Facilitating Collaborative Foreign Language Learning using the VLE

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- **Concepts & Language Learning Context**

- **Language modules**

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Concepts

- **Learning a second/foreign language**

  - Classroom (taught)

  - Society (naturalistic)

  - Combination (taught & naturalistic)

Language Learning Context

- **University degree**
  - **Arts & Humanities**
  - **Business**

- **3 or 4 year programme**
  - **3 years: in UCD**
  - **4 years:**
    - Years 1 and 2 in UCD
    - Year 3 abroad
    - Year 4 in UCD

Language Learning Modules Year 3/4

Spanish Language IIIa (Semester 1) [5 ECTS]

- 12 teaching weeks ⇨ 2 hours per week

Spanish Language IIIb (semester 2) [5 ECTS]

- 12 teaching weeks ⇨ 2 hours per week

Language Modules Year 3/4

- **90 students per module**
  - **Taught in 4 groups (23-24 students in each group)**
  - **Mixed levels (B1 – C1 CEFR)**
  - **40% go to Spain or Latin America**

- **Integrated skills approach to teaching**
  - **Reading and writing (S1 & S2)**
  - **Listening (more emphasis in S1)**
  - **Speaking (more emphasis in S2)**

Bologna Process
Student work required [5 ECTS] 100-125 hours

In class vs. outside class
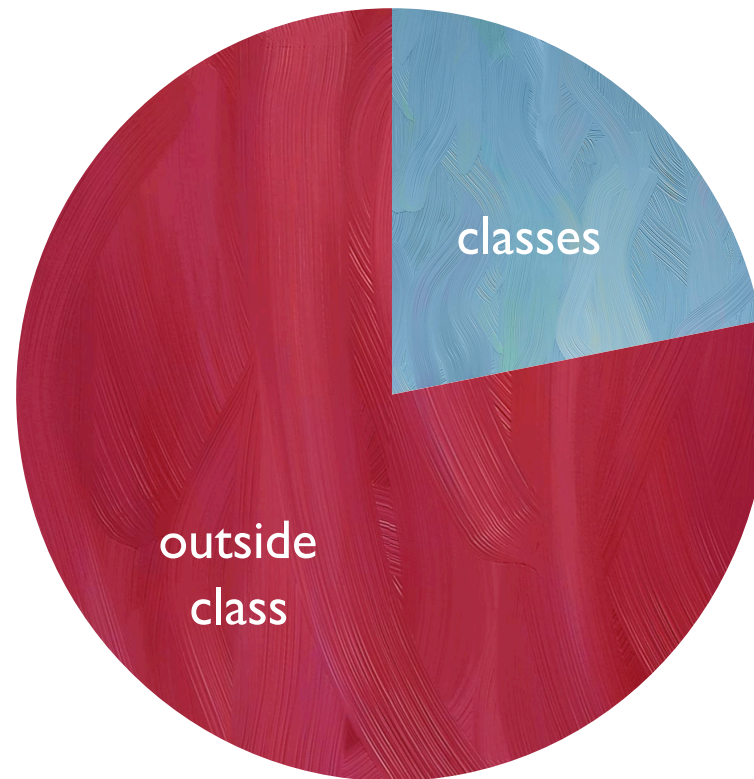
Teaching and Learning Context

- **Face to face = 24 hours per semester**

- **Blended learning (VLE) = 86 hours per semester**

  - Self-directed learning (individually)

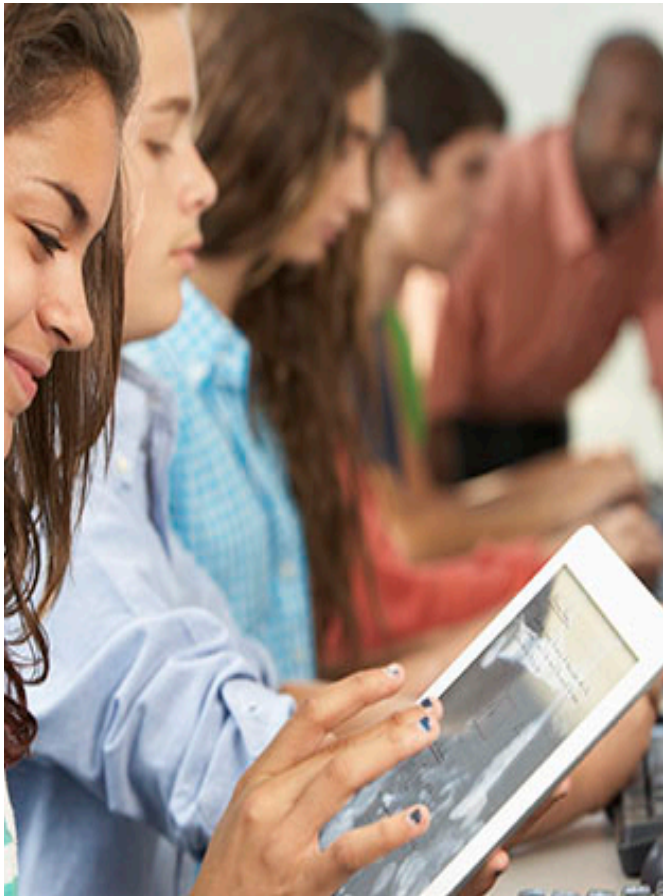 - Specified learning tasks (individually & collaboratively)

