In this book, *Teaching Language Online: A Guide to Designing, Developing, and Delivering Online, Blended, and Flipped Language Courses*, authors Victoria Russell and Kathryn Murphy-Judy present a thorough and practical approach to both developing and teaching in the realm of online and flipped language courses. The chapters are uniquely designed to build on each other or to stand alone; chapter introductions and summaries/key takeaways make it easy for readers to know exactly what is covered in a given chapter. This empowers readers to target content of the book aligning with their specific needs. Unlike many books on the market, this work covers everything from developing and designing courses to teaching them and understanding the students who take them.

The book consists of five main chapters, the Introduction and Conclusion sections, and a separate directory of e-resources. The chapters progress from covering the topic of course design to teaching online to specifically teaching language online. The final two chapters cover online professional development resources and provide a review of research in the field. While it may not be likely that a single practitioner will find every portion of the book directly relevant to their professional duties or roles, such does not appear to be the authors’ intent. They point out that the book is designed and organized in such a way as to facilitate accessing relevant information quickly and effectively.

Chapter 1 discusses the basics of course design. This chapter gives an overview of the ADDIE model and provides in-depth attention to the analysis and design phases of the model. In the analysis portion of the chapter, the authors aptly position a section head, faculty, or course designer to consider the many layers of potential analyses. As argued by the authors,

> analysis involves a mega-view of the whole context of the instructional project... an overarching pre-appraisal of all the reasons for creating an online program or course helps the designer(s), developer(s), and faculty not only to frame the project but also to sustain it. (p. 14)

Aspects of analysis covered include analysis of technology and media, learners, content, and instructional...
staffing. Aspects of design are also discussed in depth. The backward design model is explored, citing relevant industry examples. Though there is nothing revolutionary revealed here, what makes this discussion valuable is the application of backward design to general teaching ideologies in general. Additionally, the authors explore nuances of designing for student success, types of delivery (synchronous and asynchronous), types of interaction, teacher and student presence, assessment, differentiation, and accessibility and inclusion. These topics are valuable to consider even if a practitioner is not explicitly designing a course. That said, as readers may have limited experience with actual course or content design, this chapter may prove to be a particularly useful roadmap that includes relevant expert advice for situations when course design is at hand.

In Chapter 2, the authors dig into the nuts and bolts of online teaching. They cover several aspects of development, notably developing the learner, the Learning Management System (LMS), the course structure, the interactions, and the course activities—all within the specific context of online instruction. The chapter is rounded out by a discussion of relevant tools and resources. This portion of the chapter is notably useful, as it explores video, multimedia, and interactive media tools. Learning about this information may be overwhelming; however, the content is organized and discussed in a sort of “pick what works for you” approach. The authors help readers consider whether to create content and tools in-house or to use existing materials. This discussion is valuable as it offers readers advice on how to determine if their existing materials, consideration of textbook platforms, communication companies, and assessment tools are practical and wise. The authors also bring attention to the curation and vetting of resources and ancillaries and underscore what is involved in this effort. They aptly point out that “a compendium of such resources and ancillaries takes time to accumulate and vet” (p. 119). The coverage of online teaching and course development resources is thorough and relevant, with good recommendations to help a practitioner properly scope their individual efforts in this aspect.

If readers are thinking online language teaching is probably more or less the same as face-to-face teaching, Chapter 3 reveals the unique aspects of teaching languages online. It becomes clear that skills for teaching online and teaching languages alone are not sufficient for a successful experience teaching language in online, blended, or flipped environments. Russell and Murphy-Judy succinctly explain the differences between each instructional setting and important considerations in each. This is valuable, as terminology and understanding of instructional settings seems to be obfuscated by institutional jargon and media buzzwords like “hy-flex”, “distance”, “hybrid”, “blended, online”, and more. The clarity provided here is useful. Emphasis in this chapter is placed on communicative competence and its components as well as on the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT), including 10 guidelines for teaching communicatively. The authors discuss core practices for language instruction—both in general and specifically for the CLT—in online, blended, and flipped instructional settings. A key theme that is underscored in this chapter is summarized in one of the takeaways: “Students’ development of communicative competence should be the overarching goal of every language course, irrespective of the delivery mode (traditional, online, blended, or flipped)” (p. 175). For practitioners who do not adopt a communicative competence ideology, this chapter may initially seem less practical. However, adopting the theories behind CLT is not necessary to glean useful strategies and information that can be applied to practice, notably in light of the discussion of core language teaching practices. The authors reference six core practices for language instruction that have been identified and discussed in detail in Glisan and Donato’s (2017) Enacting the Work of Language Instruction. Understanding these six practices in the specific context of online, blended, or flipped language learning makes this portion of the chapter particularly relevant to the reader.

