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Skill Development in Teaching Ancient Greek: The Role of New Technologies

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Abstract

Rapid technological advances in recent years together with developments in world health (COVID-19 pandemic) laid bare the necessity for changes in the structure, methods and practices of the traditional teaching process. Information society has granted unprecedented access to data, enabling rapid processing and utilization. As a result, today's students and future citizens need to obtain those skills that will allow them to process information and use it to solve real-life problems. Concurrently, the citizens of tomorrow should be able to rise to the challenges of a multicultural society. Education thus plays a decisive role, by fostering appropriate learning environments to enable students to cultivate cognitive, digital, metacognitive, social and communication skills. In this paper, a teaching scenario is proposed based on the above and according to the theory of constructivism. The scenario is meant to be implemented in the third grade of junior high school, specifically in the course on ancient Greek, in which students become acquainted with Euripides' tragedy, "Helen." This paper discusses the concept of e-learning and skills, as laid out in Binkley et al. (2012). It is noted that as part of e-learning to teach Ancient Greek, students have the opportunity both to obtain theoretical knowledge and to develop various skills, such as critical thinking, analysis and synthesis, teamwork, communication etc. Among other benefits, students will get to know ancient drama, interact with timeless concepts, develop their written and oral communication capabilities and acquire digital skills, by honing their ability to pursue independent study and work as part of a team in collaborative learning environments supported by these forms of communication. In conclusion, the prerequisites, benefits and challenges that may arise in implementing the teaching scenario in a digital environment are presented, as are means for more effective utilization of the scenario in teaching practice.

Keywords: E-Learning, 21st Century Skills, Teaching Scenario

1. Introduction

As part of ongoing efforts to develop and improve the quality of education in the 21st century, it has become crucial to identify and utilise modern, innovative teaching methods and practices aimed at helping students hone the skills necessary to adapt to a constantly changing world, where challenges abound and traditional perceptions are called into question. Skill development is a goal of educational policy both domestically and internationally. In the 21st century, the overarching objective has become to equip students with those skills that will enable them to rise

successfully to the challenges and requirements of the modern day, where technological progress, socio-political upheavals, fluidity and multiculturalism are its characteristics (GG (B/3567/2021·GG B/3791/2021).

Sima, Gheorghe, Subic and Nancu, (2020) note that people need to exercise their creativity, experimentation, assessment and planning skills etc. to effectively rise to the changes taking place. Indeed, the use of digital tools is a vital skill in the modern day, given how we need to be ready to process information drawn from various sources, evaluate its validity and reliability and draw conclusions (Sima et al., 2020).

As part of this effort, the proposed teaching scenario makes the most of the capabilities modern e-learning provides. The scenario consists of activities aimed at strengthening student-to-student, student-teacher, and student-material interaction (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). The e-learning environment should make use of the most recent technological developments and adapt to modern teaching models, such as constructivist learning, collaborative learning and learning based on problem-solving. Studies (Al-Rahmi, Alzahrani et al. 2020) have shown that constructivist principles are fundamental to our understanding of the details of e-learning.

The scenario will be based on the theoretical principle of social constructivism. According to this principle, knowledge is “structured” together (socio-constructivism) and significant emphasis is placed on the role and contribution of a given social group in the construction of knowledge. The different ideas and opinions espoused by members of the group give rise to instability, eventually leading to the reorganisation of previous knowledge and acquisition of new knowledge within a context of communication and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). Collaboration especially is lent particular emphasis, as the vehicle through which members can exchange information and ideas, work out disagreements, and develop skills through common-interest tasks using new technologies. Students actively participate in e-learning, supported by a constructivist theoretical framework; it enables them both to draw information from a host of different sources and to connect it with the knowledge they have acquired previously, thus leading to new knowledge (Huang et al., 2010). Students can interact and participate in exchange of perspectives, helping along their development of a collective understanding of the concepts being studied (Kalpana, 2014).

