

Review: Trentin, G. (2020). *Didattica con e nella rete. Dall'emergenza all'uso ordinario*. Franco Angeli.

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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN *Didattica con e nella rete. Dall'emergenza all'uso ordinario* (Teaching in and within the web. From the emergency to everyday use) examines the opportunities that online resources can offer to teaching and learning, as well as to teachers' training. After showing how online resources can enhance students' interaction and collaborative learning, the book illustrates how to plan and design online teaching activities, how to carry out assessment, and how teachers can use online resources for professional growth. Even though it does not focus on language teaching in particular, the book contains some useful insights that can be applied to language courses, especially with respect to enhancing interaction. It is recommended for teachers approaching fully online teaching for the first time or for teachers willing to incorporate online methods into their classrooms.

Keywords: ONLINE TEACHING, COLLABORATIVE LEARNING, ONLINE ASSESSMENT, TEACHERS' TRAINING

ES *Didattica con e nella rete. Dall'emergenza all'uso ordinario* (Didáctica con y en la red. De la emergencia al uso ordinario) examina las oportunidades que los recursos en línea pueden ofrecer a la enseñanza y al aprendizaje, así como a la formación del profesorado. Tras mostrar cómo los recursos en línea pueden mejorar la interacción entre estudiantes y el aprendizaje colaborativo, el libro pasa a ilustrar cómo planear y diseñar actividades para la enseñanza en línea, cómo llevar a cabo la evaluación, y cómo el profesorado puede utilizar los recursos digitales para su desarrollo profesional. Si bien no se centra de manera específica en la enseñanza de lenguas, este volumen contiene ideas de utilidad que se pueden aplicar en cursos de lenguas, principalmente en lo que a la mejora de la interacción se refiere. Este libro es especialmente recomendado a docentes que se enfrentan a la enseñanza en línea por primera vez o a quienes desean introducir este tipo de docencia en sus clases.

Palabras clave: ENSEÑANZA EN LÍNEA, APRENDIZAJE COLLABORATIVO, EVALUACIÓN EN LÍNEA, FORMACIÓN DEL PROFESORADO.

IT *Didattica con e nella rete. Dall'emergenza all'uso ordinario* esamina le opportunità offerte dalla rete per l'apprendimento e la didattica, nonché per la formazione dei docenti. Dopo avere messo in luce come le risorse online possono favorire l'apprendimento collaborativo e l'interazione tra studenti, il volume passa a illustrare come pianificare e organizzare l'attività didattica online, come svolgere la valutazione, ma anche come sfruttare le risorse della rete per la crescita professionale degli insegnanti. Sebbene non tratti di glottodidattica nello specifico, può essere una risorsa utile da consultare anche per la didattica delle lingue, soprattutto per quanto riguarda il potenziamento dell'interazione. È una lettura raccomandata per i docenti che per la prima volta si affacciano sul mondo dell'insegnamento online.

Parole chiave: DIDATTICA ONLINE, APPRENDIMENTO COLLABORATIVO, VALUTAZIONE ONLINE, FORMAZIONE DOCENTI

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Trentin's monograph *Didattica con e nella rete. Dall'emergenza all'uso ordinario* originally inspired by a recent project of the Italian National Research Council aimed at training teachers in online education, came into being during the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced schools of all levels, from primary schools to universities, to shift their courses online. Trentin is an expert in online teaching. The author has also recently published another volume aimed at giving instructions on how to build an online course (Piras, Reyes, & Trentin, 2020). In the present volume, the author takes what can be considered "emergency online teaching" as an opportunity for teachers to learn how to take advantage of the internet and of online resources to improve the process of teaching and learning, beyond what is usually done in the traditional classroom.

Since the book mainly focuses on secondary schools, the intended audience is primarily junior and senior high-school teachers. The book, however, is rich in suggestions for anyone who is approaching online teaching for the first time and who is willing to make good use of the plentiful internet resources. These suggestions can be applied to different subjects, including language courses. As the author states at the end of the book, the intention is to give hints and offer a framework for reflection that could help teachers come up with new ideas about how to apply online resources to their specific courses (Trentin, 2020, p. 95).

