MLO Modern Languages Open

Introduction: Reflections on Post-Pandemic Pedagogical Trends in Language Education

SPECIAL COLLECTION: POST-PANDEMIC PEDAGOGIES FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION

INTRODUCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces this special collection, which focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on language education in the UK and asks what kinds of long-term effects there might be across sectors from primary schools to higher education. Each article in this collection comprises a "dialogue" which took place in the form of an online asynchronous writing "sprint" in one of six areas: primary schools, secondary schools, language teaching in higher education, early career higher education, year abroad and cultural institutions. This introduction analyses the trends, challenges and opportunities drawn from the experiences across the different areas: pedagogical transformation for an effective (digitally mediated) language education; challenges and opportunities for student engagement; and the role of communities of practice in supporting language educators. This article argues that there are valuable lessons which can be extrapolated for wider discussion on the future of Modern Languages education in the UK.

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In recent years, educational institutions in the UK have been involved in overlapping drives to improve the quality and standards of language teaching, to raise attainment for disadvantaged groups and to improve progression to further study and employment in language education.[1] Scotland has adopted a strategic multilingual approach, the 1+2 Approach.[2] Within this curricular model, different projects have been implemented to expand the teaching of Modern Languages (ML) in schools: for example, Scotland's Languages Explorers Programme aims to encourage more secondary pupils to continue with language study when they enter S4 (14–15 years old).[3] In Wales there is a new strategic curricular plan, Global Futures (2022–2025), that aims to support multilingualism in schools and increase the number of students learning language at all levels (see Gorrara).[4]

Similarly, in England, after a significant decline over the past two decades in the number of pupils taking languages at GCSE and A level,[5] different programmes have been introduced to improve pupil engagement and attainment, as well as strengthen and expand the language offer. The *Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review* (Bauckham) identified key aspects to improve ML teaching in Key Stage 3 and 4 (covering education for ages 12–16 in some parts of the UK). It also provided a series of recommendations to improve the consistency of ML teaching and address recruitment and teacher retention that have guided new measures for boosting the quality of ML lessons both in primary and secondary schools and the implementation of reforms in the curriculum. As a result of this report, one of the first measures was the establishment of the National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) in December 2018, which aimed at improving ML curriculum design and pedagogy that could lead to a higher take-up at GCSE level. Backed by £4.8 million from the Department for Education (DfE) and co-directed by the University of York and the Cam Academy Trust, the NCELP provides training and teaching resources to French, German and Spanish. In 2021 Ofsted published its *Curriculum Research Review for Languages* with a focus on the three "pillars" of phonics, vocabulary and grammar.[6] Thus, from September 2024, the linguistic content for GCSE curricula in French, German and Spanish will concentrate on the most commonly occurring vocabulary of each language. Supported by the Department for Education (DfE), the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE) was launched in March 2023 with a £14.9 million budget over the next three years. This programme aims to boost language teacher training and subsequently increase the number of pupils taking some of the most global languages such as French, German and Spanish at GCSE and A level. Led by the Institute of Education at University College London, it comprises a consortium of stakeholders, including the Goethe-Institut and the British Council. It will involve the establishment of a national network of up to 25 lead hub schools across England. In addition, the NCLE and the hubs will support schools to develop a new Home, Heritage and Community Languages (HHCL) initiative.

As a direct consequence of the decline in A level uptake in languages, the student demand for HE courses in the UK where a language is named in the title of the degree has also decreased over the last two decades. The report *Languages Learning in Higher Education: Granular Trends*, published by the British Academy and University Council of Modern Languages in November 2022, identifies how multiple external factors have influenced this trend, "including departure from the European Union, Covid-19, the introduction of alternative education routes, and

1 The negative impact of COVID 2019 on pupils' confidence and learning, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, has been highlighted in different survey reports for primary and secondary schools (see, for example, Language Trends England 2022, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_report_2022.pdf; Language Trends England 2023, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_england_2023.pdf; and Language Trends Wales 2022, https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_wales_2022_-_english_002.pdf).

2 https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2012/05/language-learning-scotland-12-approach/documents/00393435-pdf/00393435-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00393435.pdf.

3 https://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/17036/. This project is a collaboration between SCILT (Scotland's National Centre for Languages), the University Council of Modern Languages Scotland (UCMLS), Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, the University of Aberdeen, the Open University and Bilingualism Matters.

4 https://www.gov.wales/global-futures-plan-improve-and-promote-international-languages-wales-2022-2025-html.

5 GCSEs and A levels are the main two school-age qualifications in England and other parts of the UK.

6 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-research-review-series-languages.

changing economic conditions" (British Academy and University Council of Modern Languages 3).

