

Chapter 38

The Technology Segment of a Methods Course: Its Impact on Teaching Realities and Imagined Needs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports a case study with survey data collected from one residency Spanish language teacher completing the final phase of a modern languages education program as well as two current in-service Spanish language teachers who completed the same program the year previously. Specifically, the study examined 1) what the three teachers recall of an overarching framework for embracing technology they were introduced to in their methods course, 2) what technologies they currently employ for language instruction and why, and 3) what characteristics they imagine the model modern language educator of the future will require. Findings revealed that these teachers did not recall in detail the overarching system for embracing technology introduced to them, they utilized a very broad range of technologies for teaching which would prove difficult to train them all in effectively during a methods course, and they saw flexible, engaging, patient, and content-prepared professionals as the future of the profession.

INTRODUCTION

These are interesting times for language teachers and language teacher trainers. Language teachers are being called on to do more and more in their classrooms--: from being experts in the languages and cultures they teach, to knowing and successfully applying second language acquisition theories within context-driven pedagogical rationales, to being able to differentiate instruction within and across their lessons, to aligning what they teach with national and state language proficiency standards, to assessing learners across all language skill areas in multiple modalities, to seamlessly incorporating various technologies appropriately into their lessons to enhance the overall impact on language learning, plus so much more (Brown & Lee, 2015; Burns & Richards, 2009, 2012). With such massive amounts of

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potentially beneficial content to cover in modern languages education methods courses, language teacher trainers are left to attempt to decide what knowledge is of most worth for their students.

This is certainly no easy task and involves sharing, discussing, and negotiating a broad range of hopefully useful and relevant content with future language teachers. One strand of the many that must be successfully woven into a modern languages methods course is technology. Technology is certainly one component of language teacher training that has been historically, and continues to be currently, a much-considered element (Arnold, 2013). From effectively utilizing resources in language labs of the past, to now knowing how mobile device applications might assist in the language learning process have all been, at some level, incorporated into the language teacher training processes across the decades (Furstenberg & Morgenstern, 1992; Sabbath, 1962; Walker & White, 2013). Meaningful training in technology is especially important for language teachers today. “For student teachers in today’s culture of technology, the issue is not whether to use it or not to use it, it is how to use it, when and how much to use it” (Allan, 2015, p. 36).

In order to better understand what students who recently completed their modern languages education methods courses took away from a technology element they encountered in that coursework, this study aimed to investigate the following questions:

1. What do these former students recall, if anything, of a methods course segment on technology and what impact did it have on their teaching?
2. What kinds of technology do these same former students, now teaching or residency teaching, currently utilize in their classrooms and for what purposes?
3. What do they believe to be the essential characteristics future modern language educators will require to be successful?
4. How might these methods courses be further improved for future students?

It is hoped that by obtaining these former students’ reflection on past coursework, examination of current practices, and imagination of future possibilities, fruitful advancements can be realized in modern languages methods course content. With such data in place understandings might emerge which could provide language teacher trainers opportunities to present technology for language teaching in methods courses which would be more in alignment with the realities their students go on to face, and resonate more soundly with the futures students imagine about the profession.

BACKGROUND

This study stemmed from a desire to ascertain what, and to some extent how, students who had recently completed their language methods coursework in a teacher preparation program in the Western United States drew on what they had studied in those courses in their residency teaching and first years of teaching. Because so much information is shared with students in their methods classes it seemed potentially very informative to examine a single piece of that mass of information to see how it functioned in students’ realities and thinking after the methods courses were completed and they went on to become teachers.

The language methods pedagogy elements of the program these students completed were delivered through two courses: Methods I and Methods II. Methods I is a nuts and bolts course which addresses the fundamentals of teaching speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, and culture which has a

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