

SchoolNet SA presents Learning Gains through Play project at an International Conference in Italy 12-13 November 2015



About 140 delegates around the globe from 48 countries gathered at the Grand Hotel Mediterraneo in Florence, Italy on the 12th and 13th of November to attend the 8th Edition of the ICT 4 Language Learning International Conference. More than 70% of the delegates were university representatives. Hlengiwe Mfeka attended the conference as a SchoolNet SA representative to present the DG Murray Trust project, Learning Gains through Play paper on how Intel tablets and Xbox Kinect develop foundational literacies skills in Grade R and 1 through play-based learning.

Structure of the conference

Three parallel sessions were organized in three conference rooms: Room A-C, reduced to two on the 2nd day. All conference presentations were strictly 20 minutes (15 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes Q&A). An average of 3/4 presentations were held per session in each room before coffee break or lunch.

During coffee breaks, poster presentations were displayed at the hotel foyer. The Virtual Presentation was set to give those who were not able to physically attend the conference, the opportunity to present their papers.

The presentations were organized into nine thematic areas:

1. ICT Based Language Teaching and Learning Approaches
2. E-learning solutions for Language Teaching and Learning
3. Quality and Innovation in Language Teaching and Learning
4. Bilingualism and Multilingualism
5. Language Teacher Training
6. Studies in Second Language Acquisition
7. Language Learning for Specific Purposes
8. The Impact of the Digital Age on Language Teaching
9. Using Multimedia for Teaching and Learning



Conference proceedings

Dr Elisabetta Delle Donne, the President of the Conference Committee opened the conference and welcomed delegates. Briefly she highlighted the conference proceedings including four social events (Walking tour, two dinners and a closing cocktail) organised for the delegates after the two workshops.



The opening speech was made by Elena Maddalena from the Italian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme. She made a strong emphasis on the importance of acquiring language through learning in mother tongue. Furthermore, she highlighted amongst others, Erasmus+ endeavours in reducing a percentage of unemployment in the European countries through improving the provision of multilingual communication skills for the labour market.

Presentations

Beyond Process theory – how new technologies are changing the way we write and communicate

Guy Meredith from Zayed University introduced his presentation by showing pictures depicting how text based communication is changing; from writing on paper to typed text and interacting with it. He made an emphasis in the importance of a writing process than the product. He introduced an App called QUIP which he described as a faster and easier communication tool. He provided examples how he uses it in class to enhance collaboration and assessment. It works like Google docs but the downside is that it is not free. “Students support one another and give each other encouragement and advices” he said. As far as assessment, he allows students to improve their writing using continuous feedback and let them do it again and again. He advised that teachers should opt for group work for quick marking.

From Lingua Franca @ E-learning to Multilingualism

15yrs of ICT growth – what has been achieved?

Professor On-Kwok Lai sees ICT-driven mediated as a catalyst to the e-learning of new languages through daily practice: timely shifting one’s linguistic worldview from one’s mother tongue to acquire foreign language or the lingua franca to cope or survive in a globalizing world. However the new regime of e-learning for new language acquisition poses risk as well as opportunities for teachers and students; as cyber-activism and virtual linkages are revolutionary in changing the socio-cultural communicative actions and interactions, global and locally.



Interesting news was of the Japanese Ministry of Education to adopt a new policy of introducing English as foreign language teaching in primary school (foreign language activities starts at primary 3 and formal teaching from primary 5), doubling learning to 70 hours per year. Unfortunately the Professor Lai ran out of time and therefore couldn’t finish his presentation.

His slides were text dense, it was death by PowerPoint!

[A Telecollaborative Approach to Written Corrective Feedback](#)

Nahid Zarei from Islamic Azad University in Iran is a regular presenter at this conference. Her research paper investigated the impact of using Telegram App on providing feedback and providing writing accuracy in L2 over a 10 week period - also to discover student's perceptions using this App for writing purpose. The study was conducted in Iran language institute, which is said is one of the most popular English schools in Iran. She used 15 female students (as participants) from high school and university with the age range of 17-25 and taking an advanced course. Participants were divided into two groups; one as a control and the other as an experimental group. Having posted their writing on Telegram, the students in experimental group first received feedback from their peers then finally the teacher. The control group received feedback on paper. The results revealed that the experimental group using Telegram outperformed the control group.

