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“The Digital in Research-Oriented Teaching: Interdisciplinary Exchange”

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Teaching (how to teach) vocabulary: a blended learning project moving a practical language class (Sprachpraxis) towards a more research-oriented focus on teaching methodology (Fachdidaktik)

Language classes at German philological departments often have to cater for two different types of students, those in teacher training, here future English teachers, and those getting a bachelor's or master's degree in English studies. The students' level of English varies significantly. Also, some students do not have a background in the German education system or others have different mother tongues. In order to cope with this heterogeneity, internal differentiation is necessary. This paper reports on a moodle-based blended learning class that uses a modularization according to learning styles or learner types as a pathway into the teaching of vocabulary. While all students can use the online-resources to a) enlarge their vocabulary and b) get to know their own learner type, those students in teacher training concurrently c) learn how to teach vocabulary in heterogeneous settings and d) how to apply and critically reflect teaching methodology.

In this project, we adopted a blended learning approach with a flipped classroom. The class sessions (15 weeks of 90 minutes sessions) were modularized according to different learner types or learning styles. After the introductory session/s with icebreaker activities and a general introduction to learning styles and vocabulary teaching, the all modules comprise an online Moodle module (for the first) and a classroom session (for the ensuing week). The online module consists of input on the learner type as well as practical exercises that illustrate suitable language learning strategies. First, the student has to complete the online tasks. Then, each student has to develop their own exercises or applications. These self-developed tasks should reflect the students personal interests in working on a specific lexical field (e.g. the language of argumentation) as well as their own language level (B2-C2). In the corresponding classroom sessions, the teacher offers in-class activities tailored to the vocabulary learning of this specific learner type and discusses the tasks the students developed. Also, the students reflect on their own learning process and the suitability of the exercises they developed regarding different factors such as age or language competence.

While the main aim of this class remains the teaching of vocabulary, we believe that both the added theoretical background of learning styles as well as the practical addition of self-study phases with a digital backdrop will a) make this class better suited for a heterogeneous audience, b) equip students with learning strategies to c) ameliorate the acquisition of vocabulary by the learners. Furthermore, and of particular importance for the workshop, this class is more research-oriented in that it moves from mere vocabulary teaching (Sprachpraxis)

into autonomous, creative learning and the application and reflection of current teaching methodology (Fachdidaktik) in both a digital context (Moodle) as well as in class.