

1 “Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing participation and collaboration” – an introduction

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The School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies at the University of Nottingham was delighted to host the annual conference in the series *Innovative Language Teaching and Learning at University* in 2015. The inaugural conference took place in 2010 at Newcastle University, and the conference is now in its fifth year.

This year’s conference theme of *Innovative Language Teaching and Learning at University: Enhancing Participation and Collaboration* saw a varied programme of 24 parallel sessions, which broadly fall into three categories: *fostering online collaboration*, *exploring digital tools and online environments*, and thirdly *beyond the language classroom*.

We were fortunate to be able to welcome as our keynote speakers Professor Zoltán Dörnyei, who wrote the foreword to this edited volume, and Dr Jan Hardman, who also contributed a short article on *Opening-up classroom discourse to promote and enhance active, collaborative and cognitively-engaging student learning experience*. She argues for the creation of a dialogic space in the language classroom, which can then be filled with high-quality classroom interaction which serves as a highly effective tool for fostering students’ active learning.

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In addition to Jan Hardman's keynote paper, 15 conference papers are published in this volume. The contributions under the heading *Fostering online collaboration* have at their core the principle of getting students to work together on and for a common aim and result. First, Motzo shares her experience of an online buddy scheme involving students on a distance learning degree which highlights the importance of collaboration and support amongst off-campus students. Hartung and Reisenleutner then report on an innovative project that partnered students of German at two UK universities using the online tool *Voicethread*. Students worked cooperatively and collaboratively to produce a virtual travel guide to their respective university town. A further example of student partnerships is illustrated in Álvarez-Mayo's contribution, who reports on an online exchange between a group of students based in Spain and a second group of students based in the UK. In the final paper in this section, Razi focusses on collaboration in the area of feedback, in particular the differences between open and anonymous peer feedback.

The selected short papers in the second section deal with *Exploring digital tools and online environments*. De Berg's paper describes a project where students of German Business, Society and Culture were given an opportunity to develop their digital literacy skills alongside their language and cultural studies. The social networking site Facebook and a wiki are at the centre of Brahmi's project: the paper reports on a study involving students of English and their perceptions of using social media to improve their English writing skills. Magedera-Hofhansl presents an innovative project which focusses on all four skills and gives students the opportunity to "become a reporter". Reid and Gilardi's contribution reports on a project involving Japanese learners of academic writing in English and the results of the introduction of the transmedia teaching method to challenge the prevailing paradigm of passive consumers of knowledge amongst the students. The section concludes with the paper by Sadoux, Rzycka, Jones, and Lopez, which describes the implementation of a new navigational structure for their institution's virtual learning environment. The innovative aspect of this structure, which is based on distributive learning, lies in the fact that it was designed by students.

The third and final section of this volume, *Beyond the language classroom*, brings together six papers that share a focus on cultural aspects of language learning. Hampton and Demeure-Ahearne give an account of a partnership project between year abroad students and local widening participation schools, where the students used digital tools not only to create teaching and learning materials for the students in their local schools, but also online spaces, such as blogs, to reflect on their year abroad experience and the development of their intercultural competence. Staying with the theme of intercultural competence, López-Rocha highlights the need for teachers to create language courses that facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competence, as well as the challenges such inclusion into the curriculum brings. The benefits of field trips for modern languages students are discussed by Plutino who reports on a group of ab initio Italian learners and the associated benefits for motivation, engagement and collaboration. The next two papers cover the area of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): Parks looks at the complex relationship between language and culture and compares UK and US higher education with regards to the development of intercultural competence; Hughes discusses the implications of subject discipline content being delivered through a second language, and reflects on how language departments in the UK are dealing with the question as to whether subject content should be delivered in the foreign language or in English. The final paper by Lo highlights the challenges Cantonese speakers face in Mandarin classes and reports on a case study investigating those students' needs, motivations and barriers regarding the learning of Mandarin.

The year-on-year increase in the number of contributors and delegates attending this conference series is testament to the need for this type of event, where researchers and practitioners in language teaching and learning come together to share best practices and find colleagues for collaboration, both nationally and internationally.

To conclude, we would like to express our appreciation to the presenters and delegates, without whom there would be no conference. Also, we would like to thank our School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies here at the University

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