

Review of Online world language instruction training and assessment, an ecological approach

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As stated by the authors, the COVID-19 pandemic confined most of the world for up to nine months, starting in the Spring of 2020. The education world also took an unexpected turn, since most students were forced to switch almost overnight from attending a brick and mortar school to 100% online instruction in their home. In that context, two books called our attention: the present volume and *Teaching Language Online: A Guide for Designing, Developing, and Delivering Online, Blended, and Flipped Language Course* (Russell & Murphy-Jody, 2021). While both look at the design and implementation of exercises, and delivery, there are significant differences in the educational framework. The latter poses the importance of how to teach and adapt to online instruction. Along the same lines, we then take note of the *Online World Language Instruction Training and Assessment, An Ecological Approach*, which also looks at the development of the instructor, and yet another volume, *Structuring Fun for Young Language Learners Online: Turning enjoyment into engaging language practice during internet-based lessons at primary level* (Teaching English Online) (Roland, 2020). This book was also very appealing for English instructors but, as indicated in the title, it was aimed at Young Learners so it did, in some respects, differ from the two previous books. What seems to be relevant to the reader is that the COVID-19 pandemic has partially triggered the interest of online language teaching not just as a face-to-face adaptation but as a proper and differentiated way of instruction. Finally, in 2022 another volume called *Online Language Teaching in Diverse Contexts* (Friedman & George, 2022) appeared in the market, but in our opinion, it is more research-based.

Focusing specifically on the volume in this review, *Online World Language Instruction Training and Assessment, An Ecological Approach*, addresses in ten chapters the need to better understand and define the opportunities and obstacles involved in training and assessing online faculty and thoroughly provides a critical pedagogical approach to computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and teacher education (CTE), while describing specific ways of online teaching. The adequacy of this volume is self-evident when the world of online instruction is currently being reviewed by events such as the Ukraine issue where the war and the pandemic have led higher education to be mostly delivered online (Lokshyna & Topuzov, 2021), and in many other places in the world where emergency teaching prevails. This book mentions that while many primary and secondary schools, and certainly universities, had previously implemented numerous programs online, including blended teaching or hybrid formats, general school populations were not prepared for such a sudden and dramatic transition. Despite the unpreparedness to quickly move to virtual environments, the pandemic forced educators to reconceive instruction, but without the standards to train and evaluate faculty teaching online. In spite of the negative impacts, this new challenge to switch traditional face-to-face instruction to online platforms brought about an opportunity to develop new approaches that have since impacted institutions, curriculum, faculty and students. Particularly, in the case of language learning, instructors quickly faced the issue of adequately interacting with their students by adopting online platforms that could offer live video conferences for their synchronous format classes. In their informative introduction, the authors state that deficiencies in technological competence and financial resources have created tremendous struggles impacting all education participants, while also revealing the need for adequate tools that enable institutions to properly train and assess online language faculty, while ensuring social equity and academic success.

The book begins with a long introduction and also contains ten chapters, three appendices, a valuable glossary and the references in the book. Additionally, the volume has an accompanying website (<http://press.georgetown.edu/book/georgetown/online-world-language-instruction-training-and-assessment>) where more resources of CALL (such as journals, interest groups, place of study, resources for practitioners, and others) can be found (http://press.georgetown.edu/sites/default/files/KingRamirez_CTE-CALLresources_ForWeb.pdf). The first chapter, which appears to have been written after the pandemic, while the rest seem to have been written before, makes connections to the changes produced by a situation in which online education has taken a significant place in the world, and reinforces the importance of teacher training for online course instruction. Chapter 2 does an extensive and updated literature review outlining the need for specific training to be revised and reconceptualized, and is further developed by presenting strategies to do so in chapter three. Here the authors present the model proposed by Anthony Muhammad and Luis F. Cruz (2019) that stresses the importance of cognitive, emotional, and functional investments that administrations need to do in order to improve online education. Chapter 4 looks at the competencies that instructors should acquire through specific training. In this sense, the competencies that the authors present in Appendix A3 are especially relevant. Chapter 5 addresses the significant features of the assessment of online instructors' skills, the rubrics of which are presented in chapter 6 performed by students, supervisors, and departmental administrators. The only issue is that this chapter is very specific to American institutions while the rest is more transferable. In fact, Europe has a European e-Competence Framework (e-CF) (<https://ecfexplorer.itprofessionalism.org/>) that would be worth revising. Chapter 7 reviews literature on the subject of self-assessment and promotes administrators encouraging teachers' self-reflection. To us, the most interesting chapters are the last three where Chapter 8 looks at mentorship through formative assessment in depth; Chapter 9 emphasizes the best practices in the assessment process with an especial mention to the role of feedback in the training of e-instructors; and Chapter 10, which "discusses issues of the normalization of a Critical CALL approach to ensure appropriate online language instructor training and assessment" (p. 7).

The most relevant aspect of this volume is its novelty since very few books approach the topic from a differentiated perspective and especially focusing on language teaching. This volume has a practical approach that intends to change the traditional error of assuming that moving from face-to-face to virtual education just happens by changing the channel. Their ecological approach refers to a differentiated ecosystem with a different approach and method that is explained in the book. The authors not only discuss how faculty can provide a broad and holistic approach to successful online programs, but in an area rarely examined at the university level, which is how institutions train and assess their online language instructors. (Chapters 7-9 of this volume use case study data to provide examples of instructor and mentor experiences and perceptions of the assessment processes involved).

This book also points out that language teaching experience is important but often causes resistance to change for a variety of reasons, thoroughly considered in Chapter 1, since most faculty has been forced to rethink their pedagogical practices. The appendices of the volume provide eleven checklists and rubrics; Appendix A, for instance, includes a rubric that outlines how school administrators can encourage experienced face-to-face faculty that may feel less valued and/or experience a loss of autonomy over their role as educators. Inequities or marginalization with respect to online education are explored in the book and evidence is provided through citations and research regarding the disparity among communities and lack of access to the necessary technology for CTE students to be successful. According to the authors, awareness of these disparities is imperative for faculty and language department administrators to provide a successful online environment for their students. However, the encompassing remedy for addressing these issues includes action strategies that involve either online or face-to-face activities with those communities lacking the necessary resources. The discussion then involves an ecological and holistic approach identifying environments of subjects' prior activities, skills needed to participate in those activities, and on the other hand, the training, assessment and goal setting necessary to ensure appropriate developing of culturally diverse groups of faculty.

This book also considers that moving from face-to-face to online language teaching presents an ecological paradigm shift that requires rethinking teaching practices, and implies considering and applying the components mentioned above. The authors want to propose new solutions to teacher training challenges, providing extensive rubrics, and a list of CALL and CTE resources that can be used to assess faculty online skills, once they have received appropriate training and mentorship. The authors also highlight the relevance of their research, applicable to other fields, by stating that “Although the volume is focused on training faculty to teach languages online, many of the elements and strategies proposed for online instructor training and self-assessment could also be applied to the professional development of faculty from a variety of disciplines who are moving into digital pedagogical spaces.” (Pg. 8)

Overall, this publication is a well-researched and valuable guide in the field of CALL and CTE and it is well-suited for online faculty, researchers, administrators and supervisors interested in implementing new pedagogical approaches, integrating more than just basic technology and traditional assessments in language education. To complement this book, future research is needed on related topics that could include language instructor-student rapport in online environments, content knowledge, assessing students' learning, and usage of second language skills. Researchers and practitioners will surely value its updated information and resources as well as the authors' understanding that online teaching deserves its own place and recognition.

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