

## ***Digitale und analoge Lernwelten erschließen – The Concept of a Teacher-Training Seminar on Connecting the Analogue and Digital Worlds in German as a Foreign Language Teaching.***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Social and digital media are an essential part of today's teenagers' and students' lives. Yet many teachers around the world are still hesitant to integrate these media into their curricula. The mere use of technology does not improve the students' learning outcomes, which is why we need to use technological tools adequately within a well-grounded didactical setting in order to stimulate a more student-centred learning (Blake, 2013; Meister & Shalaby, 2014; Shelby-Caffey et al., 2014). The objective of the teacher-training seminar presented in this article was to promote the use of various technological tools among an international group of teachers of German as a foreign language. They were given the opportunity to experience some benefits of computer assisted language learning (CALL) first hand with the goal of breaking down some barriers and developing a less fearful attitude towards technological-enhanced language teaching.

In workshops on topics such as digital storytelling, blogging, podcasting and different audio tools, participants could not only try out different tools and didactical approaches but also learn how the presented tasks stimulate the development of all four skills (Buchberger et al., 2011). Other workshops and lectures focused on critically reflecting the use of modern technology by making data protection, behaviourist use of modern technology and quality criteria of digital tools the subject of discussion. Group tasks such as the collaborative production of a seminar blog and a digital story should further link experiences from "outside" with the digital world and give seminar participants even more opportunity to extend their digital literacy. At the end of this article, some data regarding the potential impact of such seminars on the participants' perception of CALL are discussed.

### **INTRODUCTION**

"While we do not view technology integration as a panacea for existing gaps in achievement, we strongly believe that the lack of such has the potential to amplify the achievement gap and contribute to, at least in terms of knowledge and know-how, a generation of digital haves and have-nots; those who know and those who know not."

(Shelby-Caffey et al., 2014, p. 197)

The aim of this article is to present the concept of the teacher-training seminar "Digitale und analoge Lernwelten erschließen". The seminar's concept serves as an example of good practice in the dissemination of ideas on how to promote media literacy through post-graduate teacher training.

The organisers of the seminar were Brigitte Stückler-Sturm and Denis Weger. Brigitte Stückler-Sturm as well as Denis Weger have a teaching degree for secondary schools and an additional specialisation in teaching German as a foreign language. At the time of the seminar both of them had around seven years of experience in teaching German as a foreign language to children and adults in Austria and abroad. In 2012 and 2013, they had also been working in the Department for International Affairs of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs, where they had conducted several teacher-training workshops and produced teaching material for German as a foreign language. At the time of the seminar, both organisers were working as secondary teachers in Vienna and Denis Weger as a senior scientist at the Language Centre of the University of Salzburg.

The seminar was developed and organised on behalf of the department “Kultur und Sprache” of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs. “Kultur und Sprache” promotes Austrian culture in the field of German as a Foreign Language by organising teacher-training seminars in Austria, so called “Österreich Tage” (“Austria days”) around the world as well as by producing teaching materials always concerning German as a foreign language and Austrian culture in German classes ([www.kulturundsprache.at](http://www.kulturundsprache.at)). Since the first seminar on digital technologies “Wien vernetzt” in 2013 “Kultur und Sprache” is committed to providing at least one seminar focusing on computer assisted language learning (CALL) each year. The seminar “Digitale und analoge Lernwelten erschließen” took place from August 10th to August 23rd 2014 in Vienna and Tainach/Tinje, a small town in southern Austria, with 16 participants from a variety of different countries, such as Russia (3), Armenia (1), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1), Brasil (1), Bulgaria (1), Georgia (1), India (1), Iran (1), Morocco (1), Mexico (1), Namibia (1), Poland (1), Senegal (1) and Vietnam (1) They all were teaching German as a foreign language at primary (1), secondary (6) and post-secondary (9) institutions With the youngest participant born in 1988 and the oldest in 1956, the participants differed in age and correspondingly in teaching experience as well as in their ability to work with digital tools. Four participants for example were experienced teacher trainers and active multipliers for the use of digital tools in modern language teaching in their home countries, while others had almost no experience in using online resources in their classes.