In this context, the priorities of ML education in the UK are closely related to key pedagogical issues directly affected by the pandemic: curriculum design, assessment models and marking criteria, raising attainment for disadvantaged groups, identifying best practice for international exchange in a post-Brexit context, building capacities by developing collaborative networks, and improving teachers' professional development. Any action plan for moving forward the provision of Modern Languages should evaluate the teaching experiences and the lessons learned during the emergency remote teaching imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and address the needs of language teachers and practitioners in the post-pandemic educational landscape (Rossner and Heyworth). For many language educators, the move from face-to-face to emergency remote instruction has offered the chance to think about challenges and gaps when planning and redesigning their schemes of work in the current digital landscape. It has also opened up a debate on how to support more flexible, active, meaningful and effective modes of language learning and teaching across all levels and contexts. The range of responses to cope with this crisis has provided a unique opportunity to rethink and remodel ML pedagogical practices and to reassess how to engage with digital/hybrid pedagogies (Goria; Hampton; Polisca et al.; Sadoux). Rephrasing Kalantzis and Cope, it is time to engage in a radical transformation, as after the COVID-19 pandemic, Modern Language education "may (and perhaps should) never be the same" (Kalantzis and Cope, "After" 51).

In planning this special collection, we wanted to focus on research-led practice looking at how language education has responded to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including various degrees of forced lockdown and distance or virtual engagement, and how that has transformed the way in which we understand language teaching and learning, curriculum design and assessment. We were interested in the specific challenges for, and contributions by, language education in our understanding of post-pandemic pedagogies, including digital and offline modes, as a contribution to wider debates around the future of Modern Languages.

Several published studies have been motivated by the urgent need to keep a record of the pedagogical discussions and perspectives during the pandemic, and "document the creative pedagogical thinking of instructors", as "collective memories of the extraordinary" could aid language pedagogy to move forward (Mills 159–60). Examples of these intersectional pedagogical discussions include the PanMeMic Collective (Adami et al.) and the EPAT Collective Project (Cutrara; Peters et al.).

We are only beginning to understand the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, but at the same time we felt that it would be helpful to gain an initial understanding of the immediately observable effects of the pandemic on language education using the agile "writing sprint" methodology sometimes used to produce rapid publications. We describe the sprint methodology in more detail below, but a key objective was to involve a wide range of language educational professionals, and to produce an early snapshot of these effects across different stages and sectors in language education. This collection achieves that through a series of six "dialogues" between experts and practitioners, each facilitated by a "dialogue lead" and involving an exchange of ideas about a set of pre-designed questions on the topic of post-pandemic pedagogies in language education.

ORIGINS

The origins of this special collection date back to discussions between the Digital Modern Languages section editors in late 2020 about possible new special collections to follow on from the first special collection in this series on "Critical Digital Pedagogies in Modern Languages – a Tutorial Collection" (Spence and Brandão, "Critical") and the (then) soon to be published launch issue (Spence and Wells). This was one of three special collections planned, one of which is an open issue with a particular focus on early career researchers, and the other being an issue exploring low-resource languages in digital spaces (both forthcoming). By the time the proposal started to take shape, and we were both confirmed as co-ordinating editors for the collection, the world had already experienced over a year of COVID-19-related lockdowns or other limitations, and while it was by no means clear when the most serious effects of

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the pandemic would abate, its effects on global education systems had been swift, significant and wide-ranging. The reference to "post-pandemic pedagogies" in our working title for the collection was not an ill-judged attempt to predict the end of the pandemic, but rather a gesture at the ongoing, and in some cases possibly long-lasting, impacts of the pandemic on language education which we were all witnessing at the time. Even now, just over three years after the pandemic broke out, it is astonishing to remember how quickly educators had to adjust to radically transformed learning landscapes, and while the "return to normality" reminded us how much we valued offline and in-person educational interactions, it would be hard to argue that this normality is the same one that we experienced pre-COVID. We will analyse these changes in some depth below, but first it is useful to set some context for the discussion.

The announcement of pandemic-related lockdown measures in March 2020 in the UK led to a wide-ranging series of measures in education as a whole to deal with the sudden changes in the learning environment. These included top-down policy directives and centralised toolkits, but arguably in language education the most effective responses were often bottom-up community initiatives. Language education was well placed to deal with some of the challenges in responding to the rapid move to online teaching through historical work in areas such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Levy) dating back to the 1960s and more recent variants such as mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). There has been considerable community-driven work in the school sector in particular in recent years, with the use of the #MFLTwitterati hashtag in part driving debate around the use of technology in language education on Twitter long before COVID-19 struck, and the TiLT (Technology in Language Teaching) webinar series, which began soon afterwards in March 2020. During the COVID-19 crisis, in a drive to support language teachers in moving to online teaching, experts at the Open University developed a free toolkit that could be downloaded, used, adapted and modified by ML practitioners. Social media was often a useful platform to provide help with teaching online (Rosell-Aguilar). Other examples include interdisciplinary discussions, such as the AMLUK Symposium on Modern Languages, Area Studies and Linguistics in 2021, which provided examples of the relationship and possible interdisciplinary links between research and pedagogy in Modern Languages, Area Studies and Linguistics. This symposium opened up constructive discussions about which teaching methodologies and strategies could support the internationalisation and decolonisation of our discipline.[7]

Language and culture-based virtual exchange (VE) collaborations have been increasingly popular both in secondary and HE education (see the UNICollaboration for telecollaboration and VE in HE programmes; O'Dowd, "From Telecollaboration") and as part of language teacher education programmes for enhancing and fostering trainees' critical digital-pedagogical competencies in real and diverse linguistic and intercultural contexts (Hauck et al.; Mueller-Hartmann and Hauck). The impact of the pandemic opened up new avenues for exploring how VE could support learners and teachers (O'Dowd, "Virtual"), and complement an alternative provision for the year abroad (see the Year Abroad dialogue; Cunico).