According to the New Skills Agenda (2017), the term ‘skills’ is used to refer broadly to what a person knows, understands and can do; these skills may be further broken down into categories, such as basic skills, transferable skills, transversal skills, technical skills, horizontal skills etc. (as mentioned in Laloti, 2021:15). According to the OECD (OECD, 2019:16), skills are ‘a person’s ability to responsibly use the knowledge they acquire to achieve their goals’. This paper uses as its frame of reference the 21st-century curriculum of Binkley et al. (2012), which includes ten competences vital for citizens in the 21st century.

Table 1: The KSAVE model for 21st-century skills

A. Ways of Thinking
Creativity and innovation
Critical thinking, problem-solving, management and decision-making
Learning to learn: Metacognition
B. Ways of Working
Communication
Collaboration (teamwork)
C. Tools for Working
IT literacy (source research, evidence, etc.)
Technological literacy
D. Living in the World
Citizenship
Life and Career
Personal and Social responsibility with cultural awareness and skill

Source: Binkley et al., 2012

E-learning environments enable students to develop cognitive, metacognitive and digital skills, as well as to communicate and collaborate to achieve learning goals. To foster their cognitive skills, we encourage students to posit questions, seek information, solve problems, evaluate sources of information and effectively use the information they find. We also place emphasis on developing their written and oral communication skills. To cultivate their social and communication skills, we create opportunities for collaboration, interaction and teamwork, facilitate discussion, encourage dispute management and support interpersonal communication. To cultivate metacognitive skills, we focus on critical thinking and establishing connections between various cognitive fields; we also encourage reflective knowledge management and self-assessment (Kasimatis & Papageorgiou, 2013).

The proposed teaching scenario presents itself as an e-learning environment that enables students to cultivate all these skills. The literature has not yet reached a consensus regarding the term ‘e-learning.’ At times it is used to describe the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning, at others to describe hybrid approaches to education which combine face-to-face and distance e-learning, at still others exclusively to describe teaching conducted via the internet and available either asynchronously or synchronously or in a mix thereof. Thanks to the spread of the internet, the terms ‘e-learning’ and ‘online learning’ have witnessed a massive increase in use, replacing or coming to be seen as equivalent to the previously dominant term ‘distance education’ (Karalis & Lintzeris, 2022). According to Keegan (2001), the term ‘distance education’ refers to educational processes conducted “beyond the four walls” of a conventional classroom. It may be either synchronous or asynchronous, and is characterised by the physical separation of student and teacher as well as the support of the appropriate technological tools that enable the teaching process and the transmission of educational content.

E-learning or technologically-assisted learning refers to a learning process in which Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) -notably the Internet and the World Wide Web- are used to facilitate the learning and knowledge acquisition process by establishing relationships and interactions between teachers and students as well as between students, with the inclusion of the available educational material (Petropoulou, Retalis & Kasimatis, 2015). It is defined as a teaching approach that makes the most of digital technology to facilitate interaction, collaboration and exchange of knowledge between students and teachers (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). It encompasses web lessons, blended learning and massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Allen & Seaman, 2017).

2. Teaching Scenario

2.1 Target group: students in the third grade of Junior High School

The class will be sorted into groups of four to five (4-5) students.

This class will be students’ first foray into the world of tragedy as a genre of ancient Greek poetry. Through the scenario students will become acquainted with the parts of ancient drama and the structure of ancient tragedy and will attempt to interpret the terms “hubris,” “nemesis,” “tisis,” and “tragic irony”.

Course: Ancient Greek – “Helen,” by Euripides

Duration: The scenario will be implemented over a two (2) month period

Methodology – Tools: synchronous and asynchronous distance learning, MSTEAMS, padlet, rubric, concept map, quizzes, wiki

2.2 Goals

The goal of this teaching proposal is to demonstrate the role e-learning can play in teaching ancient Greek.

Upon completion of the teaching scenario, students are expected to be able to:

- Recognize tragedy as one of the genres of ancient Greek drama.
- Identify correspondences between the structure of tragedy and that of modern theatre genres.
- Describe the concepts of ‘hubris,’ ‘nemesis,’ ‘tisis,’ and ‘tragic irony.’

