

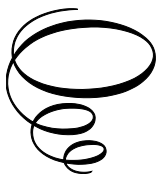
Advancing Language Studies in the 21st Century

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Edited by

Mary Jo DiBiase-Lubrano

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This volume would not have been possible without the valuable support of the editorial staff at Cambridge Scholars and the contributions of the many authors who worked relentless hours and endured the setbacks caused by the global health issues. I hope readers of this volume will learn as much from their contributions as I have and will continue to address issues pertaining to advancing language studies in the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

MARY JO DI BIASE-LUBRANO

This volume includes the contributions of nine authors whose work aims to address current language pedagogical issues across different learning environments and geographical contexts. It does so by presenting specific language learning needs such as those described in the work of Garza et al., and Nolan, changing student populations as in the chapters by Lee-Smith and Nájera, post-pandemic lessons learned by Schenker, and finally, the future of the professoriate in higher education through graduate student professional training by Glenski and Calderon.

Key issues

No other discipline is as affected by societal, economic, and geopolitical issues as language pedagogy is (Kramsch, 2019). Language instructors are facing unprecedented challenges brought on by a globalized society, the digital era, a generational public health crisis, and major population shifts (Bates, n.d.). The contributions in this volume address each of these issues.

Garza et al. (in this volume) describe a “multinational effort to build a fully online professional level writing course” that fills a gap in a highly professional context such as NATO HQ. The chapter presents the argument for a course that fosters English as a Lingua Franca proficiency to enhance the interoperability of a thirty-nation coalition where the ability to “act together coherently, effectively, and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic objectives (NATO, 2020)” is of paramount importance. The course was created thanks to the input of major stakeholders who adopted the Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate (ADDIE) model to validate a skills-based, online course. The authors present an action research project on the course validation process which included qualitative instruments such as student questionnaires. An action plan based on the survey responses is described as well as modifications to the course content and delivery.

While universities have been experiencing steady increases in enrollments in North America, this has not translated into an increase in tenured faculty. On the contrary, since the economic fallout of 2008, universities have relied on adjunct or instructional faculty along with post graduate instructors to deliver most of the course offerings (Bates, n.d.). The trend further exacerbates the divide in higher education between ladder faculty who teach literature courses and non-ladder faculty who teach lower levels of language instructions (Geisler et al., 2007). Glenski and Calderon (in this volume) describe the peer-led professional development program at a private higher education institution on the East Coast of the United States where the authors advocate for the training of the “future of the professoriate”. The program focuses on training in language pedagogy for graduate students who are in their first year of teaching as part of their PhD program requirements. As graduate fellows at the language center of the private institution where the authors were pursuing their graduate studies, they created and delivered a peer mentoring seminar under the supervision of the center’s direction. The purpose of the seminar was to delve deeper into language pedagogical issues and foster a community of practice for novel instructors. The fellows’ tenure also helped instill an “understanding of administrative work and how a successful center operates”.

Changing student populations warrant novel teaching approaches and learning opportunities to keep them engaged. Selingo (2018) describes how current college student populations – Generation Z – are digitally savvy and have different learning styles that higher education institutions should value in order to remain relevant in the 21st century. Lee – Smith and Nájera (in this volume) address content-based language instruction from two different, yet similar perspectives: while Lee-Smith provides extensive resources and ideas for the practical implementation of a “coherent curriculum that can promote both content and language learning”, Nájera describes how “teaching for understanding... offers a possible direction for meeting the challenge” of “rethinking multiple pedagogical assumptions and practices in ways that reconfigure our views of language, and the student and instructor identities co- constructed through the learning designs created.”

Nolan’s (in this volume) chapter presents a case study with a student population who is striving for advanced proficiency with a focus on parallel language use. Students are required to explore authentic English sources but produce output in a different language. The author explores the effect that such practices have on student learning and concludes that overall prolonged time is required. Recommendations are made on how to better include language teachers’ input on the proportion of authentic readings

assigned. Teachers are encouraged to develop specific teaching strategies to help students process key concepts in both languages.

Lessons learned from the COVID19 global pandemic underpin Schenker's (in this volume) comparative study with pre and post pandemic learning outcomes vis à vis the number of classroom meeting times. The findings confirm how the number of meeting times that include an asynchronous day has little to no effect on student learning outcomes which remain comparable to those when the meeting times were five days a week, face to face.

