Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning for interpreter training

Asistencia pedagógica para el siglo XXI: Interacción entre la DG-SCIC, la DG-INTE y las universidades en el ámbito del aprendizaje mixto para la formación de intérpretes

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Resumen: En la vigésima edición del Congreso DG Interpretation – Universidades celebrado en Bruselas en marzo de 2016, el título elegido fue «Modern Learning Times – New Learning Needs» [Tiempos Modernos para el Aprendizaje – Nuevas Necesidades de Aprendizaje]. Al mismo tiempo, el DG-SCIC realizó un llamamiento para el envío de colaboraciones y expresó su intención de racionalizar el uso de recursos y avanzar hacia un enfoque de aprendizaje mixto en lo tocante al apoyo pedagógico. En este artículo tratamos de explorar las sinergias y la interacción entre el DG-SCIC y las universidades, así como definir las principales características de un proyecto piloto centrado en la introducción de nuevas metodologías en el campo de la formación de intérpretes. Asimismo, nos basaremos en los resultados preliminares de nuestra investigación de campo para presentar algunas propuestas de mejora de la formación desde una perspectiva de aprendizaje centrada en los estudiantes, así como una metodología coherente derivada de la misma.

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the
interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and
Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
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89

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje mixto; instituciones europeas; colaboración con universidades; formación de intérpretes; aprendizaje centrado en los estudiantes; clases virtuales.

Abstract: At the 20th Conference DG Interpretation-Universities held in Brussels in March 2016, the title chosen was the timely «Modern Learning Times – New Learning Needs». At the same time, DG-SCIC launched a call for contributions and expressed their intention to rationalise the use of resources and to move forward towards a blended-learning approach in pedagogical assistance. In this article, we attempt to explore the synergies and interaction between DG-SCIC and Universities and to define the main features of a pilot project on the introduction of new methodologies in the field of interpreter training. Based on our action research early findings, we will also make some proposals to improve training from a student-centered learning perspective and a subsequently consistent methodology.

Key words: Blended learning; European Institutions; cooperation with Universities; interpreter training; student-centered learning; virtual classes.

1. NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS' COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITIES IN THE FIELD OF INTERPRETER TRAINING

New technologies have been applied to interpreter training, since the mid-1990s, thriving in parallel with the rise of the Internet, providing easy access to a plethora of pedagogical and authentic materials and computer-mediated activities, supported by different tools such as speech banks, online resource platforms or Virtual Learning Environements (VLEs), and enabling remote interactions (e.g. virtual classes, webinars, etc.) that were never thought possible before. European universities, in turn, began to adapt their courses to the new environment, integrating ICTs in the training of interpreters (Sandrelli and de Manuel Jerez 2007) and to explore the capabilities of blended learning in our field (Moser-Mercer, Class and Seeber 2005). This technological development has been led and promoted by the European Institutions. The European Commission's Directorate General for Interpretation, also known as SCIC, decided to leverage its extended and invaluable training experience gained from 1964, when in-house conference interpreter training of university graduates began and expanded from 1979. In 1997, «in-house interpreter training was discontinued in application of the subsidiarity principle»[1] and SCIC, concentrated its training efforts on the cooperation with the Universities,

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1. Previously, the SCIC granted bursaries for internships (*stages)* that provided in-house training for targeted language combinations.

offering not only traditional on-site pedagogical assistance, but also virtual classes, which are complex remote training interactions, performed via video-conference system.

