

Chapter 57

Professional Development with and for Emerging Technologies: A Case Study with Asian Languages and Cultural Studies Teachers in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a case study of professional development for a cohort of Asian languages teachers in Australia who undertook training with new technologies during 2011. While the use of emerging technologies requires a learning curve in terms of technical skill, the pedagogical understanding and affordance of those teaching and learning platforms have to be equally acquired. The group of 41 teachers of Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, and Japanese participated in three interwoven yet distinct components: exploration and integration of new technology devices and applications, familiarization with the pedagogical affordances of new media in the classroom, and acquaintance with action research as a tool for teacher professional development. Findings indicate that the chosen combination was a successful mixture to improve their professional practice while integrating innovative approaches into classroom practices that were not only effective in the immediate term but also sustainable over the longer term.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will start with an outline of the Australian Government's desire to support translingual and transcultural competence in school students as a means to enable their future professional

engagement in trade, business, and tourism with Asian neighbors. In order to educate these primary and secondary students, their teachers have to be trained in the first place. This necessity forms the motivating rationale for the professional development initiative of Asian languages and cultures teachers that is here described. The case study is set against the background context of the history

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of teacher professional development, languages education and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) before moving on to the contemporary applications of emerging technologies for language teaching and learning and the notion of action research as a form of teacher professional development. These combined elements (pedagogy, applied linguistics, new technologies, and action research) formed the underlying conditions of the depicted initiative on integration of new technologies and mobile devices into the classroom and how this was implemented. While the limitations of this case study comprises a small group and findings are particular to this cohort only, it provides an actual example of how new technologies were implemented into classrooms to foster student engagement and enhance student outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Australia's geographic proximity to Asian countries requires familiarity with their languages and cultures for geo-political reasons (e.g. diplomacy, two-way migration, and humanitarian assistance) but also for economic purposes (e.g. trade, business, investment and tourism). The Australian Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2008) recognized the rapid increase of global integration and international mobility in their *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and acknowledged the growing influence of Asian nations as a major change in the world that brings new opportunities. Hence, "Australians need to become 'Asia literate,' engaging and building strong relationships with Asia" (MCEETYA, 2008).

According to MCEETYA (2008), becoming 'Asia literate' means that all Australian students should be able to interact and communicate with the cultures and countries of Asia, a skill that they should obtain through their school education. The

study of Asian languages is thus a key part of the Australian school curriculum and Asia literacy and is intended to provide students with a competitive edge in a global mindset while also contributing to Australia's national advantage.

More specifically, students should appreciate cultural, social and religious diversity, be active and informed to make sense of their world and be confident enough to relate well to others (AEF, 2011). Therefore, the Australian Government has dedicated \$ 62.15 million towards this endeavor (named the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program, abbreviated to NALSSP) for the period from 2008 to 2012 alone. The NALSSP was developed by the Australian Government with input from key stakeholders such as state and territory governments, non-government education authorities, embassies and the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) with the aim to increase students' opportunities to become acquainted with Asian languages and cultures.

Subsequently, funding was allocated for a number of initiatives to be implemented by state and territory government and non-government education authorities, including the state of Victoria, where this case study is situated. There, the Department of Education and Early Childhood (DEECD) believes that the study of the languages and cultures of Australia's key regional neighbors (China, Indonesia, Japan, and Korea) will equip Australian primary and secondary school students with the skills to excel in their future careers within an increasingly globalized economy (DEECD, 2008, 2011). Therefore, the Minister of Education and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs released the joint *Victorian Government's Vision for Languages Education* and committed to compulsory languages education for all government school students from Prep to Year 10 by the year 2025. The benefits will include the students' personal development, social and economic benefits. To realize these, a number of key actions were identified and are to be implemented, covering research, training, and cluster support (DEECD, 2011).

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