Learning Outside the Classroom

- Maximise study time outside the classroom in line with Bologna

- Facilitate **collaborative work outside the classroom**

- Make greater use of the VLE

E-learning Collaborative Tasks

- **Blogs became an integral component of the final year language modules**

- **Blogs provided students with ownership of the writing process**

- **The VLE provided a social platform (virtual) for students to communicate with each other**

Collaborative e-learning Tasks

- **Writing Blogs (Semester 1 module)**

  - Groups of 3 or 4 students per blog

  - E-learning tasks were set by the module coordinator

  - Students were required to write posts for the tasks set (300 words approximately)

  - Comments by the other 3 students were made (100 words approximately)

Sample instructions for 1 of the blogs

Write an entry in your group's blog by (date). The theme is: 'How do I see myself as a writer?'

➢ Write at least 300 words.

➢ You can use the ideas from the Preliminary Task of the first class and the photocopy that we worked in class last week (available in BB) to generate ideas.

Sample instructions for 1 of the blogs (Cont.)

➢ It is important to use ample vocabulary on the subject. Read the documents that we have studied in class and at home.

➢ The text should include phrases with POR, PARA, PORQUE, POR QUÉ, POR QUE and PORQUÉ

➢ The text must be coherent and well structured in paragraphs.

Collaborative e-learning Tasks

- **Writing Blogs (Semester 2 module)**

  - Groups of 23 students per blog

  - E-learning tasks were set by the module coordinator

  - Students were required to write posts for the tasks set (150 words approximately)

  - Students involved in the presentation write a reflective piece after reading the posts written by their classmates (300 words approximately)

Sample instructions for 1 of the blogs

Write a entry in your group's blog of about 150 words on Blackboard.

➢ Go to your class group and there to the Blog.

➢ It has to be written by (date). N.B. Do not send an attachment.

➢ The post should provide comments to the group that made the oral presentation in class last Monday.

Sample instructions for 1 of the blogs (Cont.)

You can use the following ideas to write your post:

1. What did you find most positive about the presentation?

2. What would you have done differently?

3. Do you think they should have done something different to facilitate discussion / discussion?

4. Give 3 tips to the group or to specific members of the group on how to improve the presentation or the debate / discussion.

Comments from Students
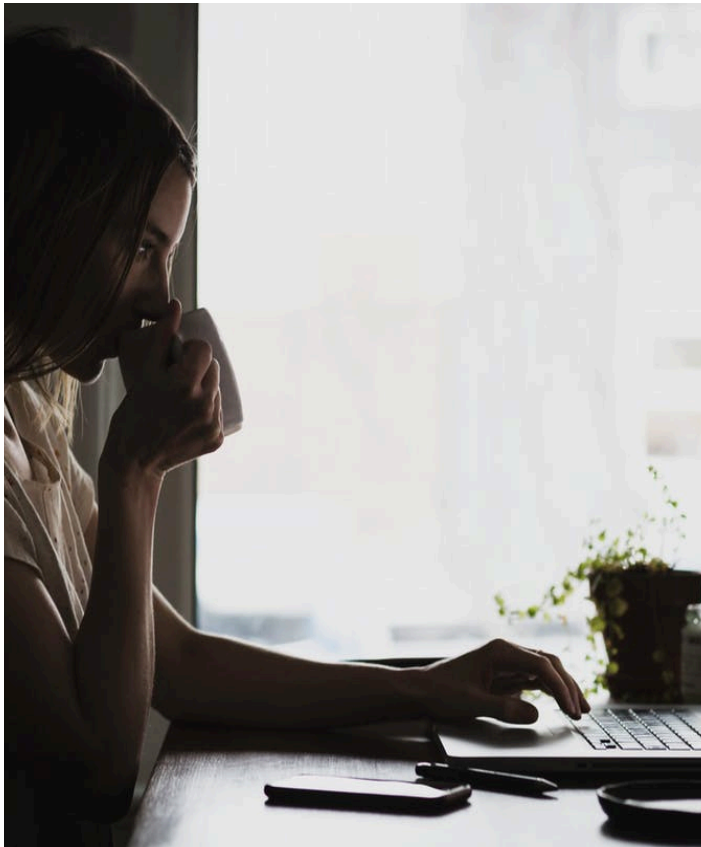
- **Blogs provided a good opportunity to use language (grammar & vocabulary) that had been learned in class**

- **The blogs were demanding (for some students)**

- **Some students wanted these collaborative tasks to count more towards the final grade**

Conclusions

- **The VLE provides extra time outside the classroom to improve foreign language skills**

- **The VLE facilitates collaborative learning in a safe environment**

- **The VLE facilitates students' self-directed learning**

- **A follow up study: data collection about collaborative learning using the VLE**

Thank you!

Any questions?