To wrap up the catalogue of interpreter training assistance that the European Institutions provide, we should mention that, in the case of the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Interpretation and Conferences, «the partnership…may be formalized in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding and…will be assessed on a yearly basis by means of indicators reported by the university» (EP DG-INTE, 2016). This cooperation also includes virtual classes but not on-site pedagogical assistance. Both Institutions, EC and EP, provide participation of staff interpreters at final exams, organize students' visits and ToT seminars; both Institutions offer grants for the organization of post-graduate courses in conference interpreting and projects aimed at supporting interpreter training. These grants have already funded a number of collaborative projects for the creation of resources and the dissemination of good training practices, ORCIT[2] and ERITON[3], to name a few. DG SCIC, particularly, has been very keen on the creation of online training resources and has, as a result, developed SCiCLOUD, a wide range of training tools, including the Speech Repository, an extensive bank of pedagogical and authentic speeches in thirty different languages and the SCICtrain, a collection of videos that can be used for training and demonstration purposes, including pedagogical material on the techniques and strategies of conference interpreting.

Having all of the above mentioned resources and activities in mind, and considering that the Universities have also been very active in the creation of their own VLEs, repositories and computer-mediated platforms, it can be claimed that never before had so much material been available for the training of interpreters and that blended learning is already a reality in our field. Focusing on virtual activities and online pedagogical resources is a significant advance, but it requires a new methodological approach because new technologies impinge on class management, teaching techniques and, ultimately, on the students' way to relate to their own learning. Blended learning seems to be the future in our field of study, and the European Institutions seem to be having no reservations about it, not for nothing the 20th Conference DG Interpretation —Universities was entitled «Modern Learning Times—New Learning Needs», but it is not an end in itself. Course leaders should have a clear set of desired learning outcomes

2.   European Commission-funded project producing interactive pedagogical tools for trainers and students of conference interpreting. It builds on the success of the UK government-funded National Network for Interpreting, bringing in partners from across the EU. Accessed December 27, 2016. http://www.orcit.eu/

3.   This project aims to facilitate the dissemination of best practices in conference interpreting training between EU and non-EU languages. The idea behind the project was to create a regional collaborative network between the EU and countries around the Caspian region. Project partners collaborate with, assist each other and outreach partners in the Caspian region by sharing their pedagogical expertise and experience through virtual classes, mock conferences and webinars. Accessed December 27, 2016. https://virtualinstitute.fti.unige.ch/eriton/

and decide on their articulation with the course curriculum before engaging in distance and computer-mediated activities: «Knowing what to do is important, if you know why, when and how you should do it. The focus should not be on the skill itself, but on whether its deployment has the desired effect on student learning» (Biggs and Tang 2011, 19-20). In the following chapter we will examine the methodological aspects of the new student-centered learning paradigm in the context of interpreter training.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE STANDARD INTERPRETER TRAINING APPROACH AND ITS ADAPTATION TO THE 21ST CENTURY CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

In recent years, in the context of the European Higher Education Area, the traditional teacher-centered learning paradigm has given way to a new student-centered learning model (SCL), based on constructivism (Piaget 1950). The traditional paradigm considered knowledge as a transmissible commodity, but the Bologna reform has resulted in a new way to understand the learning process: knowledge is built by the student and the teacher's input is no longer in the center of the learning activities.

> From a transmissionist perspective, the learner comes to the classroom as a passive listener, a consumer of knowledge. And if knowledge can be packaged for distribution, then it can be conveniently dissected into digestible chunks for transmission. If it is transferable, it is natural to assume that knowledge corresponds to some objective reality and that it is essentially the same for different people. As the teacher is considered the fountain of knowledge, then naturally it is the teacher who should have control of the knowledge distribution process in the classroom. (Kiraly 2000, 22)

This transmissionist approach also meets the definition of what Biggs and Tang call the first level of attitude towards learning: «Level 1 is founded on a quantitative way of thinking … When students do not learn … it is due to something the students are lacking» (Biggs and Tang 2011, 18). If we adapt this first level to interpreter training, it translates into very selective practices, articulated around the trainer and focused on what the students are and not on what they can become. The activities are designed to provide unilateral feedback of the exercises that is limited, almost exclusively, to spot the mistakes made by the student. This model of teaching gives prominence to admission tests, presupposing that the interpreter is «born», in other words, that the results of the training will depend exclusively on the talent of the student, rather than on the contributions of the trainer, although there is no consensus among interpreter trainers on the matter (Sawyer, 2004). This assumption raises not only ethical issues, but also epitomizes a reductionist view of what would be a more complex problem, ignoring many variables, not the least of which involves adequate methodology. Let us not forget the multiplicity of factors that play a part in learning, such as the trainer's

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
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CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
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Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

92

expertise, the pedagogical techniques, the class environment and the content of the program (Hartman and Sternberg 1993).