The discussion on how new digital literacies are impacting on current and future pedagogical approaches is not new. Since the work of the New London Group, the field of language education has reconceptualised the understanding of new literacy practices and multimodal communication in education (Kalantzis and Cope, "Multiliteracies: A Short"; Kalantzis and Cope, "Multiliteracies: Life"). Over the last decade the fast-growing use of mobile devices and social networking services has dramatically changed communication practices. It has also impacted on the need to integrate digital critical skills into ML classroom practice as they provide new opportunities for social collaboration in language learning (Pegrum; Pegrum et al.; Thomas). The application of the multiliteracies framework has been extensively explored in ML education (Lütge and Stannard; Paesani et al.; Warner and Dupuy). There are also numerous examples of multiliteracies-based interventions focusing on digital storytelling and transmedia narratives (Herrero; Multilingual Digital Storytelling; Transmedia in Education). Given the impact of adjusting teaching practices during the pandemic, there is a growing body of literature on technology-

7 https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/podcasts/amluk-symposium-pedagogies-modern-languages-area-studies-and-linguistics. The AMLUK group (Alliance of Modern Languages, Area Studies and Linguistics Subject Associations UK) was formed with the goal of fostering discussions across these three subject areas. This Special Interest Group emerged from these dialogues with the intention of bringing together these disciplinary fields more formally to explore points in common (e.g., research strategy, identity and delivery).

enhanced teaching and learning and digital pedagogies (Beaven and Rosell-Aguilar; Hampton and Salin; Plutino and Polisca; Sadeghi and Thomas; Sadeghi et al.).

Likewise, in the higher education sector there have been efforts to assess the impact of digital transformations through re-examinations of the shape of Modern Languages as a discipline (Taylor and Thornton); assessment of its relationship to the growing field of digital humanities (Pitman and Taylor); and surveys of the impact of digital pedagogies, tools and research methods in current Modern Languages practice (Spence and Brandão, *Attitudes*). The Digital Modern Languages section to which this special collection belongs, and its accompanying seminar series,[8] are part of an attempt to maintain this dialogue, and to include perspectives from across different sectors involved in language education from primary to higher education, including voices from outside academia.

While we were interested in global perspectives on post-pandemic effects and have sought to make comparisons with other countries where possible – in particular anglophone contexts where languages other than English are taught – the main focus of this collection is on language education in the UK. This was in part due to our own situatedness as researchers based in the UK, and to our desire to be able to map findings across sectors and in relation to an identifiable language policy context, but this also came from the very particular context which language education in the UK finds itself in right now, after years of strategic initiatives to reposition the teaching of Modern Languages (Ayres-Bennett and Carruthers; British Academy, *Born Global*; British Council; Worton) and in the aftermath of Brexit.[9]

THE DIALOGUES: WHY A WRITING SPRINT?

Rather than producing a special issue in the more familiar format of a series of full-length academic articles, we decided to publish an issue based on interactive dialogue and discussion between a small group of experts representing academic and other professional voices in language education. We loosely followed the "writing sprint" methodology used in this journal before (Taylor and Thornton) and in the first publication for this section (Spence and Brandão, "Critical"). In simple terms, in a writing sprint, the contributors have a fixed amount of time to collaborate on writing content for a publication, and the outcome is published shortly afterwards. This favours agile and rapid responses to a given challenge, which we felt reflected well the nature of the topic – the COVID-19 pandemic – where language educators had to respond rapidly, and often with great agility, to new circumstances.

We started by defining eight areas of importance for studying the impact of the pandemic on language education. They were the six topics covered in this collection (primary schools, secondary schools, language teaching in higher education, early career higher education, year abroad, and teaching and cultural institutions) and two for which we were unable to find facilitators (digital cultural studies and teacher training education). For each topic, we sought a facilitator ("dialogue lead") who designed and set up a dialogue between a group of contributors (other language educators) of their choosing.

We asked that each dialogue lead should aim to make their group of contributors as diverse as possible, reflecting different affiliations and institutional geographies in the UK, and in particular different languages, including non-European languages. The precise terms of operation for each dialogue were set by that dialogue's lead, but we proposed that debate for each topic would start with some initial questions/"provocations", to which contributors would respond online during a reduced timeframe (approximately two weeks) in spring 2023. Dialogue leads would be asked to monitor responses during this timeframe, and to ask for clarification, or encourage further debate in particular areas as appropriate. While not wishing to constrain what groups might cover, we sought to include a broad range of points of focus, including Modern Languages/Area Studies, language pedagogy, CALL/TELL/MALL, digital storytelling,

8 https://digitalmodernlanguages.wordpress.com/.