This volume exemplifies the variety of issues pertinent to language instruction across world regions and learning environments. Despite the apparent differences, the chapters all address the need for more research into novel language teaching approaches which enhance students' learning motivation and advances language studies in the 21st century.

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CHAPTER 1

ON THE VIRTUAL ROAD
TO INTEROPERABILITY:
ONLINE SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPING WRITING
SKILLS IN THE NATO CONTEXT

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Introduction

This chapter describes a multinational collaborative effort to build a fully-online professional level writing course for NATO staff officers. A needs analysis concluded that NATO staff officers were having difficulties with their writing tasks, often due to the unique nature of writing for NATO purposes. The first attempt to provide a solution was a self-paced online tool, ELTEC¹. Later, with contributions from a team of language experts and instructional designers, a fully online course was designed, developed, and piloted following the NATO Systems Approach to Training (SAT) model², an instructional system design framework. The entire process is chronicled and the rationale for the selection of the instructional strategies

¹ ELTEC is the acronym for English Language Training Enhancement Course. Both ELTEC1 and ELTEC2 are self-paced online courses for NATO staff officers.

² SAT is an Instructional Systems Design model and is often synonymous with the “ADDIE” model. – an iterative and interactive sequence of activity leading from the definition of a need for education and individual training through to defining, developing and implementing effective and efficient NATO training solutions to satisfy the need.

explained. Finally, the effectiveness of the synchronous sessions is examined through the lens of action research.

As a pilot course with the ultimate goal of becoming “NATO approved” and with the challenge of replicability-guided constraints, the NATO Writing Strategies Course provided an opportunity to design a novel course which applied important tenets of action research: to make improvements through action and reflection; research the real, complex and often confusing circumstances and parameters of online instruction; recognize and translate evolving ideas into action; think systematically about what happens in the online classroom; implement action where improvements are thought to be possible; and monitor and evaluate the effects of the action with a view to continuing the improvement in the final version of the course (adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart 1982).

Background

Fitzpatrick and O’Dowd (2012) note that in the 21st century workplace, English as a lingua franca is becoming more common in the business world since “employees in multinational companies are expected to use English, not only with international clients but also with their own colleagues from other backgrounds” (15). This is also the case in the multinational NATO domain. Thirty nations participate in NATO along with numerous partner nations, so a common language is essential to ensure interoperability during military missions and to foster effective communication in NATO offices and headquarters. NATO’s interoperability policy defines the term as “the ability for Allies to act together coherently, effectively, and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational and strategic objectives” (NATO 2020). Interoperability can only occur if all the different systems, procedures, technology, and equipment used by nations work together. Underpinning interoperability is the need to comprehend and communicate in a lingua franca. While the two official languages in NATO are English and French, English is considered the de facto operational language (Adubato and Efthymiopoulos 2014).

Military personnel at the staff officer level require a functional or professional level of proficiency in English, as well as military-specific language skills. Nations must ensure that their military personnel meet established English language requirements and attain the linguistic competence needed for working in these multinational military environments.

Writing in NATO

Staff officers from the 30 NATO nations fill critical positions at NATO HQ or other NATO offices. While these jobs vary, they have certain professional communication tasks in common including writing emails, participating in meetings, reading NATO documents, and producing NATO correspondence. NATO staff officers must use the appropriate NATO jargon and comply with standardized NATO formats for their written texts in addition to completing their tasks in English.

NATO writing has particular characteristics. Since NATO staff officers have to provide complex information for quick reading by leadership, writing must be clear and concise. For example, many writing tasks include the “Bottom Line Up Front” or “BLUF”, which refers to putting the recommendation, conclusion, or reason for writing in the first line of a document. NATO writing also uses jargon, specific phrasing, acronyms, and abbreviations while being diplomatic and polite in tone, usually without the author’s opinion.

When military officers transfer from a national position to a NATO one, they are expected to have a high level of writing proficiency referred to as a Level 3, Professional level (See Figure 1) on the NATO language proficiency scale (NATO STANAG 6001, 2016). Although nations do provide comprehensive language training to their personnel, instruction in writing in English specific to NATO conventions is a niche area and training is limited. Additionally, the NATO language proficiency scale reflects general language proficiency and NATO writing conventions are not specifically assessed on most national STANAG 6001 writing tests. Although staff officers assigned to NATO possess the required general proficiency and can write at the appropriate level, they often lack a familiarization with the NATO-specific writing genre before their NATO posting.