Since teenagers spend about two hours a day online (Feierabend et al., 2014) and social and digital media are a crucial part in the lives of today's and future learners, one of the main aspects of the seminar was to give all participants some ideas on how their teaching can be enriched by using different tools and online resources freely available online exploiting their potential “[...] to encourage student-centred learning rather than teacher-centred learning, which is also a principal focus of task-based or content-based instruction.” (Blake, 2013, p. 29) Therefore, out of twelve workshops seven focused on CALL<sup>1</sup> with three contact hours each. An important aspect of each of these seven workshops was to actually have the participants work with the presented tools. This gave them the opportunity to experience CALL themselves and “get a sense of empathy and otherwise uncaptured insights” (Hubbard, 2004, p. 52) on how their students might feel using certain digital tools.

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<sup>1</sup> The other workshops as well as some excursions focused on promoting Austrian culture in German classes.

Besides working with digital tools, the participants also had the possibility to experience the analogue world outside the seminar room and to get to know Austria a bit better. We tried to link some of these experiences from “outside” with the digital world by asking the participants to conduct different tasks using some of the tools presented during the seminar (e.g. producing a digital story or writing a seminar blog). This approach was intended to make participants become aware that the mere use of technology itself does not enhance learning but that “teachers need to plot out how the introduction of a given technological tool and its accompanying task will empower students to take control of their own learning process and, consequently, stimulate a more student-centred classroom.” (Blake, 2013, p. 112) In fact it is the firm believe of the author that next to the learning objectives the quality of the task (content-based, student-centred and task-oriented) remains a crucial part since it influences all that follows. However, the combination of a “good” task with a fitting digital tool can promote a more sustainable learning process (Blake, 2013; Meister & Shalaby, 2014; Dörnyei, 2016).

### **Getting started online – Facebook as an example for using social media in education**

Before the seminar participants’ arrival in Vienna, we created a Facebook group and provided them with some tasks that helped them to get to know each other and express their expectations of the upcoming seminar (for some examples see Meister & Shalaby, 2014). We decided to use a social network instead of a learning platform like Moodle in this phase, because social networks allow users to focus more on content knowledge than on web development and makes it possible for people to share information very easily (Blake, 2013). In this way, social networks can promote teacher-student as well as student-student interaction and thus support the learning process (Balcikanli, 2015).

Besides, this should not only motivate participants to see how a social network - probably widely used among their students - can be used for language teaching but also lower their potential prejudices against Facebook in general. Even if over the last two years a tendency seems to have developed among teenagers to use it less and less changing to instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp (Feierabend et al.; 2014), Facebook with its more than 600 million active users worldwide (<http://howmanyarethere.net/how-many-facebook-users-are-there/>) still is the biggest and by far most preferred social network by people of all ages (Blake, 2013).

The Facebook group was also used during the seminar to share pictures, texts and presentations and it remains active until May 2015 with several seminar participants posting products of their students using some tools from the seminar or just trying to keep in touch with the others. Balcikanli (2015) showed in a study conducted among 113 prospective English language teachers in Turkey that there is a significant positive relationship between “Facebook adoption” and “educational use of Facebook”. So by working with Facebook so intensively before, during and after the seminar we hoped to achieve that the participants, now familiar with Facebook, would go on using social networks for educational purposes.

## HANDS ON CALL – SOME OF THE SEMINAR’S KEY WORKSHOPS

In the following parts, I will present some of the key workshops dealing with different aspects of CALL and explain their position within the seminar. It is important to note that all workshops are characterized by a mixture of theoretical input and hands-on practice in combination with a task-based approach. This design is underpinned by our belief that a workshop can only have a sustainable impact on teachers if they understand why a certain approach or tool can be useful and then experience a corresponding task themselves.