9 In the closing phase of this project we became aware of a symposium titled "Language Education in the (Post-)Digital Era – Lessons Learnt from the Pandemic", organised at the University of Leeds in June 2023, which tackled similar themes: https://celt.leeds.ac.uk/events/symposium-language-education-in-the-post-digital-era-lessons-learnt-from-the-pandemic/.

intercultural communication, digital cultural studies, digital humanities, open education models, hybrid pedagogies, platform studies and digital divides/digital diversity.

Dialogue leads circulated a GoogleDoc with questions for their dialogue in the days before the sprint commenced, and while there was some variety in approach, the overall principle was that contributors (including the dialogue lead) responded to the questions and to each other's responses asynchronously in the mode of a written conversation (hence "dialogue"). The contributors could respond more than once to each question – the aim was to generate vibrant discussion in the spirit of a live roundtable panel. The groups generally gave their responses sequentially, although at least one group decided to go for a more structured approach. Once each dialogue was complete, all contributors were invited to carry out internal editing prior to a full review by the dialogue leads and by us as co-ordinating editors.

Each dialogue lead was asked to design their own set of questions, but we proposed a series of preliminary ideas which might be explored, including the overall and short-term effects of the pandemic on language education in their area; positive/negative lessons that the pandemic taught us; how the pandemic changed our relationship to online learning platforms; whether or not learners (and teachers) now have a more developed sense of digital (or hybrid digital/non-digital) literacies; from a learner perspective, the main things they have gained or lost; good case studies/examples of best practice which are still useful today; the effect on social/digital divides; how the pandemic has altered the balance of power or the tone of debate in significant ways; and whether the kinds of inter-professional online conversations which happened during lockdown have continued.

REFLECTIONS ON THE WRITING SPRINT PROCESS

We asked each dialogue lead to provide a short introduction to their dialogue and we will not duplicate information contained in these introductions, but we offer here some reflections on the overall outcomes, and what we learned about the process of organising a writing sprint as a result. Finally, we would like to salute the dialogue leads and the contributors, who committed to an experimental format with uncertain outcomes at a time when people were still in recovery mode from the effects of the pandemic on the education system, in addition to which we had to navigate intensive industrial action in both the school and higher education sectors in the UK during this period. The dialogue leads, while responsible only for their own dialogue, are credited as general editors of this special collection in recognition of the significant investment they made in generating debate on this topic.

The dialogues that were the outcome of this writing sprint will be treated in this introduction as separate sections in a collective cross-sectoral exploration of post-pandemic transformation. The dialogues vary considerably in length between 7,000 and 20,000 words and each addresses a slightly different set of questions appropriate to the dialogue's focus. We will analyse key trends in the next section, but it is worth starting by noting that each dialogue has its own character in tone and format, reflecting the communication style and epistemological contours of the particular sector to which a given dialogue belongs. They all, however, share an informed and rigorous, but flowing, conversational mode, which can be highly effective in addressing key challenges for the language sector.

In the introduction to *Critical Digital Pedagogies in Modern Languages* Spence and Brandão explore the dynamics of the writing sprint format and examine the history of writing sprints (including specifically "book sprints"), noting that they are not as common in academic knowledge production as they are in the commercial sector or in policy organisations, where they are widely used for creating documentation, manuals and collaborative reports. As in that publication, this special collection on post-pandemic pedagogies used a combination of community review and "sprint" approaches which we believe can be highly effective in surveying a field and in connecting stakeholders and viewpoints who/which do not usually come into contact with each other.

In the school education sector, online social interactions have long been a staple for leading theorists and practitioners in a community keen to assert its own agency over debates around digital engagement in language teaching. Similarly, in the academic sector, the writing sprint format has occasionally been used for asynchronous exchange between different authors

over a period of time, modelling critical and constructive engagement between people with different perspectives to generate an expansive view of a given research landscape. Writing sprints sit within a wider spectrum of interactive formats which have become increasingly common as a result of digital communication in knowledge production – from hackathons to email exchanges (see, for example, the debate between Selwyn and Gašević in 2020 on "The datafication of higher education") and beyond. These formats operate within a loosely defined space where collective intelligence, knowledge co-construction, social innovation and participatory open science overlap (Fahrenkrog et al.). While not instantly recognisable to traditional communication practices (and in this case bypassing conventional peer-review practices in academia), these formats offer new modes of engagement and (community) review which involve stronger interaction and mutual exposition of different viewpoints, with often unexpected consequences. In her analysis of the Shape of the Discipline writing sprint and publication, Taylor notes that this kind of publication "record[s] the process as much as the end result" and it responded to their aims to foster collaboration, new models of review and new forms of knowledge production (Taylor).