Interviews were also conducted focusing on usefulness and satisfaction – students found writing on Telegram faster than paper and pen. Nahid mentioned that students stated that they had access to everyone's writing in addition to their own, which provided a chance to see other participants' mistakes and avoid repeating them in their own writing thus learn more from peers.

I liked her conclusion when she said, there is no single method or strategy will lead to learning – technology and innovative approaches to learning have contributed to the variety of ways learning may happen.

During question and answer time she received some criticism about the methods she used for her research which she acknowledged and admitted. For example the size of her sample and the study being limited to females.



[“Ich will Deutsch lernen” – A Learning Portal for Second Language and Literacy Acquisition in Heterogeneous classes](#)

Celia Sokolowsky from Germany introduced the concept of the Portal “Ich will Deutsch lernen” (I want to learn German) developed by German Adult Education Association which was launched in August 2013. The portal provides a wide range of learning opportunities with regard to different language levels, topics and specific learning needs. It consists of about 11,500 exercises in five main language courses, the use is absolutely free for learners and teachers. Another principal aim of “Ich will Deutsch lernen” is to provide means of helping teachers deal with the pre-existing heterogeneity of German as a second language. Celia navigated the site with the delegates to demonstrate how it works or used. An innovative feature of the Portal is the combined teaching of oral and written skills that can be adapted to the individual needs of learners.



[Innovative Language Teaching by International Collaboration](#)

The Swedish Council for Higher Education representative, Ingrid Gran who is an expert in the Educational and

training field for the European programs inspired delegates to consider international collaborations within the language field. Her intentions were to get people more interested in collaboration within the European programs such as Erasmus+ and Nordplus. She further explained the role of Erasmus+ and its objectives; to promote language learning and linguistic diversity. By this time delegates were moving from one room to the other as seating in one room for a specific theme was limiting to other topics of interest.

Design Research on Pedagogically Motivated Multimodal Course in English: Tools for Student Engagement Enhancing Learning Outcomes

This was one of the eye catching titles presented by a team of three namely; Tuija Alasmi, Kirsi Korkealehto and Tuire Salo from Finland. It indeed gained popularity by the number of delegates who attended the presentation. The focus of this study was on student engagement – to support student engagement through self-regulated and collaborative learning while they stay motivated and inspired.

The students are provided with iPads to undergo a 10 week blended learning course with online learning material and exercises - the implementation of the course considers versatile devices. Kirsi said that social Media tools and new methods of communication (Instagram, e-cards, livestreaming etc) were integrated in the learning tasks, bringing a motivating and fun element into studying English grammar as well as written and oral skills. She emphasised that using new Apps in learning tasks should be well guided, otherwise they will not contribute to the learning outcomes. Some of the obstacles mentioned were technical difficulties, lack of guidance, or poor IT skills which affects the self-regulatory learning outcomes and feedback given to students.

Language Teacher Training & Intercultural Education in the 21st Century School



A very interesting comparison between two countries Spain and United Kingdom (UK) on how language teachers at different schools cope with Intercultural (IC) education, was made by Elena Gomez Parra from the University of Cordoba in Spain. Language teachers are the first (and sometimes the last in the importance attached by politicians and investment) to implement IC education practices.

She argues that little attention has been paid from most governments to inform and advise them on how new arrivals from immigrant children be interculturally managed. She shared very interesting findings on the diversity of the schools in the two countries. She reckons higher education must deal with the difficult task of training language teachers to teach 21st century citizens with cultural intelligence. Her conclusion was that good IC practices must be exchanged among schools and practitioners. She also mentioned that the British Council is working hard to address IC challenges.