### **Expanding the classroom in the digital sphere - Asynchronous computer mediated communication tools for the training of oral skills**

This workshop held by Denis Weger (University of Salzburg) focused on the potential of authentic (oral) input and communicative tasks to stimulate the development of oral skills. By combining authentic materials and communicative tasks with various web based audio tools learning can be better personalised and therefore be more effective (Weger, 2016). Here again, the emphasis was placed on “the sound pedagogical design of the task the participants are asked to accomplish than on the actual medium of the learning event“ (Blake, 2013, p. 77-78)

The main idea of the workshop was that while spoken interaction can easily be trained in a traditional classroom setting (i.e. through role play), the spoken production is often neglected (for the difference between spoken interaction and spoken production see Council of Europe, 2001). This is because students’ presentations or longer discussions can be enormously time consuming and that can be perceived as not very efficient by teachers and students alike, since there is always only one person speaking while all the others have to be silent. Not to mention the agitation and pressure of rather shy students, when they have to speak in front of the whole class. The use of audio tools for asynchronous computer-mediated communication such as *Voxopop* ([www.voxopop.com](http://www.voxopop.com)), *VoiceThread* ([www.voicethread.com](http://www.voicethread.com)), *Vocaroo* ([www.vocaroo.com](http://www.vocaroo.com)) or simply the recording function of the students’ smart phones can help a lot to integrate tasks on spoken production into the curriculum in a more efficient and for students less emotional way by moving the spoken production into the digital sphere. This saves not only time for other activities better suited for the “real life classroom“ but the learning process in itself can also become more individualised, self-determined and autonomous (Buchberger et al., 2011) since in asynchronous conversation learners have more time to actually plan and prepare their reactions (Kovács & Czinglar, 2009). Especially for students that feel inhibited to speak or that simply have a lower language competence this can be an enormous relief because they have more time to prepare the task and also because they can record their statement as often as they wish and share it once they are satisfied with their product. Therefore, behind one statement published using an asynchronous audio tool there are potentially many other drafts, which have been recorded, revised and re-recorded many times. This way learning becomes more intensive and more effective.

Important in all this is a good didactical context, so that the (additional) oral production at home does not stand on its own but is a part of a sequence of tasks that has already been

started in class and might even continue in class afterwards. That is why a big part of this workshop focused on different kind of (preparatory) tasks taking place in class.

### **Digital Storytelling – Bringing personal stories on the screen**

The workshop on Digital Storytelling held by Barbara Mairleitner (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna) pointed to the growing number of multimodal communication and highlighted how important it is to produce such texts with learners in order to develop new literacy skills as well as awareness of discourse systems in Web 2.0 (Paesani et al, 2015). So she showed the participants another possibility to bridge traditional classroom-based literacy with their students' everyday life literacy practices by giving their students the chance to present a certain topic (i.e. a story of their personal life) in an appealing (digital) way and to enable them "to become active participants in a multimedia environment" (De Berg, 2016, p. 60).

The workshop started with a brief theoretical input and the definition of Digital Storytelling as "the practice of combining narrative with digital content, including images, sound, and video, to create a short movie, typically with a strong emotional component." (Educause Learning Initiative, 2007, p. 1) followed by the presentation of some exemplary digital stories created by students of German as a foreign language. The next step was a guided practice, in which participants had the chance to produce their first own short digital story in order to get to know some useful tools (for a collection of different tools for Digital Storytelling see <http://electronicportfolios.com/digistory/tools.html>) and to gain first hand experience with this didactical approach. At the beginning, it was quite challenging for many participants, but with some help from other technologically more experienced colleagues everyone managed to get at least a short sequence recorded and edited before the end of the workshop.

To give participants more time and possibility to experiment with Digital Storytelling, groups were formed and each of them had to produce a short digital story about their favourite place in Vienna, which they would then show on the final evening of the seminar. This presentation at the end of the seminar not only built up a link to its beginning, but also brought the analogue world into the classroom with digital means.

It was very interesting to see that during that week every group seemed to work extremely hard on their digital story to ensure that the scripts were accurate and creative. In the discussion after the quite emotional presentations of the different digital stories on the final evening of the seminar several participants stated that they were convinced, that creating a digital story can not only enhance students' reading and writing skills when collecting information and writing and rewriting the script for their story but also "[...] allows students deeper engagement with content while encouraging the use of critical thinking and technological skills needed to navigate the ever-changing digital terrain of the 21st century." (Shelby-Caffey et al., 2014, p. 193) One participant from Russia immediately implemented the creation of digital stories into her curriculum, which was decisive for her winning the Russian award for the best German teacher in 2014 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=206nys1PpbU>).