There are, nevertheless, challenges both in the management of the writing sprints themselves and in their publication. In practical terms, for this publication it was challenging to set up groups that provided diversity across a range of factors. We prioritised diversity of languages taught in particular and aimed for social and geographical diversity (within the UK) in institutional affiliation within the initiative as a whole, but there is nevertheless a geographical bias in particular, which is no doubt partly attributable to the bias in our own research networks. The limited timeframe proved challenging for such a diverse set of actors operating in different sectors with different calendars during periods of industrial action and institutional/personal recovery from the pandemic, even though we had built in some flexibility to allow for this in advance.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of "social" forms of knowledge production in academic practice (Weller), scholarly credit and validation systems still do not recognise non-traditional publications in a consistent manner, and so each dialogue is treated here as a separate "article" in MLO platform terms. Each is hence provided with its own digital object identifier (DOI), which facilitates stable citation within an internationally recognised standard that allows content to be uniquely identified and therefore easily discoverable. Questions remain about how to classify this kind of publication/dialogue, and what implications this has for professional development in school and higher education pathways, and we welcome once again the openness of the Modern Languages Open platform to new and experimental publishing modes.

ANALYSIS OF TRENDS IN THE DIALOGUES

Given the very diverse nature of language education, the impact of emergency remote teaching has been extremely diverse and context-specific.[10] However, critical reflection on the changes brought by the pandemic to language teaching learning and teaching practices has allowed us to identify some common trends across the different dialogues. This section will also explore some variations in the effects and experiences across the groups due to the educational context, expectations and specific material conditions.

PEDAGOGICAL TRANSFORMATION FOR AN EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE (DIGITAL) EDUCATION

Across the education sector, the COVID-19 crisis accelerated digital transformation at a large scale. Thus, a dominant theme identified across all the dialogues was a dramatic change in teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches during the pandemic. So-called emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al.) shifted instruction to online synchronous activities and independent asynchronous activities, with learning supported by online web content, videos

10 This is particularly the case in higher education, where teaching involves provision in a number of different formats, including conventional language degrees, Institution-Wide Language Programme (IWLP)/Languages for All programmes and more targeted courses aimed at particular audiences.

and games, as well as communication tools such as Microsoft Teams to facilitate class interaction and teamwork.[11]

Adopting online teaching and learning was perceived as a rough transition due to the insufficient development of underpinning "pedagogical strategies" (see Rapanta et al. 717). For many teachers the transition regarding the use of technology was quite challenging (Chan et al.). Across the different scenarios and groups, opinions about the reach of this transformation were mixed, and moulded both by institutional environment and individual pedagogical perspectives. There are plenty of examples of reflective thinking on pedagogical digital practices across the dialogues (see the Primary and Secondary Schools dialogues in particular). The Secondary Schools group described how the pandemic forced teachers to upskill quickly, which may have changed teacher expectations in relation to their own digital skills. As noted by the Early Career Researcher participants, it encouraged some to re-evaluate how they could use digital tools in a more integrated manner. For the Teaching and Cultural Institutions, digital engagement was by no means new and, because they already had prior digital experience, it was relatively easy for them to make the transition. Overall, the pandemic provided an opportunity to think strategically about how to design language learning effectively and the role of digital tools in that process. Many felt that it is important to avoid the risk of technology leading learning design, as the learning objectives need to come first. As one of the contributors in the Language Teaching in HE group noted, "creativity lies more in the pedagogy than in the technology".

The contributions in the dialogues have recognised that providing access to online materials was a priority, and some found open access learning materials particularly helpful. The challenging experiences of digital dynamics during this critical period demonstrated how designing resources that are pedagogically sound for online and hybrid environments requires time and careful planning. Hence, although a significant amount of material was created to support teachers, in some cases this was of mixed usefulness.

Language instructors discovered and used a plethora of learning technologies and tools during this period. The dialogues offer examples of successful engagements with a wide range of social media, multimodal communicative tools, games and activities for language learning. For example, the Primary Schools group acknowledged the widespread uptake in the use of tools such as Duolingo and, among other examples of digital innovation, social media was used for storytelling communication. The Secondary Schools group praised, among others, LearningApps, Padlet, Kahoot and WhatsApp groups as a good source of authentic language use (see the list provided in the appendix of each dialogue). In the Year Abroad group, it is particularly significant how the use of digital tools in preparation or in academic and pastoral support for the year abroad has been "normalised" as a result of the switch to online during the pandemic.

The online mode of instruction took many language students out of their "comfort zone" (Balbay and Erkan 448). It is apparent from the discussion across the different dialogues that one of the key issues regarding emergency remote teaching was the "hidden curriculum", that is, the need for teaching learners to learn "how to interact with and within learning technologies" (Whittle et al.). In general, higher education students were quite comfortable in using digital technology. However, as participants in the Secondary Schools group noticed, students required greater support to develop digital literacies so that they could use technology more effectively. At the same time, there were examples of reciprocal support between instructors and learners. For example, one contributor presented a model where students and teachers exchanged ideas on how to use tools effectively.

