Rebooting Greek: Collaborative Curriculum Design

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Background

The Greek language is facing increasing pressure throughout the Diaspora. At the current rate of decline, the Greek language will likely cease to be a living language within one or two generations. To reverse this trend new approaches need to incorporate the latest in language pedagogy and educational technology. Language learning in the 21st century will feature the latest advances in mobile technology, including augmented reality, a conversational user interface, fully localized content and revolutionary teaching methods based on smart learning analysis. "Rebooting the Greek Language", a project run by the Centre for Hellenic Studies *Stavros Niarchos* at Simon Fraser University adopts this innovative approach to learning. This project brings a collaborative perspective into a curriculum design by combining native language content developers located in Greece and professionals living in Diaspora.

Collaborative Language Design

Collaborative design efforts are necessary when dealing with second / heritage language learners taking into account:

- the way students learn;
- their learning motivations;
- their personality;
- their racial, age, social and cultural differences;
- their diverse life worlds.

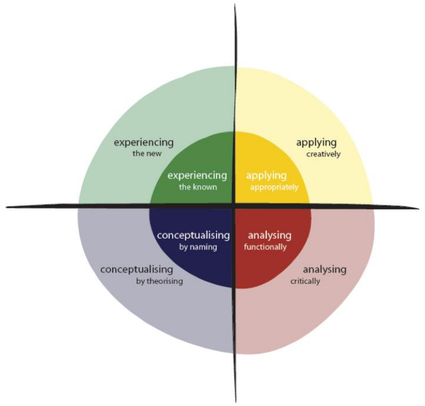
(Cook, 2008; DeKeyser & Juffs, as cited in Hinkel, 2005; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

According to latest research findings, the collaborative nature of curriculum design can lead to an improved academic outcome but also to an effective professional practice that enhances reflection and new collective thinking (Voogt, Pieters & Handelzalts, 2016).

On the other hand curriculum design reflects student-centered learning as student needs/interests and sociocultural context are evident in the syllabus. The culturally specific content and objectives are appropriately reflected on materials. During collaborative design language experts negotiate and reflect on diverse language forms, functions and activities (Hedge, 2014).

In this project content development was based on computer-assisted instruction where technology is used as tutor (Ringstaff & Kelley, 2002).

Method



Learning by design (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 327).

This project adopted the professional dialogue or 'inquiry conversation' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Feldman, 1999) and reflective practice to explicitly articulate curriculum design process and record professional reflections on content tasks and activities. The main research question focused on how recursive feedback among colleagues can sustain an effective computer assisted curriculum design for heritage language learners.

Participants:

- 7 post graduate students, University of Patras.
- 4 languages and computer experts, Simon Fraser University.

Procedure:

- All participants were involved in peer-to-peer exchange (both face to face and online).

Discussion outcomes were depicted in revised curriculum content and activities.

Preliminary Results

COMPUTER- ASSISTED INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Computer assisted instructional design produced:

- **Socially and culturally relevant new words, concepts, ideas.**
- **Increased new media usage for learning.**
- **Multimodal activities/ materials such as images, videos, karaoke songs, games.**
- **Self directed learning in students own time.**
- **Increased control over their learning.**

These findings agree with Thorne & Rheinhardt's (2008, p. 560) statement that *"emerging literacies associated with digital media are highly relevant to their current and future lives as language users"* .

REFLEXIVE PRACTITIONERS

Content developers were able to:

- **Adopt new instructional design methods (e.g. Learning by design).**
- **Experiment with applications for learners with no Greek language skills.**
- **Deal with emerging challenges concerning heritage language acquisition.**
- **Mediate between their cultural/professional assumptions and those of their colleagues.**

RECURSIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback was an integral part of instructional process securing:

- **Collegial reflection and accountability.**
- **Ongoing (self)evaluation of learners performance through activities.**
- **Learning analytics.**
- **Multimodal assessment activities such as flashcards, games, etc.**

Discussion

Greek language learners in Diaspora have little or no language background. Technological affordances mean that they can learn Greek in their own time, or with the choice to learn beyond the classroom, or without increasing the classroom time.

These new learning environments create some restrains for curriculum developers as they have to:

- Make language learning attractive and efficient.
- Design culturally related and meaningful activities.
- Use multimodality.
- Deploy new means of design.

In addition, curriculum developers acquire a new ethos as they:

- Enter in collaborative efforts and professional dialogue with colleagues overseas.
- Reflect on their practice and interactional design.

Finally, such collaborative projects increase intercultural communication and common action among peers in different localities.

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