



Digital Technologies as Catalysts for Reflective Language Teacher Education

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Abstract

In the New Zealand context that is the focus of this presentation, the government has invested in infrastructure to guarantee connectivity to all schools and has prioritised 'technology for learning' with a number of initiatives for learners, communities and teachers. One sector that has received less attention in the numerous initiatives is teacher education. If teachers are seen as the drivers of innovations in classrooms, then pre-service teacher education plays a pivotal role in ensuring that future teachers are prepared to integrate digital technologies to their teaching. A way of improving readiness in future teachers is integrating digital technologies to discipline-specific teacher education courses like the course reported in this presentation.

Research presented here is part of a wider project where four experienced teacher educators investigated the integration of digital technologies to their practices. I will present three case studies drawn from a year-long language teacher education course part of a postgraduate programme that qualifies students to teach foreign languages in secondary schools in New Zealand. The course used an 'experiential approach' where pre-service teachers used digital technologies to support both learning to teach languages and learning to integrate technology to their teaching. With students' consent, data was collected from semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, course work artefacts, students' reflections, and end-of-course evaluations. Data presented in this paper from the three cases was located and analyzed to examine how these pre-service teachers described their experiences learning to teach languages using digital technologies at three moments during the year.

The use of digital technologies was a catalyst for supporting the pre-service teachers' reflections on the complexities of integrating technology to learning to teach. Each of the three pre-service teacher participants described their learning to use digital technologies with different metaphors (roller-coaster, climbing a mountain, and smooth journey) indicative of the range of experiences during the course. The study concludes that an experiential approach is valuable to place the pre-service teachers in the role of learners who experience learning with the technology about technology, as well as about language teaching. Insights from these three New Zealand case studies will be drawn for teacher education and for other contexts as digital technologies become ubiquitous in classrooms everywhere.

Keywords: digital technologies, teacher education, experiential learning

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