Level 3 – Professional
Can write effective formal and informal correspondence and documents on practical, social, and professional topics. Can write about special fields of competence with considerable ease. Can use the written language for essay-length argumentation, analysis, hypothesis, and extensive explanation, narration, and description. Can convey abstract concepts when writing about complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, and technology) as well as his/her professional field. Although techniques used to organize extended texts may seem somewhat foreign to native readers, the correct meaning is conveyed. The relationship and development of ideas are clear, and major points are coherently ordered to fit the purpose of the text. Transitions are usually successful. Control of structure, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation is adequate to convey the message accurately. Errors are occasional, do not interfere with comprehension, and rarely disturb the native reader. While writing style may be non-native, it is appropriate for the occasion. When it is necessary for a document to meet fill native expectations, some editing will be required.

Figure 1: Level 3, Writing descriptor, NATO Standard, ATrainP-5 Language Proficiency Levels

The Role of the Bureau for International Language Coordination (BILC)

There is no permanent office in NATO to deal with language standards; however, the Bureau for International Language Coordination (BILC), a voluntary organization made up of language experts, serves as NATO's advisory body for language training and language testing (NATO Memorandum 2019). The language professionals of BILC form a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) that cooperates on various language-related projects. In addition to organizing conferences, professional development seminars, and workshops, BILC also responds to requests from NATO to offer advice and expertise on language concerns.

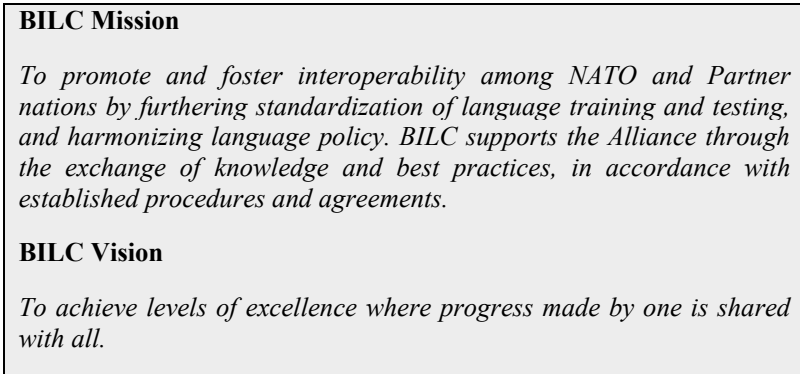


Figure 2: BILC Mission and Vision Statements

BILC Language Needs Analysis

NATO authorities commissioned BILC to conduct a Language Needs Analysis (LNA) to review the English language competence required of the personnel assigned to NATO positions. The LNA examined the language proficiency needed for the on-the-job tasks and assessed the incumbents' language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Thirty-five staff officers from various NATO nations completed a survey of their workplace language challenges. Forty percent of them responded that their writing tasks were difficult, and cited their typical writing tasks: reports, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Point Papers, and NATO policy documents. The LNA report stated, "This finding is not surprising, as experience has demonstrated that the writing skill seems to be the last to develop. It is also a skill which is challenging to teach as it goes beyond the mastery of language mechanics. In addition, few training establishments have the luxury of allotting sufficient time-on-task for language training, and the writing skill is probably the task that remains under-trained" (*BILC Final Report 2017*).

To address this training need, BILC called on the expertise of the NATO e-Learning Office, responsible for developing technology-enhanced courses for NATO personnel, which suggested a self-paced online resource to help staff officers improve their NATO-specific writing skills. A team of language subject matter experts (SMEs) from BILC and instructional designers from the e-Learning Office developed the English Language Training Enhancement Course (ELTEC2).

ELTEC2 Course Design

ELTEC2 incorporated current technological tools and modern learning methods appropriate for learners in NATO. The course included real-world NATO workplace scenarios, and authentic NATO writing tasks and documents. The instructional designers recommended micro-learning modules to provide focused information in small learning units or activities that learners can take at their convenience (Hug 2005). Audience appeal for micro-learning is that it is brief, targeted, and available for just-in-time learning (Hudspeth 1992; Shail 2019). The language SMEs decided that ELTEC2 should concentrate on the staff officers' most common writing problems identified in a survey distributed to sixteen respondents from nine nations.

1.	Direct and concise
2.	Cohesion
3.	Tone
4.	Parallel Forms
5.	Gender-Neutral Language
6.	Common NATO Phrases
7.	Using “the”
8.	NATO Spelling
9.	Comma Usage
10.	Hyphen Usage

Figure 3: Micro-lesson topics in ELTEC2

The ten micro-learning lessons provided learners with a menu of useful guidance to improve their writing which could be taken in any sequence and repeated on demand. Each micro-lesson included a presentation or explanation of the topic, reinforcement or practical application activities, and a mastery check. Emphasis was placed on as much interactivity as possible to reinforce the writing concepts. Activities included selected choice, sequencing, matching, and short answer responses.