## Podcasts by learners – Oral proficiency and social participation

Similarly to the workshop on Digital Storytelling, Kristina Peuschel's (Freie Universität Berlin) workshop on podcasting was also aimed to enable participants to integrate technology into their curriculum in order to bridge the gap between classroom activities and the "real world" outside the classroom.

According to Peuschel (2014), podcasting is an opportunity to take part in the medial discourse and social participation of the target language already during the learning process. Besides this aspect of participation, which in itself could be seen as an additional motivational factor for some learners, producing podcasts and digital stories trains all four linguistic skills, makes it possible for learners to develop their media literacy and – probably the most important part – to present themselves to a potentially substantial worldwide audience (Peuschel, 2014). Peuschel herself created with "radio daf" (<http://radiodaf.podspot.de>) her own podcasting website where she regularly publishes podcasts produced by learners of German from all over the world and which was an integral part of her doctoral thesis. In fact she started the workshop by presenting some podcasts created and published on her website by some of her former students before she went on to explain several results of her doctoral thesis on the positive effects of podcasting on the development of all four language skills (Peuschel, 2012; Peuschel, 2014). After that she asked the participants to form small groups and create their first own podcasts.

During the production phase participants were guided through six steps towards their first podcasts, which are (1) the preparation of the topic (research), (2) preparation of a written draft of the recording, (3) choosing music and/or sounds, (4) the recording, (5) the cutting and finally (6) the publication online (Peuschel, 2014). For the recordings, participants utilized their mobile phones or laptop computers and to edit them they used the free open source digital audio editor *Audacity* (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>).

Due to the lack of time during the workshop, the participants could not finish their podcasts, which were therefore not published online, although this last step can be considered as the most important one of the concept of podcasting in the language class because only through the publication learners can leave the limited space of the classroom and contribute their ideas on the topic to the medial discussion of the target language (Peuschel, 2014). In the discussion at the end of the workshop several participants seemed convinced by the potentially positive aspects of producing own podcasts with their students taking into account that, as Pim (2013, p. 20) argues, students nowadays are "becoming increasingly interested in the concept of 'content curation' – selecting, sifting, showcasing and sharing content with friends, family and peers." This shift from a rather passive attitude of students as mere recipients of information to a proactive behaviour by producing their own content making students "prosumers" (Peuschel, 2014, p. 129) can be a fundamentally positive facet of using digital technologies in (language) teaching.

## Writing for and with Web 2.0 – Blogging in the foreign language classroom

In this workshop, Valerie Bauernfeind (Diplomatic Academy of Vienna) focussed on working with the blog web hosting service *WordPress* ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)) and its potential benefits for the foreign language classroom.

At the beginning, she presented one of her own classroom blogs she uses with one group of students not only as a simple tool for sharing and collecting audio and video files they have to work with individually at home, but also to have her students uploading and sharing their own written and oral texts as well as pictures and videos. She explained several tasks in which her students published different texts on the blog in groups and then used the comments function to provide feedback on the texts of their peers. In her explanations she emphasised particularly that asynchronous tools such as wikis and blogs had an important role in – as Prim (2013, p. 23) states – “facilitating the co-creation of content, where learners interact with peers by composing, editing and exchanging texts“ and that “these technologies offer learners the opportunity to engage in activities that produce comprehensible output and where meaning has to be negotiated.“

Especially the process of writing, revisiting and reflecting on the feedback and commenting on the work of other learners can make such collaborative writing tasks interesting to learners (Domalewska, 2014) because the whole process of writing texts in Web 2.0 can be seen as “socially embedded communicative acts” (Paesani et al., 2015, p. 248). Besides Lundstrom and Baker (2009) describe in their study with 91 students at the English Language Center at the Brigham Young University that students, who give feedback to other students improve more in writing than students that only use peer feedback. They argue that one reason for this could be that students giving peer-feedback need to critically self-evaluate their own writing in order to give useful feedback to others (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). As stated above blogs with their comment section are very suited for (collaborative) writing and providing feedback.

In order to give the participants of the seminar the possibility to experience what it means to work with a blog – only one participant had worked with a blog before – Valerie Bauernfeind had prepared small research and writing tasks, the results of which then had to be posted on the seminar blog. For even further practice at the end of this workshop, groups of three were formed and each group was assigned one day of the seminar – using the Etherpad by the Graz University of Technology (<https://etherpad.learninglab.tugraz.at>) for the allocation of the different days – about which they had to write a blog entry and upload images or videos.