There was clearly a shift towards screen media education for language teaching and learning (Herrero and Suarez). Pre-recorded videos with associated interactive exercises played an important part. Most learners were also more at ease in creating and interpreting video content both technically and socially. For some participants, the danger in learning advanced digital media skills is that the learner's focus is divided between language learning and the process of using media in production. At the same time, as a consequence of screen-fatigue, some language teachers noticed how some learners have an inclination towards non-digital tools, formats and activities both in secondary and higher education. However, others have

11 As Hodges et al. point out, it is critical to make a distinction between online education and emergency remote teaching.

argued that using screen media in language learning and teaching could lead to greater levels of engagement and embedding their knowledge more firmly, as the multimodal meaning-making connects with learners' multiliteracies practices and interests (Herrero et al.).

Overall, the opinion of most of the participants is that there is no going back to teaching without technology, as the use of digital tools has improved many aspects of language teaching and learning. Some schools have moved to a blended learning approach as a result of the pandemic (see the Secondary Schools dialogue).

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Closely related to the previous trend, there was a direct and diverse impact of digitally enhanced instruction on student engagement. From a pedagogical point of view, the potential affordances of online instruction provided greater accessibility, flexibility and interactivity, for both students and teachers (Crane).

Across the dialogues there are relevant examples on how the use of digital technologies increased learners' autonomy. From primary to higher education, learning online sometimes favoured shy students because they could participate using alternative channels such as chat or online discussion boards. In the case of secondary schools, students were asked to submit spoken tasks where they recorded themselves, which led to learners gaining digital and visual literacy skills. The Language Teaching in Higher Education group acknowledged how the pedagogical model chosen was often a flipped classroom approach which allowed for flexibility and individual circumstances, but sometimes broke the "flow" of teaching and learners' attention. For students learning languages with non-Latin scripts such as Mandarin Chinese there were important advances, because they could focus on writing rather than producing the Chinese characters by hand. The contributors to the Secondary Schools and Teaching and Cultural Institutions groups were particularly aware of how students gained greater autonomy through apps such as Duolingo to support their own learning outside of the classroom, as well as having greater opportunities, in principle, to engage with a variety of examples of the target culture (through watching TV programmes with subtitles) (see Herrero and Vanderschelden, 2019).

The COVID-19 crisis has widened social and educational divides in society. A common theme that emerged in the analysis of the dialogues is the negative impact of student engagement with the migration to remote teaching due to social inequalities (lack of laptops or broadband connection). Students with low socio-economic status are still behind in terms of language culture knowledge and skills. As participants in the Primary and Secondary Schools dialogues notice, the pandemic has led to a broader attainment gap between schools meeting language requirements and those struggling to reach them.

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF LANGUAGE TUTORS IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The third trend that emerged from the dialogues is the vital support provided by different communities of practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quick implementation of digital technology added extra dimensions to the teacher's role: "tutor, organizer of the learning process, curator of the learning resources, motivator and project manager of students' learning" (Lourdes Guàrida, in Rapanta el at. 727). Given the enormous impact of the pandemic on teaching practices, there was a need for collaborative and strategic efforts. Thus, communities of practice (Wenger) played a central role in coming together to provide peer-advice and help in digital teaching during the COVID-19 crisis (Lim et al.; Sadeghi and Thomas).

In the dialogues there are numerous examples of successful practices of both virtual professional development and online teaching training for L2 language teachers and trainees during the emergency remote teaching period, and many contributors reported on the effectiveness of virtual groups in supporting and mentoring other colleagues both at national and international levels. The Primary Schools group participants acknowledged how helpful it was to engage with colleagues from across the world through webinars. Some examples of knowledge exchange include the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as webinars and workshops hosted by different institutions and professional language associations (e.g., the Association for Language Learning). As Crane notes, these types of groups and activities

"revealed an instant form of community of practitioners ready to offer support and expert guidance on a diverse set of topics related to our work as language educators" (171). These communities of practice provided support for those who were not prepared for technology-based language education in terms of knowledge and skills: for example, to design online lessons or to engage students using a range of apps, tools and games. The secondary schools community was very active in providing support through webinars and other activities that helped to upskill language teachers. Similarly, during the lockdowns, team-building also helped to create feelings of peer-support and empathy among colleagues from the Language Teaching in Higher Education and Teaching and Cultural Institutions groups.

The "Community of Inquiry" model and the notion of "social presence" were particularly relevant for providing opportunities across the different groups to share knowledge and ideas about teaching with digital technology and online instruction. In general, it could be argued that there has been a move to a more horizontal dynamic in sharing knowledge. These teaching experiences facilitated in some cases collaborative educational projects that have emerged and become more formalised since the pandemic. There are numerous examples of community collaboration around the year abroad, which include "networks of sharing good practice" capable of looking at alternative placements when the need arises. Likewise, the Early Career Researcher contributors praised academic Twitter as an important social channel for building research and solidarity networks. The move to online made it easier for early career researchers to engage with academic and research events, leading to greater inclusivity.