- Identify the parts of ancient theatre.
- Recognize the anti-war message of the tragedy.
- Draw conclusions, by investigating and utilising sources.
- Develop cognitive, social, communication (collaboration, team spirit, conflict management etc.) and metacognitive skills (reflection, self-regulation, learning strategies etc.).
- Develop digital skills (information-seeking, data analysis, problem-solving, digital content creation etc.).

2.3 Conditions

Appropriate identification of research participants is critical to the science and practice of psychology, particularly for generalizing the findings, making comparisons across replications, and using the evidence in research syntheses and secondary data analyses. If humans participated in the study, report the eligibility and exclusion criteria, including any restrictions based on demographic characteristics. E-learning (synchronous and asynchronous distance learning) may be exceptionally useful when supported by a planned, student-centric approach. Nevertheless, to ensure the effectiveness of the e-learning process, conditions associated with the learning goals, the teacher, the method, the characteristics and the interests of the students, as well as the technological equipment, should all be taken into account (Mouzakis et al., 2004). More specifically:

- Ensuring a reliable communication network
- Planning the appropriate educational material
- Teachers with appropriate knowledge and (organisational, digital, educational, social) skills
- Appropriate teacher preparation
- Organisation of lessons according to course objectives

2.4 Description of the teaching scenario

Describe the procedures for selecting participants, including (a) the sampling method, if a systematic sampling plan was used; (b) the percentage of the sample approached that participated; and (c) the number of participants who selected themselves into the sample. Describe the settings and locations in which the data were collected as well as any agreements and payments made to participants, agreements with the institutional review board, ethical standards met, and safety monitoring procedures. The teaching scenario is meant to be implemented following the introductory lessons, after which students will have a rough idea of the subject of ancient Greek, specifically ancient tragedy, a subject they first come into contact with in the third grade of junior high school.

Students will brainstorm ideas, taking cues from an image that shows a scene from ancient tragedy and the prompt “*what comes to mind when you think of the word tragedy?*” and noting keywords associatively on their padlets. This exercise is not assessed. The padlet will include scenes from the tragedies of Euripides with relevant information.

1. The teams will observe a video from the tragedy “Helen” on MSTEAMS via synchronous distance learning. The video aims to pique students’ interest and provoke discussion. After viewing the video, students will document their thoughts on the padlet, prompted by the question “Did you understand the change in episodes in the tragedy you just watched? How many episodes does this tragedy have?”. The goal is to introduce students to the concepts and motivate them to develop preliminary thoughts on the topic of the teaching scenario, which will be the focus for elaboration in subsequent specific activities.

Students will be divided into groups, each group represented by a member. Each group will be provided digital worksheets with learning activities. Students will be tasked with analysing information and processing data in a constructive learning context. We will ensure the appropriate learning environment and foster a positive, supportive atmosphere to ensure active involvement and interaction between participants in the learning process.

The worksheet will include the following activities:

2. Visit the website Greek Language Portal <https://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/index.html> and find definitions for the words 'hubris,' 'nemesis,' 'tisis'. Subsequently, compare the modern meanings of these words and find the context in which they are used. This activity will help students understand the continuity of the Greek language.

3. Students will be required to find information and images regarding ancient theatre on the internet and use them to prepare a video using the AI application <https://www.idomoo.ai/> which enables quick and easy video creation. The student teams will have one week to create their videos. They will then present their videos to the other teams via screenshare on MSTEAMS. A discussion will follow after each team has shared their video.

4. Student will assess themselves and their peers through a digitally created rubric at the webpage <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=NewRubric>. They will collectively assess their video based on specific criteria, as well as videos of their choice from other groups. The criteria included in the rubric will concern, indicatively, content, duration, purpose, number of applications used, maintaining interest etc. The rubric the students will create will be holistic; students will fill in their rubrics after the videos are presented and discussed. By using the holistic rubric as a self-assessment tool, students will have the opportunity to self-assess in a group context, guided by specific criteria and generating a comprehensive picture of their overall performance and final product (Kasimatis & Papageorgiou, 2019).