Understanding the array of language resources and professional development opportunities available for designers, course developers, and instructors is critical in the field of online, blended, and flipped language instruction. Chapter 4 covers several such resources. The authors describe the focus and resources available through ACTFL’s online mentoring program, the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC), the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL), STARTALK programs, and the Basic Online Language
Design and Delivery (BOLDD) Collaboratory. In all of these cases, Russell and Murphy-Judy underscore the relevance of online resources for online instruction. They discuss resources available from these groups for content development, curriculum selection and adaptation, and online language teaching methods. They also introduce specific professional organizations that focus on computer-assisted language learning, teaching and learning languages in distance education settings, and teaching and learning culture in online settings. Additionally, the chapter underscores other professional organizations which are not discipline-specific but which offer support, information and training tied to education in online settings as well as technology-assisted learning more generally. The book includes a directory of other resources outside of this chapter which is notably comprehensive and covers an expanse of geographical regions. In all of this, the authors remind readers to find professional organizations, resources, and development opportunities tailored to their needs and the needs of their students.

Finally, Chapter 5 delves into relevant research in the field of online and blended learning. Russell and Murphy-Judy explain their intent with the chapter this way: “The overarching purpose of this chapter is to help language educators apply the findings of research to their online course design, development, and delivery” (p. 212). The first topic broached, and perhaps the most poignant when discussions surrounding online learning arise, is that of teacher and student satisfaction. The authors parse out the factors that may impact teacher and student satisfaction with online learning, with one such factor being class size. In addition, Russell and Murphy-Judy explore learner anxiety and reference the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as a foundation to considering anxiety among language learners in general (p. 219). This chapter aptly considers research in using the FLCAS to evaluate language learning anxiety among students in online, blended, or flipped classroom settings specifically. A robust analysis of research on best practices in online teaching is included both for online language teaching and for online teaching across disciplines. For readers wanting to develop or improve their online teaching methods, this portion of the chapter that contains numerous e-resources is particularly salient. By sharing research around hours necessary to achieve certain proficiency benchmarks, this chapter empowers teachers in terms of their own expectations and in terms of what to communicate to help students understand how long it may take them to progress to advanced proficiency, for example. The authors also cover research on engagement and presence in online courses, as well as learner connectedness, both of which are very relevant topics for all online teachers. The last section of the chapter offers a useful discussion of research on assessment in online language education, which is a common topic of interest among language educators. Russell and Murphy-Judy finish the chapter by effectively summarizing the value of understanding the research in the field: “The studies that were presented in this chapter and their implications can help online language instructors create more meaningful, effective, and enjoyable learning experiences for their students and for themselves” (p. 256).

The Conclusion section offers a useful summary of essential topics and elements covered in the book, including course development and design, procurement and adaption or development of course materials, teacher development, best practices in teaching online, and key research in the field. The intent of the book and its relevance is clear in this excerpt:

The authors hope that those who read this book will come away with a solid understanding of basic online language course design as well as how to implement an effective, engaging, and efficient online, blended, or flipped language course or program.

Those who deliver instruction online need to be ready to meet the challenges of rapidly changing technologies and instructional contexts. Therefore, the authors suggest that they participate in regular technology training sessions, attend professional development activities that focus on online language pedagogy (e.g., conferences, workshops, webinars), and they should also engage in communities of practice—either at their institutions, online, or both—where they can connect with others who are using educational technologies to teach online, blended, or flipped language classes (p. 268).

The section concludes with a discussion of potential future directions for technology implications in
language learning and online language learning more broadly.

Russell and Murphy-Judy have compiled a practical resource, even a handbook, for practitioners in the field of language education. Naturally, the world of anything online will evolve rapidly. Typically, that could put a book like this at risk of becoming obsolete in a short amount of time. However, the authors have grounded the book in fundamental practices, theories, and frameworks that are not likely to drastically change in such short periods of time. As technology, platforms, software, and means of connecting evolve, this book is likely to continue to be a viable resource for understanding the critical underpinnings of successful online, blended, and flipped language instruction.

References


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