Preface

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This special issue collection derives from an international symposium held at Coventry University (CU) on the 29th and 30th of June 2017: BMELTT (Blending MOOCs for English Language Teacher Training) – the Symposium: Flipping the Blend through MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning), MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and BOIL (Blended Online Intercultural Learning) – New Directions in CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning)³. The symposium was jointly funded by an English Language Teaching Research Award (ELTRA) by the British Council, by Coventry University (School of Humanities, Faculty of Arts and Humanities) and by staff based in the Disruptive Media Learning Laboratory (DMLL), based in the Lanchester Library at Coventry University. The symposium attracted around 100 participants from over ten countries around the world and provided a snapshot of how CALL is evolving in the 21st century. The somewhat provocative title aimed at stimulating a discussion on how new technologies are supporting the development of fluid blended learning models, where existing technologies are re-purposed for the pedagogical needs and wants of their users.

The conceptualisation of ‘blended learning’ has evolved considerably since it was explored by Bonk and Graham in 2006. MOOCs, MALL, and Online Intercultural/International Learning (OIL) have provided innovative opportunities for ‘distributed flip’ models (Sandeen, 2013), where learners in distant locations can engage in blended social-collaboration in multiple modes, blending face-to-face activities in classroom settings with discussions on institutional Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) (like Moodle, BlackBoard,

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and Canvas), enhanced by global interactions on Open Educational Resource (OER) platforms, such as MOOCs (e.g. FutureLearn and Coursera). The affordances of Web 2.0 technologies can blur the lines between face-to-face and blended modes of delivery, between formal and informal learning, and between teachers and learners.

The discussion with the participants who took part in the round table at the BMELTT symposium, which included one of the partners from China and all the partners from the Netherlands who had taken part in the ELTRA project – see Orsini-Jones, Conde Gafaro, and Altamimi (2017) (including some students), illustrated moreover that many of the terms used in CALL are often interpreted in different ways and given different teaching and learning contexts. For example, the conceptualisation of ‘MOOC’ would appear to be closer to an OER in the UK, while it seems to be closer to an institutional VLE in China.

The symposium also highlighted the need to review how we interpret communicative competence in CALL/MALL Web 2.0 settings (see Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018 on this point). An interesting feature of the symposium contributions were the talks by ‘expert students’, such as Minh Tuan Phi and Yan Jiao, who carried out blended MOOC curricular evaluations and research based on studies previously conducted by their tutors. This provided an interesting role-reversal perspective on blended-MOOC flips.

The first chapter of this collection is based on the keynote by Agnes Kukulska-Hulme on day one of the BMELTT symposium (29th of June): Mobile assistance for personal learning on a massive scale. Kukulska-Hulme, based at the Open University, reports on an interesting project she is carrying out where a MALL App has been designed to support the English language needs of refugees in a contextual way, guiding them through the services they need to access. This project provides an excellent example of the kind of research-informed “ethical CALL” (or MALL) that can be produced with the support of new technologies.

The second chapter, *MOOCs as a new technology: approaches to normalising the MOOC experience for our learners*, is the plenary from the second day of the symposium (30th of June) by Stephen Bax (Open University), when Stephen entertained us with pictures of very odd technology that never became normalised, e.g. ‘The Isolator’ (see the presentation available at the link in the references to this section, Bax, 2017). In chapter two, Bax discusses MOOC ‘normalisation’, using as starting points his seminal papers *CALL, Past, Present and Future* (Bax, 2003), *Normalisation revisited: the effective use of technology in language education* (Bax, 2011), and his most recent book on MOOCs with Kan (Kan & Bax, 2017). He outlines the current landscape with regard to language learning MOOCs, drawing on successful Open University projects in Spanish and Italian. It looks critically at where language MOOCs seem to be potentially most valuable, and also at aspects of the experience which seem to have impeded normalisation.

In chapter three, *What our MOOC did next: embedding, exploiting, and extending an existing MOOC to fit strategic purposes and priorities*, Kate Borthwick, Director of Programme Development (online and blended learning) at the University of Southampton, reports on the evolution of the creation, evaluation, and continuous re-design of the MOOC *Understanding Language: Learning and Teaching*, which she has managed in collaboration with the British Council for seven runs to date (at the time of writing, May 2018). She concludes by discussing how a MOOC can support the key priorities of a Higher Education institution, marketing included.

In chapters four and five, ‘expert students’ discuss the advantages and disadvantages of integrating MOOCs into the curriculum of the Master of Arts (MA) in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics at Coventry University. The two chapters align with previous related literature on the role-reversal thresholds concept pedagogy model (Orsini-Jones, 2014), where ‘expert students’ engage with research topics that have been explored by their tutors and,

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5. https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/understanding-language
in doing so, help them (the tutors) to see their practice and research through the
students’ eyes (as also discussed in Orsini-Jones et al., 2017).

In chapter four, Integrating a MOOC into the MA curriculum: an ‘expert’
student’s reflections on blended learning, Minh Tuan Phi, MA in ELTAL
alumnus, currently Academic Coordinator, IvyPrep Education in Hanoi,
Vietnam, presents a student-centred view of the integration of the MOOC
discussed by Borthwick into the curriculum of the MA in English Language
Teaching and Applied Linguistics at Coventry University. The study reports on
how he decided to replicate related studies carried out by Orsini-Jones (2015)
for his MA dissertation and explores how a blended MOOC approach impacted on
his beliefs and his identity as an autonomous teacher of English, which he had
also explored in a previous related publication (Phi, 2017).