Likewise to the creation of the digital stories it was interesting to see also for this task how much effort each group put into planning, writing and reviewing their texts before posting them and that some even integrated tools from other workshops in their postings. Although some pictures have been deleted, the seminar blog can still be accessed on <https://lernwelten2014.wordpress.com>.

## Reflecting technology – Promoting a critical view on the use of modern technology

As Kramersch (2013, p. xvii) argues, teachers should

“move beyond a simple computer functional competence (knowing how to use the tool) towards both a critical competence (realizing what the tools are good for) and then, finally, to a rhetorical competence (understanding how these tools will help transform the learning environment).”

In order to promote especially the critical competence during the seminar, two workshops examined the use of modern technology and certain tools from a critical perspective. In her workshop “Digital = Fatal?” Andrea Stangl (department “Kultur und Sprache” of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs) discussed several online resources (e.g. some exercises on [www.learningsapps.org](http://www.learningsapps.org)) that showed a very behaviourist use of modern technology and therefore did not at all exploit the potential of CALL for a more communicative and more sustainable learning process (as shown here [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYzcCJ0SMBQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYzcCJ0SMBQ)). According to her, certain standards and fundamental quality criteria such as task and action orientation, processuality and interactivity (Stangl, 2014) should be considered when thinking about whether or not to integrate a special tool in the curriculum.

A similar discussion to Andrea Stangl led Thomas Strasser (University of Teacher Education Vienna) in his workshop “Learning in Web 2.0” by stating that “a fool with a tool is still a fool” (Strasser, 2014) and underlining that “above all, what matters are the methodological underpinnings [and that] [...] teachers can find new tools and new vehicles in Web 2.0, but methodology comes first.” (Strasser, 2012, p. 13) This way he – similarly to Andrea Stangl – requested the seminar participants to always focus on the interactive qualities of certain tools and on their potential for being used in developing meaningful and motivational language learning activities.

Last but not least, we visited the *quartier 21* ([www.quartier21.at](http://www.quartier21.at)), which is a public funded structure supporting and hosting different cultural initiatives with emphasis on digital culture, media art, game culture, design etc. There, among other things, we attended a lecture on data protection at the initiative *Quintessenz* ([www.quintessenz.at](http://www.quintessenz.at)).

## WHAT IS IT FOR? – THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SUCH SEMINARS ON PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTION OF CALL

To collect data regarding the impact of the seminar described in this article on the participants everyday teaching only a very rudimentary online questionnaire has been used two weeks after the end of the seminar as well as a small-scale inquiry has been posted in the Facebook group five months after the seminar asking who uses which tools that have been discussed during the seminar. Five out of fifteen persons answered the latter and stated, that they would use some (3) or many (2) of the tools they got to know at the seminar.

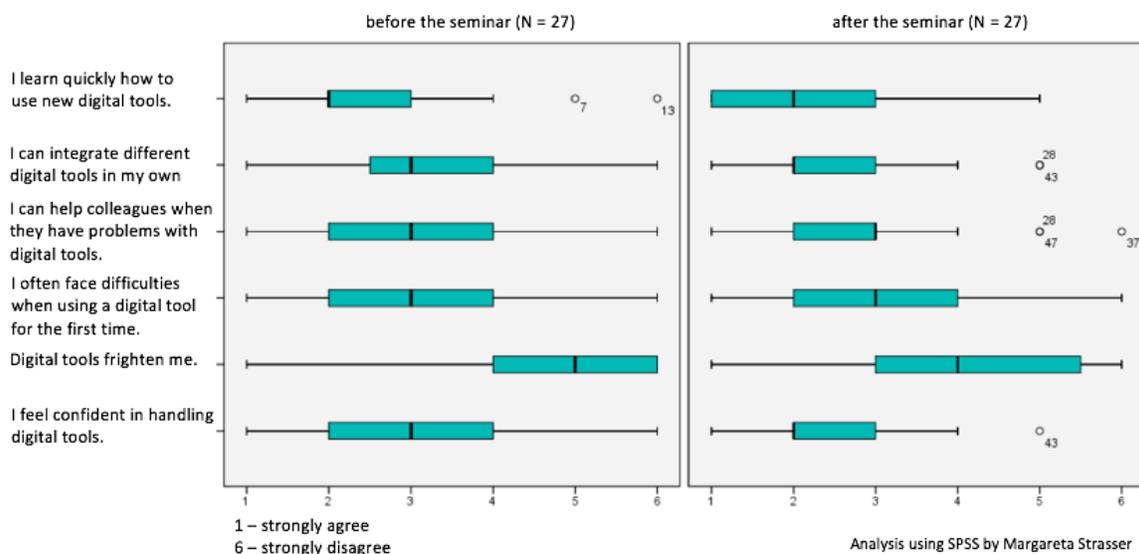
As in 2014, there was also a teacher trainer seminar focusing on CALL in 2015. The seminar “Österreich: HörenSagen” took place from August 2nd to August 13th 2015 in Vienna and Klagenfurt and had 28 participants. The program consisted of a further developed version of the one presented in this article reflecting important insights gained from the seminar in 2014. While most workshops focussing on CALL were similar such as the one on digital storytelling, podcasting and those critically reflecting the use of modern technology, we replaced the workshop on blogging with a workshop on collaborative writing tools.