The conversations included in this special issue show the emotional dimension of language teaching. They surface the emotions and loneliness that teachers and researchers suffered during the lockdowns, and the impact this had on their teaching practice and professional identity. They provide evidence of the need for further research on language teaching as an "emotion labor in crisis" (see Warner and Diao), particularly in the context of language teaching in the UK.

The disruption brought by the pandemic increased language teachers' workload and psychological stress due to a combination of factors. First, the lack of training in digital teaching and insufficient resources was a major challenge for many practitioners. Second, a substantial proportion of teachers were on fractional contracts, and it was hard for some to cope with the significant time-consuming elements of preparation for online design. Third, the loss of quality in interactions increased teachers' emotional anxieties directly and indirectly when supporting pupils and parents, in the case of primary and secondary education.

The emergency response to the pandemic has also given more visibility to the precarious working conditions of many language tutors, particularly – but not only – early career researchers. Moreover, some argue that online teaching can increase precarity in working conditions for educators, especially in the higher education sector, as the shift towards virtual or hybrid formats of delivery can put language instructors at risk.

WHAT WE LEARNED/NEXT STEPS

A major body of scholarship and research works has been published about education during the pandemic, but less attention has been paid to how the lessons learned from those experiences can contribute to "develop and address the challenges of a post-pandemic future" (Teräs, in Kerres and Buchner 6). In order to advocate for the valuable role that Modern Languages plays in education, it is particularly important to learn from successful and innovative pedagogical approaches implemented during emergency remote teaching, as well as analysing the current state of ML education in the UK. For instance, there is a perception that there has been a decrease in the number of people taking languages at GCSE as a result of the pandemic and that this crisis has led to the attainment gap between schools meeting language requirements and those struggling becoming broader than before (both in primary and secondary schools). In-person immersion and study abroad experiences were badly affected by the pandemic. In line with the points raised by the participants in the Year Abroad and the Language Teaching in Higher Education dialogues, online and virtual experiences (e.g., Teletandem and other forms of virtual exchanges, etc.) cannot substitute for the invaluable (inter)cultural and linguistic

experience of the year abroad. However, the lessons learned from the closure of borders due to the pandemic has helped many to recognise that remote instruction can support language learning, particularly in emergency situations (war, environmental disasters, etc.). There has been increased awareness of the need for "flexibility and resilience" (Year Abroad dialogue). It may be too early to talk about a "post-pandemic year abroad", and there are no clear solutions, but the pandemic has clarified which areas need attention, opportunities and "best practice" in "mobility provision" (Year Abroad dialogue). Certainly, the sector is in a better place to deal with emergencies that might affect the year abroad at short notice. Even more important in many respects is that it has demonstrated that cooperation between different organisations is the best way forward (see materials and activities provided by the University Council for Languages Year Abroad Special Interest Group). There is some debate about whether the term "year abroad" best describes the experience now. On a positive note, the alternative provision of teaching (blended and online delivery) has helped to identify cohorts of language learners that were previously not represented, particularly in adult learner education (people who could not attend in-person teaching for family, health or work reasons). Also, there is a growing debate about changing attitudes towards heritage language speakers.

As we noted earlier in this introduction, the use of digital technology for learning and teaching, and the different didactic approaches adopted during emergency remote teaching, could provide valuable lessons for an effective post-pandemic language education pedagogy. The diverse teaching experiences during the lockdowns have opened ongoing debates about how and when to offer online or hybrid provision. Considering the scale of remote teaching that took place during the pandemic, online and hybrid formats of learning and delivery are here to stay (Impedovo and Chee Tan). For some, the key question is how to make an "effective" and "creative" use of "convivial technologies" (Williamson et al. 112); thus, there is a need to support teachers and students to develop and enhance their digital competence for a responsible use of ICT and digital devices and platforms. The pandemic forced teachers to break out of existing habits and to be creative in teaching design, which necessarily involved thinking of the most appropriate digital teaching methods and tools for flexible and alternative approaches to instruction and learning. Some of the challenges and opportunities related to digital learning during the pandemic are still relevant pedagogical considerations, as teachers should be "designers" of learning experiences (the New London Group; Kress and Selander). Thus, Lim and Toh (74–5) call for attention to be paid to the affordances offered by semiotic technologies used in online education and how they contribute to learning experiences (knowledge representation, pedagogical interaction and learning experience). Reflecting on the interactive ways in which teachers and students have embraced digital technology, one of the expectations is to enhance further the digital literacies of language educators and students, and to explore how to improve the design of student learning experiences both inside and outside the physical classroom. Thus, it is particularly relevant to consider the multimodal and intercultural dimensions of digital literacies (Sindoni et al.).

The dialogues provide clear evidence of how teachers and students are thinking more about autonomous learning through a combination of distance learning techniques and face-to-face learning, synchronously or asynchronously. Homework management now often happens online through platforms such as Google Classroom, and some teachers felt that monitoring home learning had become easier as a result (e.g., video lectures, digital games for learning and social media as a learning platform). Online education has given greater prominence to traditional broadcasters (e.g., the BBC and iPlayer for home learning), as well as other streaming media companies (Google, YouTube, Apple and Zoom, among others) in collaboration with different education providers. There is a clear trend towards "empowering private companies" as providers of remote forms of education (Williamson et al. 109) which has an impact on the concept of open educational exchange. Also, this switch towards online education during the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how the use of game-based learning and screen-media learning can strengthen the link between formal and informal learning, and provide opportunities for self-paced and individual learning.

