Chapter VII

LAPLI - The Language Learning Lab: A Methodological Proposal for a Hybrid Course in a Virtual Environment

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Abstract

The teaching of languages to higher-intermediate and advanced-level students requires a distinct methodology. Many of these students are, or will be, language teachers and need to be motivated to continue learning the foreign language, practice the acquired knowledge, and develop teaching and researching skills. Aiming at challenging them to go beyond their limitations, LAPLI — the language learning lab: a methodology of integrative CALL using the Internet — is made of 12 activities in which the students, based on authentic material selected by them, are stimulated to develop fluency and accuracy in the foreign language, focusing on the development of their reading and
writing skills, but also promoting their oral skills. Students use the language as a tool to accomplish tasks in a contextualized way, being involved in individual and collaborative learning, natural learning, meaningful learning and discovery-based learning, by means of the new technologies in a virtual learning environment.

**Introduction**

The rapid technological transformations that have taken place in recent years in the fields of communications and information technology (IT) have brought changes to the paradigms of education both in the education of the student and in his or her professional development. In Poland, the educational reforms of 2000 included the use of computers and IT for material preparation and teaching, both as an incentive for English language teachers to retrain and as a prerequisite for their professional promotion. (Krajka, 2002).

In research conducted by the American Department of Education in 2001, it was proven that the preparation of educators with a proficiency in IT — which allows them to meet the necessities of the 21st century — is “an educational challenge,” since “more than two-thirds of current teachers will be replaced with new teachers during the next decade” (Bell, 2001, p.1).

To meet this challenge, it is necessary to change the current paradigm, centered on the teacher, to one centered on the student that promotes responsibility, critical analysis and autonomy. For this, as Behrens (2000) said, it is important to:

(a) gradually reduce the number of theoretical lessons, increasing the time available to do research, to access databases, to give support in the construction of activities and the students’ own texts;

(b) encourage students’ development in both well-planned individual and collective group work activities with defined responsibilities;

(c) organize differentiated activities, events that require creativity, challenging projects that provoke cross-referencing, dialogue with authors and own production; and

(d) promote the use of electronic devices, of IT, of multimedia and telecommunications with all the available resources of the school campus. (pp.121-122)

The use of new technology can assist with collaborative work, discovery-based learning and in the production of knowledge. Besides, the changes that were brought about by the technology-innovator paradigm — which itself is still resisted by many professionals in different sectors of education — remind us of the warning words of McCarthy, “Professors will not be substituted by technology, they will be substituted by professors who use technology” (2001). We are, as each day goes by, closer to the time to rethink our current practices in teaching/learning and search for new paths to teach, where we will benefit from information and communication technology.