In Understanding learner autonomy through MOOC-supported blended learning
environments: an investigation into Chinese MA ELT students’ beliefs – chapter
five – Yan Jiao, another alumnus of the MA in ELTAL and currently employed
as teacher trainer at Harbin International Centre for Cultural Exchanges in
China, also links to the theme of MOOCs and their integration into the formal
curriculum. Like Phi’s, this work is based on the author’s MA dissertation, but it
discusses a different MOOC: Exploring the world of English language teaching
(Jiao, 2018). Also like Phi, Jiao explores the troublesome nature of autonomy
in language learning for his Chinese peers and discusses how the MOOC
integration can support them with understanding this concept. His interesting
findings illustrate how experienced Chinese teachers on the MA programme
appear to pay ‘lip service’ to the adoption of autonomy in theory, but do not
apply it in practice when engaging in micro-teaching, while less experienced
teachers on the MA in ELTAL are more willing to embrace pedagogies that are
alien to their Confucian teacher-centred contexts/background.

This collection also contains two chapters that relate to OIL, also called Online
Intercultural Exchange (OIE), Collaborative Online International Learning
(COIL), telecollaboration (see Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018, on this), or Virtual
Exchange (VE) in the Erasmus+ literature. The title of the symposium referred
to BOIL, which was a bit ‘tongue in cheek’ and was meant to highlight the face-to-face side that is normally inherent in OIL projects, but which gets lost in the ‘O’ for online. In the first study – chapter six – OIL for English for business: the intercultural product pitch, Andrew Preshous, Senior Lecturer in Academic English at Coventry University, An Ostyn, Business English Lecturer at VIVES University College (Kortrijk, Belgium), and Nicole Keng, Lecturer in English at the University of Vaasa, Finland, report on how OIL helps to integrate soft skills into the academic curriculum, as well as providing students with international interaction opportunities and develop intercultural awareness. In this project, Malaysian, Chinese, and Indonesian International Business students in the UK established links with their Belgian or Finnish peers online using a tailor-made Moodle platform, then delivered a product pitch presentation before responding to another group’s output. Students’ feedback on the project was very positive and the tutors were also pleased with the level of digital literacies practised by students.

The second piece of work on OIL, A role-reversal model of telecollaborative practice: the student-driven and student-managed FloCo (Florida Universitària/Coventry University) – chapter seven – is by Elwyn Lloyd, Senior Lecturer in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), Abraham Cerveró-Carrasco, Lecturer in English Language Teaching at the Unitat d’Educació, Florida Universitatíà in València, Spain, and Courtney Green, a Coventry English and TEFL third year undergraduate student currently on her placement abroad at the Florida Universitatíà to teach English. This chapter reports on FloCo, a telecollaborative project where, like in the research reported by Phi and Jiao, the roles of teacher and student were reversed. Green had taken part in the online intercultural exchange MexCo (Mexico/Coventry), between Coventry and Mexico (Orsini-Jones et al., 2017), in her first year at university and decided to set up a similar exchange between the class of students she was teaching in Spain and Year 1 students on Spanish degrees at CU in collaboration with Lloyd and Cerveró-Carrasco. The shared ‘expert student’ staff reflections on the project are reported in this chapter and compared with the outcomes of related online intercultural exchanges (e.g. MexCo and CoCo: Coventry/Colmar).
In *Chinese segmentation and collocation: a platform for blended learning* – chapter eight – Simon Smith, Senior Lecturer in Academic English and Course Director for English for Business, discusses an innovative approach to teaching Mandarin through blended learning with a corpus-based platform. Smith argues that very little research has been carried out on inductive or autonomous learning in the realm of collocation acquisition. He proposes a new Chinese implementation of a trusted corpus-based platform, currently available for English learning, accompanied and enhanced by a data-driven approach to Chinese segmentation, whereby different ways of carving up a given sentence are selectively displayed to the learner.

In the final study in this collection – chapter nine – Student-teachers’ beliefs concerning the usability of digital flashcards in ELT, Marwa Alnajjar and Billy Brick report on an interesting qualitative study on the beliefs of student-teachers on the MA in English language teaching at Coventry University regarding the usability of three digital flashcard websites to teach English language. The study reports that despite their positive feedback on this new technology, participants appeared reluctant to adopt it because they did not feel comfortable with teaching it to their students. This discrepancy between teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ practice, which also emerged from Jiao’s study in this collection, appears to be a recurrent theme in language teacher education. It is hoped that collections of practice-oriented papers on CALL like this one can dispel language teachers’ fear of technology, go beyond the ‘wow’ factor, and support the normalisation of useful new CALL platforms.

We hope that the readers enjoy the variety of OIL, MALL, MOOC, and other e-learning assisted language learning studies reported here. We would like to thank all the contributors and a very heartfelt thank you also goes to the reviewers who volunteered to support the editing of this collection, namely: Kate Borthwick, Mike Cribb, David Jones, and Fiona Lee. A very special thank you goes to Qian Kan and Andrew Bax for helping with the writing up of Stephen’s chapter and to Andrew Bax and family for granting us permission to write up the chapter from the video-recording.
References


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