Research by Kasimatis, Papageorgiou & Kouloumpis (2019) has shown that rubrics enable students to assess their efforts, allowing them to understand their usefulness as assessment tools. Students will self-assess through reflection and feedback regarding the development of 21st-century skills, such as team spirit, collaboration, time management etc.

5. Students will collaborate via MSTEAMS to create a conceptual map. To create the map, they will use software available at <https://bubbl.us/>. There, students will be able to express and associate the concepts of the course. The conceptual map activity will help students develop their metacognitive skills.

6. Students will be tasked with composing texts on the subject of war. Each team will have a different subject. The tragedy has strong anti-war sentiments, with its overarching message being the futility of war as expressed with the choice of Helen's 'idol.' Indicative questions:

- a. "All wars need an embellished pretext to be declared. Write down and analyse what you consider to be a pretext/excuse to start a war".
- b. "Helen's monologue allows Euripides to present how war impacts the defeated. What do you believe are the consequences of war? Take into account the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza in your answer".
- c. In the tragedy, Helen's brothers (the Dioskouroi) provide a resolution to the plot, as a "deus ex machina". Unfortunately, this is not the case in war: the opposing sides need to sit down together and flesh out a solution. Think about how wars may be stopped.

Students will have a specific deadline to complete their answers. Students and their groups will be able to make interventions, add material and improve their texts within the wiki environment. Students will collectively shape their texts within the wiki environment and through asynchronous communication with their peers. They will also reflect on the initial structure of their text with the teacher, reworking it and gradually producing more complex texts. Students will thus become involved in an ongoing process of collective reflection to produce a final text. The wiki environment allows students to develop their writing (communication skills) and enables them to identify the degree of participation in the process.

7. Search online for paintings with anti-war content and add them to the padlet together with the corresponding content.

A possible means of extending the teaching scenario could be finding connections between the tragedy and the Iliad, more specifically in how Helen is presented in the latter. In addition, students can also compare the depictions of war between the two works. Students can be tasked with identifying anti-war messages in the epic. Using e-

learning and AI, students could form groups and search the internet for anti-war songs; they could then use these songs to create a video with Lucas AI video creator (<https://www.idomoo.ai/>), which they will present via MSTEAMS. Furthermore, the tragedy “Helen” could also be taught in an interdisciplinary context, as part of lessons on Modern Greek Literature. Students will be tasked with searching for poems referencing Helen of Troy on the internet and presenting how they depict her.

2.4.1 The teacher’s role

The teacher will posit questions aimed to actively engage students and answer their questions. The teacher will also properly distribute roles to students, utilise the opportunities provided by technology and be prepared to solve any technical issues. Thanks to the opportunities provided by distance learning, teachers will be able to share educational material with students, encourage communication with them and become the link between students and learning, overseeing the distance learning process (Vogiatzaki, 2019; Amorgiannioti, 2020). Teachers working in an e-learning environment should possess communication skills, social skills, digital as well as metacognitive skills. Teachers in e-learning should organise learning activities, such as:

- Taking advantage of the opportunities provided by e-learning.
- Planning learning activities.
- Using paralinguistic and extra-linguistic elements.
- Planning educational content.
- Planning assessments and providing feedback as part of the formative and final assessment.
- Ensuring active engagement and motivating all students throughout the teaching scenario.
- Promoting dialogue and non-verbal communication between students.

2.4.2 Assessment

Assessment will take the form of self-assessment and external assessment both over the course of the scenario and at its conclusion. Each team member will assess themselves and their peers. In addition, each student team will assess the other teams. Assessments over the course of the teaching scenario are formative and constitute a reflective process for both the students and the teacher. Collaborative learning environments favour external assessment, enabling students to assess each-other and provide feedback (Ndoye, 2017; Homayouni, 2022). Furthermore, collaboration between students helps hone social skills and collaborative behaviours, a demonstration in practice of Vygotsky’s concept of social constructivism, that learning takes place in a social context (Homayouni, 2022). As part of the final/summative assessment, students will answer quizzes prepared by the teacher on Classmarker: (<https://www.classmarker.com/online-testing/quiz-features>). Students will complete the quizzes online. This tool will also be used to provide students with feedback, enabling reflection on their answers. This method allows students to develop metacognitive skills.