Biggs and Tang's level 2 is also teacher-centered, but focuses on what the teacher does. Activities and resources are multiplied in order to provide more opportunities for students' practice. Nevertheless, high-performance training goes hand in hand with a level 3 approach that revolves around the student and what the student does (Biggs and Tang 2011). Activities and resources are designed with a specific purpose in mind and fit the desired learning outcomes at every particular stage of the pedagogical progression. Our understanding is that, in general, the interpreter training community is nowadays situated between level 2 and beginning to tilt to level 3, already completing the shift from a transmissionist perspective to a constructivist approach. Resources and materials are abundant, expert trainers such as Gillies (2007, 2013) or Setton and Dawrant (2016) have published new handbooks and there is a myriad of webinars and ToT courses taking place. Interpreter trainers are aware of the importance of continuous training and are adapting their courses to new virtual environments and to the use of speech repositories and engaging in new ways to give feedback, moving away from the traditional spot-the-error approach.

In this new level 3 constructivist context, the master class loses preponderance, memory learning is relegated to the background and «learning by doing» is emphasized, a fact that suits interpreter training perfectly because good practices have always privileged interpreting exercises over theoretical courses. Let us not forget that interpretation is a profession and that what students acquire in the course of their training is, mostly, procedural knowledge: techniques, strategies, abilities and skills. It is important for the trainers, however, to understand that their description of «how they interpret» (declarative knowledge) will not be transformed by the students into an actual skill unless they practice it and learn to construct their own knowledge.

Interpreters are experts in their trade and, in fact, share two fundamental features with experts in other domains: they invest what they learn in learning more and advance in their learning by progressive problem solving.

> Reinvestment and progressive problem solving are not separate processes. They are two aspects of the same process, which is what we are calling the process of expertise. Reinvestment is the motivational aspect. It is not just willingness to exert effort … Reinvestment involves both conserving resources, so they have something to reinvest, and putting those resources back into the activity itself rather than dissipating them elsewhere. Progressive problem solving is the cognitive aspect of the process of expertise. It is not enough just to try to do better. (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1993, 82)

The ability to «learn to learn» is, thus, vital for the expert, not only to reach the degree of expertise required for optimal performance, but as a basic trait of his/her own development as practitioner. This metacognitive ability needs to be integrated into the expert's professional career in the form of lifelong learning and is critical for

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
eISSN: 2444-1961
Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

93

interpreter training. Deliberate practice, i.e., «engaging in an activity with the primary goal of improving some aspect of performance» (Ericsson 2000, 195) should be accompanied by an exercise of reflection that fosters the student's metacognition and ability to recognize patterns and enabling procedural learning. In this way, the students will gradually learn to make use of the strategies that the expert masters and to optimize the deployment of available mental resources (Anderson, 1982).

Nevertheless, the trainer's intervention or declarative knowledge is not to be neglected because, in order for the students to construct procedural knowledge and reach autonomy, guidance and modelling are essential.

