Guest Editorial Preface

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This special issue collection derives from an international symposium held at Coventry University on 29th and 30th 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)". The symposium was jointly funded by an English Teaching Research Award by the British Council and by Coventry University (School of Humanities). It attracted around 100 participants from over ten countries around the world and provided a snapshot of how CALL is evolving in the 21st century.

Professor Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, the keynote speaker on the first day of the symposium, presented an interesting project she is carrying out at the Open University (UK), 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, providing an excellent example of the kind of research-informed "ethical CALL" (or MALL) that can be produced with the support of new technologies. Professor Stephen Bax (sadly not with us any longer) discussed MOOC "normalisation" on the second day of the symposium, using his seminal papers CALL, Past, Present and Future (2003) and Normalisation Revisited: The Effective Use of Technology in Language Education (2011), as well as a touch of humour, as his starting points. These two keynote contributions are available at the link in the references below.

The conceptualization of "blended learning" has evolved considerably since it was explored by Bonk and Graham in 2006. MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) and OIL (Online Intercultural/International Learning) 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 (like Moodle, BlackBoard and Canvas), enhanced by global interactions on OER (Open Educational Resource) 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. For example, if an Online Intercultural Exchange/Online International Learning (OIE or OIL) project similar to the one discussed by Sevilla-Pavón and Nicolaou, or Smith and Keng, in this special issue is carried out asynchronously on a shared Moodle platform amongst the two partners, but the two partner classes "meet" on Skype for a synchronous webinar exchange should we classify this as 'face-to-face', 'blended' or 'distance learning'? Also, the opportunity to access most of these educational tools anywhere, anytime through MALL is blurring blended learning boundaries still further.

The discussion with the participants who took part in the round table at the BMELTT symposium illustrated moreover that many of the terms used in CALL are often interpreted in different ways, given different teaching and learning contexts. For example, the conceptualization 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 (Orsini-Jones et al., this issue).

The symposium also highlighted the need to review how we interpret communicative competence in CALL/MALL Web 2.0 settings (see Orsini-Jones & Lee on this), the emergence of new hybrid types of interaction that occur online and the opportunity to gamify CALL through both MALL and/or standalone video games (Newcombe & Brick). An interesting feature of the symposium contributions were the talks by "expert students", who carried out blended MOOC curricular evaluations and research based on studies previously conducted by their tutors (e.g. Phi). This provided an interesting role-reversal perspective on blended-MOOC flips (Phi) and gamification (Newcombe).

This special issue contains four papers based on work that was presented at the symposium (Orsini-Jones et al.; Smith & Keng; Brick & Newcombe; Phi) and also contains related ones from contributors who could not attend it (Sevilla-Pavón & Nicolaou; Pineda).

In 'Chinese English teachers' perspectives on "distributed flip MOOC blends": from BMELTT to BMELTE', Marina Orsini-Jones, Bin Zou, Yuanyan Hu and Li Wei report on a study involving experienced university lecturers from Nanjing Agricultural University, reflecting on how to blend FutureLearn MOOCs into their existing English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula while on an 'upskilling' teacher education summer course in the UK in academic year 2016-2017. The paper presents the teachers' perceived pros and cons of adopting a 'distributed flip MOOC blend'. This paper has been accepted by three reviewers.

The paper by Minh Tuan Phi, 'Becoming autonomous learners to become autonomous teachers: Investigation on a MOOC blend', is related to the one by Orsini-Jones et al. Tuan is an "expert student" who presented the findings from his MA in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (MAELTAL) dissertation at the symposium in June, and worked with Orsini-Jones on the BMELTT project. He noticed that autonomy, a topic that he was studying on the MA syllabus in the context of reflection on a blended MOOC flip, appeared to be a challenging concept for both himself and his peers. His paper attempts to ascertain the MAELTAL students' beliefs with particular reference to the awareness of the relationship between learner autonomy (LA) and teacher autonomy (TA) developed while engaging with a MOOC. The study illustrates the constraints relating to the promotion of autonomy to students who are new to the concept and come from a teacher-centered learning tradition where face-to-face contact has a much higher status than blended learning.

This special issue contains two papers that relate to Online International Learning (OIL), also called OIE (Online Intercultural Exchange), COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) or telecollaboration (see Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018, on this). The title of the symposium referred to BOIL (Blended Online International Learning), 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. The first study, 'A Business Writing OIL (Online International Learning) Project: a Finland/UK Case Study', by Nicole Keng and Simon Smith, reports on how OIL helps to integrate soft skills into the academic curriculum, as well as providing students with international interaction opportunities. It discusses the extent to which telecollaborative writing tasks between Chinese students based in the UK and Finnish students can benefit the academic writing learning experience. It illustrates how the students in Finland worked in pairs to create authentic case study materials, and the students in the UK, in what the authors characterise as "stimulus writing", produced reports based on the business case studies they had been given to write. The second OIL (or OIE) study, 'Online Intercultural Exchanges through Digital Storytelling', by Ana Sevilla-Pavón and Anna Nicolaou, focuses on the affordances of a digital storytelling project in developing both students' language skills and other soft skills, including learning and innovation, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, team working, and life and career skills. The project, which adhered to Project-Based Learning (PBL) principles, was undertaken by university English for Specific Purposes students and was conducted within an OIE between the Cyprus University of Technology and the University of Valencia in Spain.

The last two papers in this issue cover specific areas of CALL afforded by new technologies. The first one, 'Development of language accuracy using synchronous and asynchronous learning activities' by Jorge Eduardo Pineda, explores the design and implementation of synchronous and

asynchronous learning activities to develop oral skills in an online English course. It reports on a small-scale study involving six graduate students. The main findings of this investigation show that the synchronous learning activities prompt errors that translate into opportunities for learning. The results also show that the use of asynchronous learning activities produce errors despite the fact that the participants have time to prepare and anticipate language inaccuracies. The results suggest that the use of asynchronous learning activities promotes the development of language awareness, as participants can identify general categories of errors.

The second paper, 'Blending Video Games into Language Learning', by Jonathan Newcombe and Billy Brick, focuses on the language learning affordances in offline video games, which could be blended into language curricula. The choice of offline video games is influenced by the ethical pitfalls (and possible real dangers) that a teacher could encounter when utilising live video games online. General game-based learning principles identified by Gee (2005; 2013) are used as the method to identify and classify the learning affordances in a selection of video games. These learning principles are explained and then used to detail general learning opportunities inherent in a variety of video games. The study suggests that the wealth of language learning opportunities available in video games may be overwhelming for learners, and that the scaffolding guidance of a teacher is needed. It concludes by proposing that contextualised live video-game-like immersive experiences in controlled ethical conditions could also be conducive to language learning.

We hope that the readers enjoy the variety of blended learning and online learning studies reported here. We would like to thank all the contributors. A very heartfelt thank you also goes to the reviewers who volunteered to support the editing of this special issue, namely: Fiona Lee, Benet Vincent, Andrew Preshous, Christopher Timothy McGuirk, Tim Nisbet, Elwyn Lloyd, Mike Cribb, Jinjing Zhao and Xiaoyun Wang.

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