The Journal of Asia TEFL

http://journal.asiatefl.org/

Book Review

Interaction Online Creative Activities for Blended Learning by Lindsay Clandfield and Jill Hadfield, series editor Scott Thornbury, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, 223 pp., $37.91 (US), ISBN978-1-316-62917-8.

This book is an invaluable source of ideas and activities for language teachers and teacher-educators striving to introduce or increase interactivity in the online sphere. The aptly named *Interaction Online* is broad in scope, with eight engaging and informative chapters that include practical examples. The authors have elected to rely on just three easily accessible tools to accompany the activities, namely discussion forums, instant messaging, and audio- and video-conferencing. A strength of this approach is that users of the book need not be concerned about whether they are using the latest technology. Chapter by chapter, the authors also emphasize the importance of taking into account the types of discussions in which educators are striving to engage learners.

Today's students tend to have short attention spans, and this is especially prevalent when completing tasks in an online environment where there can be very little interaction online. Studies have found that when students are feeling isolated online, there exists a larger risk of dropping out (Croxton, 2014; Liu, Mgjuka, Bonk & Lee, 2007; Tello, 2007). Thus, the activities suggested in *Interaction Online* aim to be not only motivating and engaging, but they also promote online interaction to combat a decrease in social interactivity. In addition, especially Asian students might find partaking in online discussions to be more enjoyable than in a face-to-face environment as they may perceive it to be less face threatening (Ng & Cheung, 2007).

Chapter 1 presents the major considerations when setting up and managing online interactions, covering topics ranging from the platform and key issues during a course to choosing between synchronous and asynchronous activities. The chapter gives examples of writing clear easy-to-follow instructions for accessing the course and sample netiquette rules. Particular attention is given to teacher intervention and wrapping up (e.g., useful phrases for online praise), which can be challenging in discussion forums. Teachers should also benefit from the helpful tips for teachers on time management such as how to make expectations clear, which posts to respond to and how to create student questions on the discussion thread.

Chapters 2-6 represent the core of the handbook. Here various discussion activities are categorized into five types of interaction, namely personal, factual, creative, critical, and fanciful. Each chapter describes from 13 to 19 activities according to a standard framework and includes the Common European Framework of Reference level, making it easy for teachers to move from one activity to another. A common theme throughout these five chapters is that interactions take place among learners and instructors, rather than between a learner and a machine. Also, because the activities can be used with Blackboard, Moodle, Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, and other popular platforms, the carefully-chosen activities make excellent starting points, so practically all teachers should be able to use these engaging and worthwhile activities.

Chapter 7 considers issues related to feedback and assessment in connection with the activities presented in the preceding chapters. The authors survey various forms of feedback, audio, video,

screencast, and other techniques that can be incorporated into online interactions, according to sound pedagogical research. Particularly useful to teachers is the sample assessment rubric for promptness and frequency of post and interaction. The chapter ends by stressing what and how to assess, including peer and self-assessment methods as well as examples that language teachers can make use of to enrich students' learning experiences. Teachers interested in learning more about evaluating online learning are provided with further reading suggestions.

The final chapter provides tips and ideas to help teachers create their own online activities and lays out key considerations for putting them into practice. Thus, for example, teachers are urged to match the activities to specific topics or language skills and levels and to choose the proper activity type (synchronous or asynchronous) along with working examples. Perhaps, one of the most significant contributions in this chapter is the checklist, to raise awareness of how teachers can design their own tasks.

If I have to point out anything that the authors could improve, it seems that the two final chapters are not as well developed as the subsequent ones. The book reflects on the dynamic and complex nature of interacting online; yet as an increasing number of teachers are required to integrate various elements of online learning, an increasing amount of time is spent on feedback, assessment, and task design. Thus, it would have been nice to see more substantial discussion of these vital topics.

This book contributes to the advancement of knowledge and to innovation in the use of creative activities for blended learning with direct implications for teaching and learning. Readers will find inspiration throughout the book along with numerous interesting pedagogical ideas that can be implemented in a variety of language-learning contexts, not only teacher-student but also student-student interaction, which Callagher (2008) suggests is vital for learning to happen. Moreover, the book is accessible for anyone interested in blended learning, even those without extensive background knowledge, so that the complexity of the activities is never overwhelming. An added benefit is each activity has a specific learning focus with a suggested proficiency level (Common European Framework of Reference).

In conclusion, *Interaction Online* is clearly structured and features clear and easy-to-follow descriptions of activities for use in the blended classroom. The book provides a detailed account of activities designed to promote interaction using discussion forums, instant messaging, and/or audio- and video-conferencing. It therefore represents an important addition to the existing literature on learning and teaching online and is highly recommended to language teachers and teacher-educators, who stand to benefit from the activities presented here in their efforts to revitalize and update their pedagogical practices in innovative ways.

References

Callagher, M. (2008). How can student interactivity be enhanced through the use of a blended learning approach. Retrieved September 4, 2017 from http://markcallagher.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/research-report-mark-callagher.pdf

Croxton, R. (2014). The role of interactivity in student satisfaction and persistence in online learning, *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, *10*(2), 314-324.

Liu, X., Mgjuka, R. J., Bonk, C. J., & Lee, S. (2007). Does sense of community matter? An examination of participants' perceptions of building learning communities in online courses. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, *8*(1), 9-24.

Ng, C. S. L., & Cheung, W. S. (2007). Comparing face to face, tutor led discussion and online discussion in the classroom. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 23*(4), 455-469.

Tello, S. F. (2007). An analysis of student persistence in online education. *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education, 3*(3), 47-62.

Lucas Kohnke
English Language Centre, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong
Email: lucas.kohnke@polyu.edu.hk