2.5 Benefits of e-Learning

E-learning provides a host of new possibilities for communication and interaction between the people involved in the educational process. The advantages of e-learning may be summarised as follows:

- 1) Flexibility: better management of time.
- 2) Cost: video conferencing is an affordable, educationally expedient tool for synchronous interactive communication that enables students and teachers to participate in internet-based learning activities completely bypassing the need for specially equipped spaces and reducing transportation costs.
- 3) Access to a greater number of courses
- 4) Self-regulated learning: students themselves dictate the pace of their learning. E-learning facilitates a learning process adapted to individual student needs and time, drawing from their interaction within the e-learning context (Coursaris & Sung, 2012).
- 5) Encouragement of meaningful dialogue between those involved in the learning process.

Synchronous distance learning shifts both learning itself and the roles of student and teacher. Students actively participate in a dynamic interactive environment characterised by collective, distance knowledge-building in real time (Anastasiadis et al., 2012; Armakolas, Panagiotakopoulos & Magkaki, 2018).

In synchronous distance learning, interaction is key to engendering a social learning environment which allows students to exchange ideas and forge a sense of community, providing opportunities to develop student-to-student and student-teacher interaction (Alqurashi, 2017). Students can pose questions, work as part of a team, access sources of information and combine electronic communication tools to discuss and complete learning activities (Armakolas, Panagiotakopoulos & Vasilopoulou, 2014). Students can work on worksheets and have opportunities for discussion, exchange of opinions, disagreements and conflict management.

2.6 Benefits of e-Learning

On the other hand, however, e-learning has its share of issues relating to assessment and practicable effectiveness, such as technical difficulties, lack of face-to-face interaction, limited access to resources, not to mention issues of self-motivation and keeping the motivation to study vibrant (<https://elearningindustry.com/>). Sirohi (2007) notes “the lack of personal contact” as the major drawback. E-learning does away with face-to-face interaction, which is crucial, among others, to the development of individual personality.

3. Conclusions - Proposals

Through the teaching of Ancient Greek via e-learning, students can interact with ancient theatre and come into contact with timeless ideas, all while acquiring digital and social skills that are at the forefront of global educational policy in the 21st century. In addition, students are also able to learn at their own pace independently and in a group context, in collaborative learning environments supported by such forms of communication.

E-learning increases learning incentives, offers opportunities for students to develop and hone their cognitive, social and digital skills, bolsters their research capabilities and facilitates collaboration. With the appropriate planning, teaching that makes use of e-learning is more than capable of rising to the needs and expectations of a group, using methods and techniques that promote the active involvement of participants, expanding and covering any needs that may arise during the learning process.

The assessment available through the e-learning environment -specifically via MSTEAMS, but also the other web software- is associated with reflection, defined as a postcognitive activity drawn from the review of previous activities, and may assume the form of either self-review (by the person who completes the activities) or by external review by one's peers. Compared to traditional teaching, e-learning provides students the spatial and temporal freedom to act outside the classroom. This approach improves the learning process and facilitates experiential learning.

To conclude, we propose the planning and implementation of teaching proposals to develop 21st-century skills in e-learning, with appropriate material for students and true to the principles of distance learning. These will allow students to develop the appropriate skills to rise, as active citizens, to the challenges of modern society. Finally, we propose large-scale research on the cultivation of 21st-century skills in students within e-learning environments. As for the teachers, they should have undergone the appropriate training regarding the basic e-learning principles, applications and methodology, given that they need to encapsulate organisational, social, educational and digital skills in their role as educators (Zympoulaki, Loumpaki, Konstantinou & Fragkaki, 2022).

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