This is one presentation that raised emotions in the room and people nearly fought arguing about certain cultural activities (data shared comparing two countries) which were said to be incorrect. Elena firmly handled the debate well with high professionalism.

Training to teach: The Development of Teacher Trainees' Perceived Competence

Joanna Pflugstorn and Wolfgang Gehring from Germany, first explained the structure of German education in teacher training and specifically English First Language (EFL) teachers. Joanna gave a number of examples to highlight a lack of standardisation in EFL teacher

training – this way, a significant degree of individual differences in learning processes and subjective experiences of teacher trainees is to be expected. The study was to investigate the degree to which perceived teaching competence is affected by their mentioned training conditions.

SchoolNet's Presentation: Learning Gains through Play: Xbox Kinect and Intel Tablets Impact Early Literacies

This was the last presentation in the evening of the first day – pity it resulted to poor attendance nevertheless the existing audience seemed interested and engaged. The research seeks to develop the Foundational Literacy skills in grade R and 1 through Play-Based learning, enabled by Xbox Kinect and Intel tablets technologies in the classroom. Hlengiwe Mfeka from SchoolNet SA in South Africa gave a brief overview of the project and shared the targeted literacies and paid special attention to the Acquisition of English.

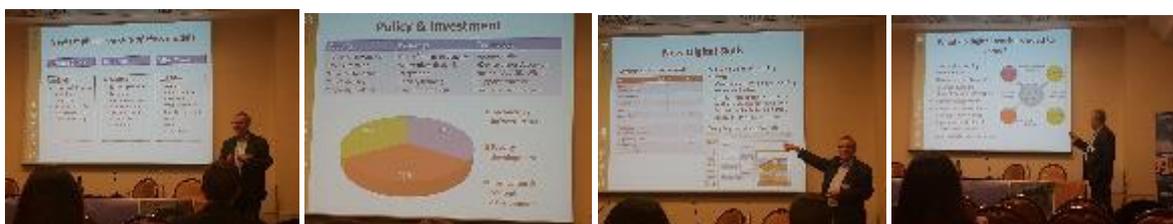


She played two videos, one showing educational benefits of Xbox Kinect and that of Buselaphi Shelembe explaining how learners find their Apps without being prompted to do so – moving from teachable moments to learners driving their activity choices. Buselaphi Shelembe's video caught the audience' attention and aroused their interest as most of the questions after the presentation were based on that video.

Hlengiwe wrapped up the presentation by sharing the evaluation results which showed significant improvement from our project schools compared to control schools.

The Digital Language Teacher: Competences, Opportunities and Development

“It is not acceptable anymore for a teacher to say I don't like technology”, this was a moving opening statement made by Michael Carrier from Cambridge English in United Kingdom. He made an emphasis on the importance of the out of class models (Before, During and After Classroom learning including possible activities that teachers could administer in each model) – “Nobody can learn English or any subject in 3hrs a week!” said



Michael.

“Teachers will not be replaced by technology BUT teachers who do not use technology will be replaced by teachers who use technology”, that was a closing statement before the end of the presentation.

The effect of Playing with Tablet Games Compared with Real Objects on Word Learning by Toddlers



It was interesting to sit at this presentation as it is very similar to our Learning Gains through Play project. We had already met with the presenter Ingrid Singer from HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht in The Netherlands prior to the presentation. The purpose of her study was to determine the effect of a vocabulary intervention with tablet games or real objects on word learning by normally developing toddlers. The vocabulary intervention aimed at stimulating word learning by providing the children multiple exposures to target words during playful interaction with a speech language therapy student.

Interestingly, the results suggested that toddlers learn as many words during an intervention with tablet games as they did during an intervention using real objects.

Social Events

The walking tour to visit exciting and important sites in Florence was a great experience and more time to interact and get to know other participants. The photos below says it all!



Tullio (photo with Hlengiwe) was very supportive before and during the conference. Professional Hospitality of the organizers was excellent and created a pleasant and friendly atmosphere.

This was an excellent knowledge space for all of us to learn and share experiences!