were also looking for innovative solutions using information and communication technologies, aiming to give support to their own methodological proposals.

In 2004, Marriott created the Language Learning Lab (LAPLI)¹ (Laboratório de APrendizagem de LInguaS). LAPLI is a hybrid (50% face-to-face [F2F] and 50% distance learning) methodology for intermediate and advanced language learning students, developed in a collaborative virtual learning environment (VLE). Involved in its 12 activities, students research on topics of their own interest associated with linguistics or education and select authentic material from trustworthy sources online, saving them in the VLE for all to access and work on. They work at word, paragraph, and text level, and are involved in several activities such as concept mapping²; questioning and answering; creating grammar exercises; and developing summaries, reviews, articles, and PowerPoint presentations. Learners work individually, interactively, and collaboratively among themselves and in small groups formed according to shared interests or involvement in the activities. LAPLI's activities are designed to challenge students to go beyond their limitations while developing their fluency and accuracy in reading, writing, and oral skills. LAPLI is based on Torres' distance learning methodology LOLA³ - The Online Learning Lab (Laboratório Online de APrendizagem⁴) was created in 2002. Both LAPLI and LOLA are based on

constructivist, collaborative, and meaningful learning approaches, placing the students in the center of the process, developing their autonomy, responsibility, and social skills.

Following the development and evaluation of these proposals, several new research projects have been undertaken, which has led to an increase in the number of publications in this area. It was in light of these new investigations that the idea of editing this publication took shape and the *Handbook of Research on E-Learning Methodologies for Language Acquisition* was conceived.

First, let us explain what we mean by “e-learning,” “methodologies,” and “language acquisition.” E-learning means in its broadest sense to “explore new approaches to learning supported by technologies” (HEFCE, 2005), involving the innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT) for F2F, hybrid, and distance learning initiatives in order to be able to “transform learning and teaching” (HEFCE, 2005). Methodology is perceived in its general meaning to encompass “approaches, methods, techniques, procedures and models” (Harmer, 2001) within which theoretical and pedagogical approaches combine, supporting and guiding the use of teaching resources available, and a set of procedures designed to achieve the expected learning outcomes is found. As for language acquisition, we understand this to mean “a natural developmental process of gaining knowledge and mastery of a speech system in a living environment” (Pham, 1994), whereas language learning, also covered in this publication, is “a largely conscious process that involves formal exposure to rules of syntax and semantics followed by specific applications of the rules, with corrective feedback reinforcing correct usage and discouraging incorrect usage” (Felder & Henriques, 1995).

Therefore, in this *Handbook of Research on E-Learning Methodologies for Language Acquisition*, we gather research on innovative theoretical and practical approaches to language learning and teaching in the area of CALL, using current available teaching resources for F2F, distance, and hybrid courses. The 33 chapters are written by 60 prominent, internationally known authors from all six continents of the world and cover both language learning and language acquisition as well as language teaching. They cover a variety of topics such as the use of computer mediated communication, Web2.0, social software, mobile learning, virtual learning environments, e-gaming, mapping techniques, hyperlinked dictionaries, interactive whiteboards, corpus linguistics, learning objects, virtual reality environments, and podcasting. They report on research and studies focusing on the theory and methodologies for the learning, teaching, and acquisition of languages online, fostering students’ foreign language competencies and communicative skills as well as their autonomy, responsibility, and social skills.

The *Handbook of Research on E-Learning Methodologies for Language Acquisition* covers the areas of pedagogy, methodology, assessment, current and future challenges of online language learning, and teaching. It is divided into the following three foundational areas under the e-language learning umbrella heading: Section I – Theories, Tools, and Pedagogical Resources; Section II – Developing Skills and Competencies; and Section III – Methodological Approaches and Future Tendencies. This publication aims to contribute to the education of language students, novice teachers, academics, and researchers who not only wish to keep abreast of current developments but also want to introduce innovative methodologies and approaches into their own practice. It aims to promote insights into current e-learning practices and methodologies for language teaching, learning, and acquisition, and to foster the development of both theoretical and practical issues concerning learning, skills development, interaction, communication, collaboration, and evaluation of foreign/second language education online, encouraging professional discussion and progress in this fast developing field.

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Editors

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For information on LAPLI, see Marriott, R., & Torres, P. (2006). LAPLI – The Languages Learning Lab: A methodological proposal for a hybrid course in a virtual environment. In P. Zaphiris, & G. Zacharia (Eds.), *User-centered computer aided language learning* (pp. 133–151). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.
- ² For information on LAPLI focusing on concept mapping activities, please refer to Marriott, R., & Torres, P. (2008). Enhancing collaborative and meaningful language learning through concept mapping. In A. Okada, S.B. Shum, & T. Sherborne (Eds.), *Knowledge cartography—Software tools and mapping techniques*. Springer-Verlag.
- ³ LOLA was awarded 1st place in the category “Research” by ABED, the Brazilian Association for Distance Learning (*Associação Brasileira de Educação a Distância*) and by EMBRATEL, a Brazilian telephone communications company, in 2003.
- ⁴ For information on LOLA, see Torres, P.L., & Marriott, R. (2007). The LOLA strategy and e-learning knowledge management. In T. Kidd, & H. Song (Eds.), *Handbook of research on instructional systems and technology* (pp. 656–669), Volume II. New York: Information Science Reference.