

It is an increasingly acknowledged fact that we are living a time of great change in language teaching in Higher Education (HE) worldwide. It is a time of necessary reorientation in tertiary language education, of curricular rethinking, and of reconfiguration of study plans. In Europe, this process of reinvigoration and renewal is being channelled through a specific policy framework – the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), whose creation is the overarching aim of the Bologna Process.

This reform, which seeks to achieve more broadly compatible HE systems across Europe, is affecting all curricular levels in the language teaching arena at tertiary level – from objectives to evaluation. We are at that crucial stage in the European convergence process of moving from theorizing to practice, of translating the general European agenda into a successful local one. As the Graz Declaration (2003: 5) states, “the main challenge now is to transform the multitude of legislative changes that have been taking place across Europe in the past few years into meaningful academic aims and institutional realities.” The goal of this monographic volume is to support this important endeavour, by presenting practical accounts and experiences which evince how the new European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) can successfully be put into practice in language classrooms across Spanish universities.

And it cannot be more fitting to check the pulse of Europe’s new landscape in language teaching than in a volume which pays homage to a Professor who has always been at the forefront of pedagogical innovation in English language teaching – Professor Neil McLaren. Neil’s towering figure has been the intellectual beacon guiding generations upon generations of students towards personal richness and academic excellence at the University of Granada’s Department of English Philology.

A students’ teacher and a teachers’ teacher, he embodies the purest essence of what university should be – not just a place of learning but a true community of teachers and students, a *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*. A true Renaissance humanist always at the side of students, this unique scholar who is now retiring emphasized the uniqueness of each of his students, nurturing their individual path to knowledge and personal development.

Never has the academic message been as rich, nor the messenger as tantalizing. His pedagogic magnetism mesmerized students, who literally

flocked to his lectures not only to learn concepts, but to absorb his method, based on the Enlightenment's critical attitude which has been so fertile for science (and humanity) for the past three centuries. As a distinguished member of our editorial board, he spreads the mantle of his wisdom over GRETA, to the immense benefit of us all, whether staff or readership.

Each of us is ultimately measured by the number and fertility of the seeds we have sown in our personal as well as in our professional lives. An endless, ecstatic field in bloom contemplates, in awe and gratitude, Dr. McLaren, our *magister*.

The volume kicks off precisely with his seminal overview of the changes in language teaching at Spanish university in the last four decades. In a beautifully conducted interview by *Professor Jesús M. Nieto García, Dr. McLaren* shares with us his insightful views on several hot-button issues in our field: the Bologna process, plurilingual education in Andalusia, the future of the *Selectividad* exam, the role of ICT in language learning, or the native vs. non-native speaker debate. An interview to be treasured.

In the first article, *Anna M. Brígido Corachán* illustrates the main assets of using virtual forums to foster crucial competencies within the EHEA, including collaborative work, problem-solving skills, or critical thinking. She also sets forth a valuable set of guidelines to activate and monitor virtual forum use.

*Alfonso Ceballos Muñoz* then makes a spirited defence of the shift from the traditional transmission of information model based on *ex-cathedra* lecturing to one which is grounded on competency development. He describes in detail the objectives, methodology, classroom arrangements, and evaluation system which he has gradually introduced and refined in the past four years of ECTS piloting within the subject of *Comentario Literario de Textos Ingleses*. The ultimate aim is to make the students aware of the fact that, while the knowledge they need is easily retrievable from accessible sources, they must strive to develop a set of competencies – critical and analytical capacity, research skills, teamwork – which will prove essential for their future incorporation to the job market.

In turn, *Carmen Fernández Martín* fleshes out the way in which *History of the English Language* – a traditionally challenging course at the University of Cádiz – has been transformed in the European convergence process. Within the latter, materials are increasingly diversified, learning from the best practices of others is actively incorporated, and correction and assessment have been modified to meet the demands of the new credit system. Data from learning outcomes and evaluation surveys is presented, highlighting the difficulties encountered and the most outstanding challenges yet to be faced.

ICT runs through the next set of articles. *Carmen Gregori-Signes* makes a case for the targeted incorporation of new technologies in the language classroom in order to bolster the Bologna process. She introduces and expands on educational digital storytelling by underscoring its numerous assets as a language teaching tool and by explaining how it can be successfully

incorporated into the field of English Studies. In turn, **Barry Pennock-Speck**, **Marina Torralbo Jover**, and **M<sup>a</sup> Goretti Zaragoza Ninet and Begoña Clavel Arroitia** report on extremely interesting experiences with very promising outcomes which they have carried out with ICT in diverse English Studies subjects: *History of the English language*, *Inglés Instrumental Intermedio*, *English Language II*, and *English Dialectology*. What transcends is that ICT is an exciting opportunity for teachers and students in the present and future of language teaching within the European convergence process.

**María Jordano de la Torre** focuses on a different field – that of ESP for Tourism. She explores the teaching of oral competence in a distance learning context by describing a project which has capitalized on the opportunities offered by ICT to use instant messaging and webinars to advance in the teaching of this competence, while also developing generic and subject-specific competencies.

**Melinda Dooly** and **Dolors Masats** frame their work within yet another area: that of teacher training. Their article expounds on the necessary paradigm shift which needs to take place in tertiary language education in order to move away from rote learning and traditional methodologies and towards project-based, collaborative, and self-directed learning. They attempt to overcome initial skepticism in the adoption of these novel methods by implementing a teacher training program with videos and movie-making with pre-service educators at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. The ultimate aim is to prepare future teachers for the educational system of the 21st century.

The thrust of **Robert O'Dowd's** contribution to the volume is that, while competencies are crucial in the new higher education context, little concreteness is provided as to their evaluation. He tackles the issue of learner competency development and assessment, and relates them to online foreign language education. He then reports on the outcomes of a survey to determine what and how online interaction is evaluated and concludes that online assessment is still a niche which needs to be addressed and filled.

Our regular sections – ***Culture and Literature***, ***Net Ideas***, and ***Reviews*** –, keep us well-informed on the latest goings-on in these areas and fill us in on where to look if we want to continue to be up-to-date.

We thank our contributors to this volume for pooling their knowledge on the application of the ECTS to language teaching and for showing us, with their invaluable insights, how to face the so-called 'language challenge' successfully. Their experiences provide testimony to the fact that times of change like the ones we are living in our field should energize rather than deplete us. They evince how, far from engaging in mere methodological 'window-dressing', it is possible to use the ECTS as the perfect framework to reset, renew, and improve our HE system and to reinvigorate language learning.

**María Luisa Pérez Cañado**  
**Ana María Ortega Cebberos**