Many of the participants refer to how emergency remote teaching drove an intense period of continuing professional development and how digital technology has been particularly useful for sharing scholarly practice (e.g., research-informed teaching, open educational resources

and successful models of learning and teaching). Examples include presentations in online and hybrid symposia and conferences, blogs, podcasts and other formats of visual presentation (posters, infographics and videos) shared via social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.). The success of offering opportunities for professional development in virtual format has continued in many cases after the return to "normality", both for pre- and in-service teachers. However, as the participants of the dialogues note, there is still a preference for in-person events as well as for the flexibility offered by hybrid teacher training courses (CPD) and other educational and research events. To some extent, one of the clearest implications that can be extrapolated is that teachers are more willing than ever to continue to use digital tools. The testimonials and critical reflections collected in this issue acknowledge how they have learned to assess a wide range of tools and technology critically, and to think about their value for their professional practice. As a result, teachers have a much better sense of what functions in a language learning environment, and how and when to integrate different digital resources. What becomes apparent from the examples shared by practitioners is that establishing different forms of educational institutional collaboration can not only reduce workload and generate new ideas for effectively integrating new technologies into the language curriculum, but also resolve issues affecting language education more quickly and in a more consistent way (see the example of the Year Abroad group).

Similarly, students are now more able to use and evaluate different digital tools and platforms for their learning, and these could be particularly useful for autonomous working and revision-type activities. Overall, online teaching has created more and better conditions for learner agency; for example, in the Secondary Schools, Language Teaching in Higher Education and Year Abroad dialogues, one of the areas identified as a successful development was peer collaboration for language development skills, through knowledge building and intercultural and cross-cultural development. By the same token, digital technologies have provided more opportunities for learners to co-create, share knowledge and participate actively in digital learning, and this has led to a "greater student-centricity where the interactions shift from students with the teacher to students among themselves" (Lim and Toh 80). The dialogues offer a range of successful examples of the value of alternative forms of assessment (e.g., demonstrating how moving away from written assessments towards portfolios of learning encouraged a more reflective approach to students' own learning). Cope and Kalantzis advocate for a new framework for learning and assessment through "recursive feedback" that they call "reflexive pedagogy" (30). But while there is great potential to create autonomous learning using digital tools, in practice some teachers are concerned that students have lost resilience and their ability to work independently since the pandemic. For some, students may find it harder to control their screen usage than before and they are more prone to being distracted by email or social media interactions.[12]

Teacher training has played an important role and it will continue to do so, particularly for supporting teachers in how to integrate technology into their professional practices. There is a danger of teachers losing some of the skills they learned due to lack of confidence in using digital tools. Distance learning created some challenging work/home-life balance issues. For many language educators, "loneliness and isolation" are still common sentiments. Examining the effectiveness of coping strategies used by language teachers during this challenging crisis, MacIntyre et al. (12) suggest that they offer useful lessons for the future, as "learning how to cope with the stress" constitutes an essential skill that should be part of teaching training programmes. In particular, the pandemic highlighted the precarious position of early career researchers. There is a need to re-evaluate our understanding of the role of this group in higher education. Mentoring and training will be important elements in supporting them going forward. In summary, there should be a review of the training of pre-service and in-service language teachers to strengthen and invigorate language education with the lessons learned during emergency remote teaching, and geared to dealing with the challenges of today and the future.

12 This aligns with the concept of attentional literacy. As Pegrum and Palalas suggest, "(w)hen students learn online, they do so within a wider context of digital disarray, marked by distraction, disorder and disconnection, which research shows to be far from conducive to effective learning" (1).

CONCLUSIONS

Although across the different dialogues there were mixed opinions about the extent to which the pandemic brought about (or accelerated existing) pedagogical transformation, in general there has been a move to a connectivist philosophy on teaching and an increase in the use of digital technologies and blended teaching in some cases. There was more consensus about how it has transformed teacher-to-teacher and cross- and inter-institutional support, and opportunities to collaborate and to exchange pedagogical ideas and lessons.

The discussions collected in the six dialogues offer an insightful approach to the pedagogical repertoire developed during emergency remote teaching. They offer models of effective resources and activities for blended learning and provide a comprehensive panorama of practices and experiences across different types of ML provision in the UK. Moreover, they demonstrate how digital pedagogies require not only subject knowledge but also a sound understanding of the affordances of digital technologies and tools.

It is time to reimagine the new pedagogical possibilities for Modern Languages, attending to the challenges, opportunities and limitations in the current post-pandemic socio-economic and geopolitical context, following the narratives of those who experienced directly the emergency migration to online learning across different sectors.

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