> The teacher is of course «a facilitator», choosing materials and exercises, judging the pace of the class and the individual, simulating conditions still unknown to the students, and setting objectives and expectations. But s/he is also much more than that. Students learning a new skill will often expect more direct, even «intrusive» correction and guidance. The prerequisite for all this…is still the teacher's ability to put her/himself in the student's place and understand the learning process from the student's perspective, the better to guide it. (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 28)

In order to make the most of the available resources and activities that DG-SCIC and DG-INTE offer to their partner universities, the course leaders of interpreter training programs should endeavor to integrate pedagogical assistance within their courses curricula, to engage local students and local trainers in a collaborative effort to use new technologies, while, at the same time, aligning the current offer with a level 3 approach and maintaining a cohesive strategy. This is a very challenging undertaking, especially considering that it would be easier to take in pedagogical assistance in isolation or alienated from the pedagogical design. We will discuss some proposals on how to better achieve these goals in our next chapters, focusing our analysis on virtual classes and the Speech Repository bank of speeches.

3. VIRTUAL CLASSES WITH THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS: EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND PROPOSALS

Our first experiences with virtual classes date back to the outset of this new form of pedagogical assistance and even precede the creation of our current postgraduate program at Comillas Pontifical University. Overall, in the last ten years, we have participated in more than 60 virtual classes with the European Institutions and other partner universities. In the course of the last decade, videoconference technology has improved and the SCIC's virtual training menu has evolved to include not only traditional consecutive exercises, but also multilateral simultaneous interpretation training, themed training sessions and master classes on Self-Training and on Documentation and the use of tablets in the booth. We are not alone on this journey: according to the SCIC's

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
eISSN: 2444-1961
Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

94

web page information (European Commission, 2016), 33 Universities have already experienced the training benefits of virtual classes, namely:

- «Students have the opportunity to refine their skills in a formal setting (stress management)
- Students receive external feedback from professional interpreters and experienced trainers
- University teachers can exchange views with European Commission assessors/trainers
- Students interpret speeches delivered by native speakers in Brussels in a wide array of languages, which are sometimes difficult to cover locally by universities» (SCIC, 2016)

These benefits are obvious. There is no doubt that staff interpreters have much to offer, since they are trained and experienced practitioners that often have a larger language combination than that of the local trainers. It is also clear that the virtual classroom is a privileged setting for the exchange of views and the sharing of best training practices. However, the particular configuration of VCs makes them difficult to plan, prepare and perform. The format is much more rigid than that of a traditional class and requires discipline and a lot of technical intervention. In order to assure perfect coordination, a script setting the pace of the exercises and different interventions is generated and closely followed (Rodríguez Melchor 2011).

The European Commission is currently offering up to four VCs per semester per university, following the recommendations of the Pedagogical Assistance Evaluation Committee; the main criteria are the language combinations taught and the university's interests for SCIC. Adding that figure to the EP's virtual classes (one or two per semester/partner) and to those performed with other partner universities, the total number of virtual classes we teach in our Master's Degree in Conference Interpreting[4] can amount to 10 or 12 per year, making it necessary to meticulously plan their consistent integration with the program's overall design. This aspect cannot be neglected, since it is vital to maximize the value-added of these virtual activities and their contribution to effective interpreter training. One of the minimum requirements of interpreter trainers should be «understand the course design, its rationale, structure, intermediate and final objectives, and assessment criteria at all levels» (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 11), but it is true that for staff colleagues it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep track of all the courses they interact with, not to mention of all the students. It is up to the programs' pedagogical coordinators, then, to monitor the suitability, content and timing of each VC request.

Most of our existing virtual classes with DG-SCIC and DG-INTE are based on the same pattern. A script is created to set a framework for interventions and the topics of the speeches (and, sometimes, key words too) are provided in advance to

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4. Master Universitario en Interpretación de Conferencias (Universidad Pontificia Comillas web site). Accessed December 27, 2016. http://www.comillas.edu/en/postgrado/social/master-universitario-en-interpretacion-de-conferencias-en

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
eISSN: 2444-1961
Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

