INTRODUCTION: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers and students today are commonly described as inhabitants of the 'digital' or 'information age', a new type of economy built on knowledge. The use of technology is a key aspect of inclusion in this new age and is identified primarily with access to digital technologies. Learners who were born during in the last 15 years and have 'grown up digital' (Tapscot, 2008) have been identified as belonging to a new generation of 'digital natives' who require need forms of pedagogy to fit the digital age (Prensky, 2001). A Demos report from 2007, is emblematic of such claims:

> The current generation of young people will reinvent the workplace, and the society they live in. They will do it along the progressive lines that are built into the technology they use everyday – of networks, collaboration, co-production and participation. The change in behaviour has already happened. We have to get used to it, accept that the flow of knowledge moves both ways and do our best to make sure that no one is left behind. (Green & Hannon, 2007, n.p.)

Research on the impact of digital technologies on learning has grown in recent years (Thomas, 2009). In *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age*, Beetham and Sharpe (2007) argue "that these new technologies represent a paradigm shift with specific and multiple impacts on the nature of knowledge in society, and therefore on the nature of learning" (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007, p. 4).

Since the emergence of the Internet in the late 1960s and the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, new electronic forms of discourse and communication have been exerting a profound influence on business, society and education (Castells, 2001). Indeed, Warschauer's 1999 prediction that the Internet is the "most important current development affecting reading and writing" today, and that by 2020 "it will have reached into virtually every school and library and most homes in the United States and other developed countries" (1999, p. 4), underlines the increasing importance of mastering new technologies for educators and students alike. In the context of global higher education, these socio-economic changes have brought about a challenge to the concepts of traditional pedagogy, particularly to the transmission mode of delivery (Laurillard, 2002), the emergence of new modes of electronic or digital literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Warschauer, 1999), and the rise of pedagogies such as social constructivism, connectivism and sociocultural approach.

One of the driving forces behind the integration of digital technologies in education is the dramatic increase in the number of students entering higher education around the world, and the need to discover

new ways of communicating and instructing them with current levels of investment (Lockwood in Weller, 2002, p. vii). Discussions about the nature and effectiveness of ICTs or digital technologies are inevitably associated with a complex range of other factors, thereby giving the whole debate a wider, socio-political significance (Warschauer, 1999). These contributing contextual factors include, "the globalization and commercialization of education, the quality of education, the merits of distance versus campus based learning, and the very nature of learning institutions themselves" (Weller, 2002, p. 19). Nevertheless, as a UNESCO report from 2002 indicated, while "countries and institutions seem to be willing to invest huge amounts of money in ICT projects with little knowledge of their potential benefits" they are "unwilling to invest a small fraction of these amounts in research and development to protect their large investments and improve their effectiveness" (Haddad & Draxler, 2002, p. 201). When research does take place into the impact of ICT – particularly in a language education context – it is often after the technology has been deployed, rather than prior to its introduction (Cuban, 2001; Kenning, 2007). The trend to advance 'technology before pedagogy' is not a recent one, but it still in evidence in the introduction of recent ICTs; the large scale introduction of interactive whiteboards (IWB) in English primary and secondary schools since 2000 is another case in point (Thomas & Cutrim Schmid, 2010). This situation inevitably produces conflicts between progressive and conservative philosophies of education. On the one hand, the "rapid diffusion of new technologies is bringing about a shift in literacy practices as dramatic as any since the development of the printing press" (Warschauer, 2006, p. ix). On the other hand, many educational institutions remain "fundamentally conservative institution[s]" (ibid), incapable or unwilling to change their pedagogies in

order to effectively utilize the learning technologies they have invested in or been provided with.

It is against this background of a networked and increasingly wireless and mobile society, that the International Wireless Ready Symposium series has emerged in Nagoya, Japan. Hosted by Nagoya University of Commerce & Business (NUCB), Wireless Ready has been one of the most innovative forums for the discussion of emergent technologies in recent years in Asia and it is hoped it will continue to attract prominent plenary speakers and an international audience in the future.

The 2009 Wireless Ready Symposium assembled 22 papers on a range of subjects relevant to digital technologies in language learning. This is the third eProceedings to be published arising from the symposium, and subject areas include social networking sites (White, Britten), wikis (Thomas) and microblogging (Castro). Other papers explore related themes, such as task-based learning (Sakamoto & Honda) and digital natives (Van Amelsvoort and Shiozaki). Further discussions were also held with participants, publishers and educational technology organizations on the future of digital publishing and mobile learning.

Three other papers including those of the plenary speakers (Gary Motteram and Pete Sharma) as well as George MacLean, Jim Elwood and Paul Daniels, were published in a special edition of the *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society* (IJETS) in 2009, thus reflecting the quality of presentations increasingly attracted by the event each year.

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