It can be said that the book has two main themes: how teachers can use the internet and online resources to enhance teaching and learning, and how teachers can use such resources to improve themselves and grow professionally. These themes are analyzed across five chapters. The first two chapters describe how to use online resources, with a special focus on how to utilize them in order to support students with special needs. The third and fourth chapters focus on planning, designing, and assessing online teaching and learning, while the fifth chapter analyzes how teachers themselves can learn through the internet.

Specifically, the first chapter provides some examples of how the web can act both as a support to traditional courses and as an environment to host an online course, emphasizing both potential benefits and potential pitfalls. It also gives important suggestions about how to carefully plan educational activities, whether teachers intend to use online technologies inside or outside the physical classroom; it indicates which technologies are most useful for proposing collaborative activities to students; and finally, it demonstrates how collaborative learning is often stimulated and favored by the digital medium. This chapter is extremely useful for anyone planning to take their teaching online for the first time. It lists a series of materials that teachers can find online and use to design their courses, including, but not limited to: teaching units; educational apps developed to facilitate the achievement of specific disciplinary objectives through individual or group activities; and apps which are not necessarily designed for educational purposes but which can be adapted for educational activities. Examples of the latter are 3D environments, simulated environments, and apps that enable activities centered on gamification. The chapter also suggests useful tools which can be used to carry out synchronous and asynchronous interaction, which is one of the main challenges of online courses, especially in the case of language teaching (Panagiotidis, 2019). Finally, it focuses on how to engage students in active learning and how to invite them to put into practice what they have studied. The pattern suggested is the flipped classroom. In the flipped classroom pattern, mini-lectures are given to the students in the form of videos or other digital materials so that they can learn before class; during class time, students and teachers are mainly involved in the activities of analyzing key points, doing quizzes and exercises, researching projects, and taking part in group discussion.

The second chapter analyzes how online teaching can benefit students with special needs. The chapter mainly illustrates two projects developed by the Italian National Research Council, namely CLIPSO (Classi Ibride e Scuola in Ospedale, that is, Hybrid Classes and In-Hospital Schooling) and TRIS (Tecnologie di Rete e Inclusione Socio-educativa, that is, Network Technologies and Socio-educational Inclusion), which aim at enabling the education of, respectively, hospitalized students and homebound students with diseases that prevent them from attending in-person classes. However, the chapter also analyzes how online teaching and, most of all, blended learning have been crucial to ensure the continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this period, schools were forced to adopt a blended learning pattern. In blended learning, being able to flip the classroom was crucial because it enabled the teacher to provide a variety of activities, to ensure student-centered learning, to keep explanations short to alleviate the students' fatigue of looking at a video for a long time, and to give students moments of reflection and synthesis, for example by encouraging them to respond to specific stimuli, or by requiring them to produce short compositions that helped to consolidate knowledge of the studied topics. Flipping the classroom does not mean eliminating the teacher's explanation, but rather reducing its duration in order to save time for active teaching and to allow students to manage their time independently by carrying out activities individually, in pairs, or in small groups. With blended learning,

being in the classroom or at home makes little difference, at least from the point of view of carrying out educational activities (Trentin, 2020, p. 55).

The third chapter mainly focuses on how to plan the educational use of online resources. In particular, the chapter gives suggestions regarding the design of activities centered on collaborative learning, which is often stimulated and favored by being online, where teachers and students can share their projects more easily. Trentin also illustrates how social media can be used for educational purposes, and details the skills that are required for a teacher to plan online teaching. Social media in particular can support collaborative learning. The main advantages of social media lie in encouraging dialogue between peers, in promoting the sharing of resources, in improving the development of communication skills, and, above all, in the possibility of expanding learning contexts beyond the school or university classroom. There are numerous testimonies about the use of blogs that attest to the benefits of online writing to enhance the development of language skills. As far as enhancing collaborative writing skills is concerned, collaborative tools that allow students to contribute and modify one or more pages of course related materials, such as wikis, can constitute a learning environment in which teachers can provide continuous feedback to students, as well as an easily updatable language portfolio. Another example of the use of social media, now very widespread in schools, is the use of video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo: for example, in addition to being an inexhaustible source of video material in the most diverse disciplinary fields, YouTube provides new functions to help develop and share educational videos online. As for social networks, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram allow students and teachers to exchange messages in real time, to participate in groups or pages of interest, to organize events, and to interact with experts and professionals outside the school world.

