

An Approach to Language Teacher Training Promoting Digital Literacy through the Use of Web 2.0

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Abstract

New advents in CALL technology over the past two decades are coupled with respective research focused on a broad notion of literacy, embracing a wide communication landscape, beyond just page-based texts; a term many people use to describe such Literacies is 'Digital' or 'New' Literacies. This shift is further accentuated by the advent and proliferation of web 2.0 (widely known as participatory / social web applications). For language learning and literacy in particular, recent research reports that social web tools can support communicative language learning (Carmesin et al, 2009), and prompt open communication and social learning opportunities in contextual and less formal environments (Perifanou & Costa, 2009), to name just two of numerous noted learning benefits.

However in Greek language and literacy teaching, dynamic perspectives on text production –and thus, aspects of new literacy- are still depreciated as curricular values, the printed text still being prevalent in teaching methods and examination systems (Koutsogiannis & Mitsikopoulou, 2004). In addition, language teachers still appear reluctant to organically integrate web 2.0 tools in their practice, be it for the lack of ICT skills or fear of being replaced by the 'machine' (Perifanou & Costa, 2009).

This paper reports on the implementation of a teacher training approach aiming at promoting communicative language learning and at enhancing aspects of digital literacy through the use of web 2.0 applications. In practice, it centres around the translation of language teaching ideas into applicable teaching ideas, as "activity plans" integrating the use of these tools.

The approach was implemented in two different teacher training settings: a) in service training, with teachers attending the seminar in parallel to their morning teaching, b) academic MA course, with teachers taking time off their formal teaching duties. The first group had to directly implement their activity plans with their students and put their ideas directly into practice, whilst the second group was more theoretically oriented, as the plans needn't necessarily be implemented in real classroom settings.

The activity plans, as final deliverables, were examined through two lenses: a) the form (e.g. characteristics) of digital text they guided their students to product and b) the type of students work they orchestrated (collaborative or not), afforded by web 2.0 tools.

Results relate to the main differences between the two categories of trainees and specifically to a) the way they understood and didactically engineered the notion of "digital text" and b) the way they organised the social elements of learning (pupil communication and collaboration) through web 2.0 tools.