

Creating a Critical Digital Pedagogy Context: Challenges and Potential of Designing and Implementing a Blended Learning Intervention for Adult Refugees in Greece

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Abstract : The current sociopolitical realities (displacement, encampment, and resettlement) refugees experience in Greece are a quite complex issue. Their educational and social 'integration' is characterized by transition, insecurity, and constantly changing needs. Based on the current research data, technology and more specifically mobile phones are one of the most important resources for refugees, regardless of their levels of conventional literacy. The proposed paper discusses the challenges encountered during the design and implementation of the educational Action 16 'Language Education for Adult Refugees'. Action 16 is one of the 24 Actions of the Project PRESS (Provision of Refugee Education and Support Scheme), funded by the Hellenic Open University (2016-2017). Project PRESS had two main objectives: a) to address the educational and integration needs of refugees in transit, who currently reside in Greece, and b) implement research-based educational interventions in online and offline sites. In the present paper, the focus is on reflection and discussion about the challenges and the potential of integrating technology in language learning for a target-group with many specific needs, which have been recorded in field notes among other research tools (ethnographic data) used in the context of PRESS. Action 16, explores if and how technology enhanced language activities in real-time and place mediated through teachers, as well as an autonomous computer-mediated learning space (moodle platform and application) builds on and expands the linguistic, cultural and digital resources and repertoires of the students by creating collaborative face-to-face and digital learning spaces. A broader view on language as a dynamic puzzle of semiotic resources and processes based on the concept of translanguaging is adopted. Specifically, designing the blended learning environment we draw on the construct of translanguaging a) as a symbolic means to valorize students' repertoires and practices, b) as a method to reach to specific applications of a target-language that the context brings forward (Greek useful to them), and c) as a means to expand refugees' repertoires. This has led to the creation of a learning space where students' linguistic and cultural resources can find paths to expression. In this context, communication and learning are realized by mutually investing multiple aspects of the team members' identities as educational material designers, teachers, and students on the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, creativity, humour, code-switching, translation, transference etc. are all possible means that can be employed in order to promote multilingual communication and language learning towards raising intercultural awareness in a critical digital pedagogy context. The qualitative analysis includes critical reflection on the developed educational material, team-based reflexive discussions, teachers' reports data, and photographs from the interventions. The endeavor to involve women and men with a refugee background into a blended learning experience was quite innovative especially for the Greek context. It reflects a pragmatist ethos of the choices made in order to respond to the here-and-now needs of the refugees, and finally it was a very challenging task that has led all actors involved into Action 16 to (re)negotiations of subjectivities and products in a creative and hopeful way.

Keywords : blended learning, integration, language education, refugees

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