For a better evaluation and a further development of the seminar concept the organisers of the seminar “Österreich: HörenSagen” – Julia Ruck (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Denis Weger – this time collected data through interviews, questionnaires, and journals to gain more insight to the following questions:

- How does the seminar affect the participants’ view on the usefulness of digital technologies for their own teaching?
- How does the seminar affect the participants’ willingness to actively implement digital technologies into their classes/curricula?
- How do participants’ evaluate their own competence regarding the use of digital technologies before and after the seminar?

A detailed description of the research design will be published along with the final results. The data collection has not yet been finished. Until now several journals have been collected and online questionnaires (<http://goo.gl/forms/1IULmiT14j>) were filled out on the first and on the last day of the seminar. In February 2016 the same questionnaire will be sent to the participants in order to evaluate the long-term effect of the seminar. Guided interviews with some participants will then be carried out in March 2016.

A first analysis of some questionnaire items reveals some interesting tendencies as shown in the chart below.



**Figure 1:** Integrating digital tools

During the seminar, the self-confidence of the participants in handling digital tools and in learning how to use new ones seems to have increased. Moreover, participants appear to have become more familiar with the idea of integrating different digital tools in their own teaching as well as in being able to help colleagues when they face problems with digital tools.

Surprisingly the fear of using digital tools seems to have increased slightly as well. An explanation for this observation could be that sometimes we faced technical difficulties when working with digital tools during the seminar. The survey in February 2016 and especially the interviews in March 2016 will hopefully give us more insights into this matter.

### **WHAT COMES NEXT? – PROSPECT AND DESIDERATES**

The teacher trainer seminar focusing on CALL in 2016 will take place from July 27th to August 8th in Vienna and Tainach/Tinje. While some workshops will be similar to the ones on the seminars in 2014 and 2015, the organisers of the seminar “Lust auf Österreich – Deutsch für junge Lernerinnen und Lerner” – Brigitte Stückler-Sturm and Denis Weger - plan to try to expand and intensify the online phase before the actual seminar starts to foster collaboration between the future participants from an early stage on. Moreover, we would like to offer workshops on topics such as mobile assisted language learning (MALL) as well as on some aspects of the wide field of digital game-based playing (e.g. different serious games for language learning) and augmented reality games made possible by programmes such as the open source tool ARIS ([www.arisgames.org](http://www.arisgames.org)) by the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Further, we would like to establish cooperation with the organizers of the DaFWebKon ([www.dafwebkon.com](http://www.dafwebkon.com)), an annual online conference for teachers of German as a foreign language, to give seminar participants the possibility to present their own adaptations of the seminar contents. This way we hope that some participants will be even more motivated to actually implement certain aspects of CALL, knowing that they can present their best practice examples to a broader public.

Finally, there will also be an emphasis on the promotion of potential telecollaboration activities either among seminar participants or between seminar participants and Austrian teachers using sites such as [www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net).

Regarding the evaluation of the seminar, we plan to use a similar research design as in 2015 with a slightly revised version of the questionnaire.

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