

Study week in Kiel

Shahad Alfali

Introduction

Travelling to the University of Kiel, Germany, as a part of proPIC Europa project in 2019 was a very eye-opening experience, that I have benefited from in many aspects. Especially as a graduate student at Newcastle University studying for an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL, with an ambition to work as an English language instructor in the future. Thus, having the opportunity to join the study week at the University of Kiel was exciting because it gave us the chance to learn intensively about transnational language teaching and the creative use of modern technologies in teaching practices. As Godwin-Jones (2018) states there has been a major shift in the way that second language learning/acquisition is happening because of the growth of online networks and media, especially among young people. In the field of language learning, utilizing computers (Johnson et al., 2014) to assist learning has made brilliant developments in many aspects, such as computer-mediated communication, telecollaboration and even game-based learning. Hence, the study week in Kiel, was very valuable for my professional development as teacher.

Study Week Benefits

The proPIC Europa project helped in many different ways, from meeting new people and listening to their different backgrounds as teachers and/or learners, to being exposed to the many different methods of teaching conducted all around the world. Additionally, I benefited from the project with my university studies, and finally with professional development and teaching experiences after I graduated from the University. Even though it was only one study week, it was tailored perfectly for the benefit of teachers' development especially in the use of mobile technologies, as it is up to date with the students' current needs (Zhang et al., 2006).

Different Teaching Methods

Aside from meeting people from all over the world with different learning/teaching experience, collaborative work with them showed how collaborative work is important, not only for teacher development, but also for students learning a language. As language can be learned through the sharing of ideas, and working together (Li, 2017), so for instance getting the students to try collaborative writing in google docs and slides or making everybody contribute with their peers, might result in language learning through communication. Additionally, attending and observing language classes in local schools in Kiel gave us an insight as to how teaching another language can be innovative. Some of the ideas seen in class, such as using an iPad and connect it to a projector, were simple enough to try yet very advantageous to both teachers and students. Another interesting aspect that trainee teachers benefitted from is seeing the teacher using pop culture of the targeted language to get students more motivated and engaged.

Study Benefits

The study week in Kiel was also highly beneficial for getting my MA degree at Newcastle University. In one course in CALL (computer assisted language learning) we had to create online content to teach English to speakers of other languages. As part of the proPIC project we had to learn and create a web-page, a game for learning language, and create a video. Therefore, learning about it in Kiel was very helpful and important. The material was designed to be used in a blended classroom that is, as Sharma (2010) explains, a learning space designed with a combination of both face-to-face classes and online learning, as both being equally important to the students' learning process. The reasoning for that particular choice, is because as Li (2017) mentions, students can go deeper into the learning process in class from the online foundation they study on their own time. Thus, allowing students to have more autonomy, and freedom to access the material when they feel like having extra language practice. According to Li (2017) such an approach may bare behavioristic elements suggesting that repetition in studying a target language is very useful, especially for younger learners (Bax, 2003). In the end, creating the website, and material was considerably easier when I had the chance to have learned about creating a website on Weebly, and a video for teaching purposes, beforehand in Kiel.

Professional Development

Last but not least, the project also helped me with my professional development. The development of technology implies that the delivery of information has been gradually replaced by flexible digital formats, such as online videos and broadcasts (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Therefore, it is only progressive for the field of education, to have technology add to its contribution to the improvement of educational outcomes (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). For example, some studies have shown that video lectures outperformed face to face lectures (McNeil & Nelson, 1992; Zhang et al., 2006). Thus, having recently become a language teacher in Kuwait University I tried to implement what we learned during the study week. Accordingly, making use of technologies in teaching, and making it fun and relevant at the same time. As well as making sure to apply elements of collaborative working for the students to benefit from their sharing of ideas (Li, 2017). However, most of the things learned during the study week in Kiel, will need to be adapted in order for it to fit in the target culture, as teaching in Kuwait is very different from my experience in both Kiel and Newcastle.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study week in Kiel has been advantageous for me, in both short and long-term basis. As for the short-term I have immediately benefitted from applying what I have learned in the study week to my CALL course in Newcastle university, and as a student teacher the experience was very valuable and beneficial. As for the long-term, I'll be sure to participate more in self-reflectiveness during my own teaching career, and applying all that I have learned during the study week. As well as making sure to continue working on my own development as a teacher, as there is a lot of benefit to collaborating with teachers from around the world.

References

- Bax, S. (2003). CALL - past, present and future. *System*, 31(1), 13-28.
- Bishop, J. L., & Verleger, M. A. (2013). The flipped classroom: A survey of the research. *ASEE national conference proceedings*, 30(9), 1-18.
- Godwin-Jones, R. (2018). Chasing the butterfly effect: Informal language learning online as a complex system. *Language Learning & Technology*, 22(2), 8-27. <https://doi.org/10125/44643>
- Johnson, L., Becker, S. A., Estrada, V., & Freeman, A. (2014). *NMC horizon report: 2014 K*. The New Media Consortium.
- Li, L. (2017). *New technologies and language learning*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- McNeil, B. J., & Nelson, K. R. (1991). Meta-analysis of interactive video instruction: A 10 year review of achievement effects. *Journal of Computer-Based Instruction*.
- O'Flaherty, J., & Phillips, C. (2015). The use of flipped classrooms in higher education: A scoping review. *The internet and higher education*, 25, 85-95.
- Sharma, P. (2010). Blended learning. *ELT Journal*, 64(4), 456-458.
- Zhang, D., Zhou, L., Briggs, R. O., & Nunamaker Jr, J. F. (2006). Instructional video in e-learning: Assessing the impact of interactive video on learning effectiveness. *Information & management*, 43(1), 15-27.