95

enable the students to do their homework and preparation. The level of the speeches is decided beforehand, in close cooperation with the course leader, so that it fits with the students' progression. Once the speech is delivered by a staff interpreter, one or two students render it into the target language and receive the assessors' feedback. We have witnessed a very positive development of staff interpreters' feedback, in parallel with the progressive implementation of the Bologna process and the introduction of the new constructivist learning approach. Nowadays the feedback that is given in our virtual classes with the European Institutions is thoughtful and inclusive, albeit generally product-oriented. Most of the time, the students are requested to explicitly state their objectives at the beginning of the training session and their opinion about the usefulness and adequacy of speeches and feedback is asked at the conclusion. In our opinion, a survey form could prove useful to gather the students' reactions, since they are often shy and fail to respond to these questions directly. There is no written feedback or follow up, but, if the speakers and assessors give their permission, the virtual class can be recorded, so that the students can revisit their performances and feedbacks and repeat the exercises. To facilitate this revision and to maximize the benefits of the VC learning experience, our course leader sets up a link to the recordings on our Moodle platform and draws up an entry for the program's logbook. There is, of course, an element of variability to be taken into account, depending on the speakers and assessors and on the technical conditions, that makes these classes more stressful than traditional classes, but the balance is certainly positive.

However, there are two challenging features of current virtual classes that we would like to emphasize, namely their sporadic nature and the evanescent quality of the feedback that they generate. Randomness is a difficult matter to solve, since the availability of staff interpreters is subject to the needs of the service, although, for universities that receive two or three VCs per semester, very often the same staff assessor comes to all the classes so that the students' progression may also be noted. The virtual classes are confirmed when the course has already started and generally require an adjustment of schedule to make sure of their adequate alignment with the desired learning outcomes of that particular stage of the pedagogical progression. With regard to the volatility of feedback, recording the classes has proved to be a very useful tool for the students. Reinforcing the feedback with a debriefing session that takes place immediately after the VC has also been very useful in the context of our Master's Degree. Perhaps, one way to promote a less transitory approach to feedback in virtual classes could be the creation of a bank of experts' advice, such as the EP funded project ERITON[5], because, in fact, when exposed to the same patterns of performance, trainers tend to give similar general feedback. In fact, the

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
eISSN: 2444-1961
Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

96

remarks that staff interpreters provide usually concentrate on delivery and general knowledge, as was to be expected, given the difficulty to customize feedback for a student they do not know for a one-time performance. In virtual classes, the students confront the client and expert perspectives, which are frequently relegated to the background in face-to-face daily interactions, and this demanding new focal point often means an enriching and eye-opening turning point for them. In order to align these activities with a level 3 approach, the desired learning outcomes for VCs should be stress management, public speaking, documentation, the abilities to contextualize information and to create patterns of association. Together with stress management, one of the learning outcomes that students obtain from VCs is stamina in the face of external assessment, a fact that prepares them to resist the pressure of their final exams, when some of the members of their panel will also be staff interpreters from the European Institutions.

Nevertheless, it can be discussed that virtual classes, other than master lectures, are not well suited for the earlier stages of interpreter training due to the stress they cause and to the fact that the abilities to resort to knowledge schemata to contextualize the source speech are more developed in experts than in novices:

> Faced with difficult or unfamiliar input, experts try to make sense on what they know… while novices get stuck…experts have built schemata for different types of speeches… while novices treat utterances in a more isolated manner and fail to establish discourse links. (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 315)

In fact, professionals access knowledge by contextualization, that is, they select the relevant knowledge for each context. Obviously, this access to knowledge is more fluid in the case of experts than in that of beginners (Rodríguez Melchor 2009). In most cases, the experts' access to knowledge is automatic. This is particularly important when density is high, since any automated task frees the information processing channel and requires less conscious attention. At any rate, feedback «should focus on the current intermediate pedagogical objectives…in the first phases of introduction to each new skill, feedback should be primarily process-oriented, then from consolidation onwards, should focus increasingly on the product» (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 36).