The fourth chapter focuses on one of the main issues to be faced and solved during online teaching and learning, that is, assessment. Trentin makes a distinction between formative assessment, which refers to assessment that evaluates student learning at the current stage and supports next steps, and summative assessment, which refers to the systematic and continuous recording of student achievement. This distinction has long been known to scholars in the field of education (e.g., Harlen & James, 1997). However, Trentin adds a third kind of assessment, called “training assessment,” that is intended to make the evaluation process itself formative by actively involving students, stimulating them to perform self-assessment and self-regulation of their own learning process (Trincherò, 2018). Trentin gives some useful suggestions on how to carry out assessment: rigorously formulate the learning objective; define an effective way to evaluate its achievement and the contents to be taught to achieve it; and define the appropriate teaching strategy to ensure students’ overall preparation for passing the assessment test. Trentin also suggests different types of assessment, such as simulations, that is, solving real problems and situations. The web can support the assessment process with environments for the management of homework delivery and correction (Learning Management Systems, LMS) such as Moodle); environments capable of guiding students in an activity set by the teacher (WebQuest); and anti-plagiarism tools. It is also possible to evaluate collaborative learning online. Group activities can benefit from web resources and services, which allow functions such as: interaction between participants in forums, on social media platforms, on blogs, or in audio and video conferences; archiving and sharing of study materials (Google Drive, Dropbox, Office 365); collaboration and cooperation in the creation of artifacts (wikis, concept maps, video artifacts); peer review of papers (Moodle and Peergrade). Finally, many network environments (for example, LMS such as Moodle and Google Classroom) track data and provide automatic processing of the tracked information (commonly referred to as “learning analytics”), thus further supporting the evaluation activity of the teacher.

The fifth and last chapter turns its attention to the teachers by describing how they can use online resources for their own training and professional growth, on top of planning and designing their lessons. Here the teacher is not only a trainer, but a trainee as well. The chapter aims at answering the following questions: what are the resources and educational offerings that a teacher can find online? Where can they be found and how should they be selected according to the teacher’s needs? What rules should be followed in order to effectively benefit from an online training course? The chapter, however, does not just focus on online courses; another opportunity for professional growth offered by the Internet is that it facilitates contact with other colleagues, allowing teachers to participate actively in “communities of practice” centered on collaborative planning and on sharing teaching materials, experiences, and solutions to common problems. To summarize, online courses represent formal training environments, while participation in communities of practice completes the framework by offering informal opportunities for professional growth.

The book gives new and deep insights into the possibilities offered by online resources and online teaching. It especially stresses the importance of the flipped classroom approach for interactive activities with

the aim of engaging students in active learning, which is already found in the literature (e.g., Hua, 2018). The focus on high school students and on how traditional classes can benefit from the flipped classroom pattern in an innovative way is also in line with previous research (e.g., Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Maglioni & Biscaro, 2014). Making the lesson more interactive is also crucial to language courses. The possibility of reduced teacher presence, social presence, and scarce group interaction are among the main concerns about online courses. This is even more true in the case of language learning, where “learners must have the opportunity to interact in the target language to negotiate meaning” (Perifanou & Economides, 2014, p. 3562). Also, Panagiotidis (2019) states that “learning a language is not comparable to learning other subjects, as it demands a high level of interaction with other speakers and the use of higher order thinking skills” (p. 286). As stated before, the book mainly addresses high school teachers, and it revolves around the issue of online teaching as well as learning in general, without giving specific examples for any subject, which may be seen as a shortcoming. However, it still gives valuable suggestions and insights about how to use online resources and about how to plan an online course, which can easily be applied to different subjects. In particular, suggestions that are especially suitable for language courses focus on how to increase interaction during online lessons and blended teaching, and on how to use online tools such as social networks to improve collaborative learning. These suggestions make the book worth reading for language teachers. Finally, the book is not just centered on planning, designing and assessment of online courses, but in an innovative way it also turns its attention to the training of the teachers, suggesting how online tools and resources can be used for teachers’ professional growth.

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