4. SPEECH REPOSITORY AND SCICTRAIN: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO INTERPRETER TRAINING RESOURCES

The Speech Repository is already an irreplaceable tool for the training of our students. In our Master's Degree we combine it with our own repository of didactic

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virtual classes amongst its members and offers speeches and expert feedback sort-ed by languages and difficulties.

resources and pace the students' progression throughout the academic year since, otherwise, they tend to overexert themselves, sometimes using speeches that are not adequate for their level. One problem we have recurrently encountered is that the students (and some trainers too) prefer to use open-access speeches that do not require them to log in to the repository. We actively promote the use of those speeches that require to log in with an ECAS[6] account, and this for various reasons. One of them is that it enables the students to use the SCICRec double track recording tool. In this setting, the trainers decide on the speeches that the students have to practice on their own and invite them to record their simultaneous renditions and upload them to the repository, in order to receive the trainers' feedback via the same system. This activity is highly effective and enables the trainer to give a very complete and customized feedback. Monitoring the students' self-training activities is one of the challenges of blended learning in our field, but it can be addressed through VLE virtual learning platforms (Moodle in our case), complementing the student's deliberate practice with virtual tutoring (Motta, 2006). Nevertheless, we have found that the students on their own do not use this feature. In order to overcome this difficulty, we have created specific exercises, in the form of flipped-classes (Bergmann and Sams 2012), requiring the use of the SCICRec. In this manner, the trainers are able to ensure the students' autonomous work meets with the provision of thorough personalized distance feedback, which is later discussed and evaluated in face-to-face interaction, in accordance with 3D feedback that also includes diagnosis of problems and recommendations for treatment:

> c. Written 3D feedback by the instructor after listening to recordings outside class. In SI, giving comprehensive feedback is only possible by recording and listening carefully, perhaps repeatedly…this should be provided to each student, at least once or twice in a semester. (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 37)

The students appreciate this activity a lot, but not all of them have succeeded to grasp the technicalities. In our case, approximately a third of the students experience technical problems. In general, these activities increase considerably the trainers' work-load and have to be well designed to yield appropriate results.

Last but not least, we should mention that we have linked some of the SCICtrain videos to our Moodle platform because we think them useful for demonstration/modelling purposes. We have advised the students to browse the SCICtrain site by themselves, and sometimes we have designed flipped-classes that require to visualise some of its contents. Our trainers have also had resource to this collection of videos, especially in the context of our undergraduate courses and for self-training purposes.

Both the Speech Repository and the SCICtrain are resources that can be utilized in face-to-face interactions and distance learning. We have found, however, that they are better suited for asynchronous activities carried out through our VLE online platform

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6. European Commission Authentication System.

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
eISSN: 2444-1961
Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

98

with the trainers' mediation since they foster personalized attention, which is one of the traits of blended learning, together with autonomous work and socialization. Precisely because they are asynchronous, the non-contact activities, carried out through online platforms, are adapted to the rhythm and level of each student and boost the quality of self-training work that is complementary to face-to-face training interactions and essential in postgraduate programs in conference interpreting.

5. CONCLUSIONS: THE ADDED VALUE OF BLENDED LEARNING IN INTERPRETER TRAINING

At the 20th Conference DG Interpretation-Universities held in Brussels in March 2016, the title chosen was the timely «Modern Learning Times – New Learning Needs». At the same time, DG-SCIC launched a call for contributions and expressed their intention to rationalize the use of resources and to move forward towards a blended-learning approach in pedagogical assistance. In this article we have attempted to explore the synergies and interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities and to delineate the main features of a cohesive approach for the introduction of new methodologies in interpreter training programs. Based on our experience, we have also put some proposals to improve training forward from the perspective that the shift to blended learning in our field should be guided by a constructivist approach to learning and a subsequently consistent methodology.

We deem it necessary for face-to-face classes to be complemented with virtual and computer-mediated activities. On this respect, trainers' mediation, 3D written feedback, a logbook to monitor the students' work and a clear curricular integration that generates the desired learning results at each stage of the pedagogical progression are essential conditions for a successful integration of e-learning activities. We endorse Kahn's view on the need for an integrated and consistent approach in order to increase the possibilities for learning.

> A well-designed e-learning program can provide numerous features conducive to learning. However, these features should be meaningfully integrated into an e-learning program to achieve its learning goals. The more components an e-learning program integrates, the more learning features it is able to offer. However, the effectiveness of e-learning largely depends on how well they are incorporated into the design of the programs. (Kahn 2005, 10)

In the case of our Master' Degree in Conference Interpreting, the flexibility of the program and the coordination of all the participants allows for the pedagogical progression to be adjusted to the cooperation with DG-SCIC and DG-INTE, both at a group level and at an individual scale. In the framework of a program that aims to

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
eISSN: 2444-1961
Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

99

the progressive acquisition of interpretive competence, a clear sequencing has to be established in order to break down the learning objectives in several stages.

> The scientific approach to curriculum provides a framework for instructional design by viewing the acquisition of interpretation competence as a process. This viewpoint stresses the breakdown of composite skills into component skills and their subsequent reintegration, as well as the sequencing of learning events according to the difficulty and increasing complexity of tasks. An appropriate sequence of instruction can be identified for an educational program through the description of skill levels and developmental milestones grounded in principles of expertise. (Sawyer 2004, 73)

In spite of the fact that, in postgraduate conference interpreting programs, it is only the final exam that counts, some sort of continual assessment has to be introduced to guide the progression of the students, providing scaffolding for the construction and integration of the subsequent skills. Moodle assignments, learning diaries, logbooks, self-assessment rubrics are some of the elements that we use to gather information for the students and trainers and to feed tutorials and remedial interventions. Learning diaries and self-assessment rubrics are especially useful for the students to express their experiences and share their perspectives because they sometimes find it difficult to react directly to the trainers' feedback. One of the main objectives of this process-oriented assessment is to gradually develop the autonomy of the students, coaching and getting them ready for the last phases of their training when assessment will mainly be focused on the product.

This formative assessment portfolio also facilitates the trainers' team coordination, makes the learning process more transparent for the student and allows for early diagnosis of possible learning difficulties. Moreover, formative assessment also involves a metacognitive reflection on the part of the student and, in this sense, it is a very valuable tool for empowerment and participation. In the table below, we have matched some of the training activities we are currently putting into practice in our Master's Degree. We have managed to integrate virtual classes in our set of synchronous trainers-students' interactions and the Speech Repository, SCICRec and SCICtrain are included in the set of ICT available tools and resources.

TRAINING ACTIVITIES	MASTER CLASSES	CONSECUTIVE SIMULTANEOUS COURSES	SELF-STUDY PRACTICE GROUPS	VIRTUAL CLASSES
FACE-TO FACE VS DISTANCE	FACE-TO FACE BLENDED (FLIPPED)	FACE-TO FACE BLENDED (FLIPPED)	DISTANCE	VIRTUAL (REMOTE)
SYNCHRONICITY	SYNCHRONOUS ASYNCHRONOUS	SYNCHRONOUS ASYNCHRONOUS	ASYNCHRONOUS	SYNCHRONOUS

María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
Pedagogical assistance for the XXI century: the interaction between DG-SCIC, DG-INTE and Universities in the field of blended learning…

CLINA
vol. 4-1, June 2018, 89-103
eISSN: 2444-1961
Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca - cc by-nc-nd

100

TRAINING ACTIVITIES	MASTER CLASSES	CONSECUTIVE SIMULTANEOUS COURSES	SELF-STUDY PRACTICE GROUPS	VIRTUAL CLASSES
MAIN ACTIVITIES	THEORETICAL/ PARTICIPATIVE LECTURES	CONSECUTIVE/ SIMULTANEOUS EXERCISES MOCK-CONFERENCES	SELF STUDY DOCUMENTATION INTERPRETING EXERCISES PREPARATION FOR FLIPPED CLASSES	PARTICIPATIVE LECTURES THEMED, CONSECUTIVE/ SIMULTANEOUS COURSES MOCK-CONFERENCES
ASSESSMENT	VLE ASSIGNMENTS	FACE-TO-FACE FEEDBACK VLE LOGBOOK	LEARNING DIARIES SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRICS	REMOTE FEEDBACK SURVEY FORMS VLE LOGBOOK
ICT TOOLS AND RESOURCES	POWER POINT/ PREZI VLCs	SPEECH REPOSITORY SCICREC SCICTRAIN SPEECH BANKS VLCs VOICE AND VIDEO RECORDING DEVICES	SPEECH REPOSITORY SCICREC SCICTRAIN SPEECH BANKS VLCs VOICE AND VIDEO RECORDING DEVICES	IP VC SYSTEMS SKYPE GOOGLE HANGOUTS

Table1. High-performance training activities and their main characteristics[7]

The fact that our pedagogical progression has been designed to be developed in combination with tools for blended learning environments such as the VLE Moodle platform and the Speech Repository results in a considerable improvement in terms of efficiency and accessibility of materials and resources. In the last two years, we have defined a focus for our action research and raised the question of whether blended learning environments, combined with the use of learning portfolios, enhance the development of interpreting skills in our students. The variables are many and one of the inherent difficulties of this type of research is to identify the methodological and technical problems that could hinder the optimal use of the virtual resources available. One of the first problems we have identified is that the students' access to virtual resources implies a certain loss of control on the part of the trainer, especially in terms of the management of pedagogical progression. Another problem we have identified is that not all students have a good command of new technologies, as could be expected, given their age group. In fact, for complex tasks that require the use of applications such as double-track recording, roughly a third of our students have experienced technical problems of various kinds. Another difficulty is the dependence on the Wi-Fi connection (or the IP connection for the virtual classes). Finally, the proliferation of

7. In bold, European Institutions' activities and resources.

platforms and the multiplicity of resources complicate to a certain extent the choice of the most appropriate materials.

Possible solutions to these problems would be found in the training of all those involved, especially the trainers who act as the human interface between new technologies and the students. The design of the program should also have to optimize the integration of technological resources because the use of new technologies without a clear set of learning outcomes in mind is not the best option. In the face of technical problems that may arise, the trainer should gather patience and back-up materials. An interesting relation that has been observed, through the analysis of the data we have so far collected, is the one that links the academic results in the final exams and the depth of metacognitive reflection of the learning journals and the student's self-assessment rubrics, especially with reference to the assimilation of metalanguage. Awaiting, therefore, to be able to analyze the data generated by the portfolio of our 2016-17 course, which we hope will allow us to make a comparison with previous editions that may yield quantitative results, these are our first conclusions that make us assume that our approach is correct in the use of blended environments, together with an adequate methodology that involves the participation of the students in their own learning process.

As we have stated at the beginning of our paper, thanks to the efforts of the European Institutions in cooperation with universities, we can affirm that interpreting students have never had so many resources at their disposal and that blended learning in our field is already a reality. However, we are aware that this cornucopia of pedagogical resources and new technologies must be accompanied by a profound soul-searching exercise about our training goals and methodologies and will require a complete shift to a level 3 student-centered learning model (SCL). In other fields of expertise, the combination of clearly defined intended learning outcomes and pedagogical innovation, such as the use of rubrics, learning diaries or flipped-classroom methodologies, has been successful in achieving the students' engagement and understanding of their own learning processes. The capability of learning to learn is not only vital for the purpose of attaining the degree of expertise that will enable students to pass an interpreting test, it will also accompany the journeyman in the full development of that expertise, and facilitate the expert's adaptation to new working environments in an ever-changing profession such as ours.

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María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor
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CLINA
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102

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103