Limitations of ELTEC2

Throughout the course, learners are provided immediate feedback on their answers to the practical, interactive activities; however, ELTEC2 is limited since it does not provide feedback on extended written discourse. Hewett (2012) advises that individualized feedback is a primary method to teach writing to students. Without this ability to provide individualized feedback,

ELTEC2 was considered an initial training solution and would need to be augmented by a course that would offer individualized feedback on written documents. In addition, during the development of ELTEC2, the language SMEs identified the following salient writing topics that could not easily be presented through micro-learning because they require more extensive explanation or practice:

- The writing process
- Self-editing/peer editing
- Genre analysis
- Writing tailored for the audience

BILC decided to enhance ELTEC2 with a course that could further address these limitations and provide the feedback necessary for a comprehensive approach to meet NATO writing requirements. To develop such a course, BILC enlisted the help of the well-established training center, the Partner Language Training Center Europe (PLTCE)³, to carry out this recommendation. Consistent with its role of providing advanced training solutions to promote NATO interoperability, PLTCE accepted BILC's request to design and develop a course to enhance ELTEC2 that would give staff officers individualized feedback and provide additional, targeted instruction on NATO-specific written writing assignments and documents.

ADDIE: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation

The English Language Department of PLTCE was selected as the locus for the instructional design, development and implementation of the new course. In 2018, PLTCE earned Unconditional Institutional Quality Assurance Accreditation from NATO and has four NATO-approved courses, a result of following a rigorous ADDIE-based design model (NATO Training Group 2019).

³ The Partner Language Training Center Europe (PLTCE), located in Germany, is part of the George C. Marshall Center, a US-German institute for security and defense studies. PLTCE offers advanced and professional-level language courses, as well as expert assistance on NATO language interoperability. In addition, PLTCE is an important source for professional development for BILC-member nations.

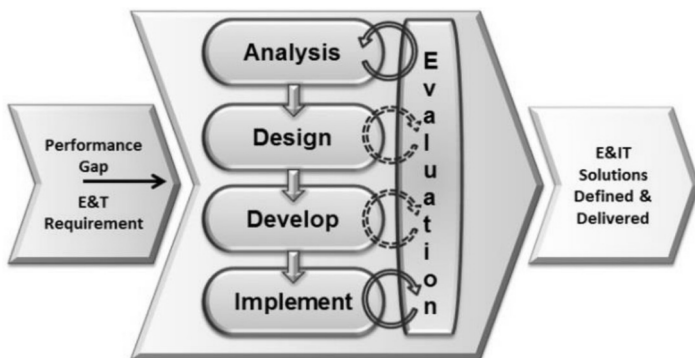


Figure 4: The NATO ADDIE Model

Educators and instructional designers have used the ADDIE Instructional Systems Design method as a framework in designing and developing educational and training program since 1975 when it was originally developed for the U.S. Army by the Center for Educational Technology at Florida State University. The sequence, Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation, does not impose a strict linear progression through the steps. Curriculum developers find this approach very useful because having clearly defined stages facilitates implementation of effective training tools (Kurt 2017). As an Instructional System Design model, ADDIE has found wide acceptance and use, including the NATO Systems Approach to Training.

Analysis Phase

Consistent with the ADDIE process, the PLTCE team started in the Analysis Phase and established a working group (WG) of language professionals from ten BILC-member nations⁴ with the aim of soliciting their ideas on the feasibility of an online course to supplement ELTEC2. WG members reviewed the ELTEC2 course and met virtually to consider online options for providing writing instruction with individualized feedback to the learners. As the initial steps in the analysis phase of the NATO Writing Strategies Course, the proposed extension of ELTEC2, the WG defined the target audience, the course goal and the performance objectives.

⁴ Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and the USA.

Next, the WG designed a questionnaire for a wider audience to gauge national interest in such a course, explore preferences on course modalities, and identify writing content areas. The survey was sent to the BILC community and sixteen nations responded. Among those, eighty percent agreed that there are learners in their nations who would be interested in a writing course and that they would have the technology to support an online delivery of a writing course. Seventy-five percent expressed a preference for a course that combines asynchronous and synchronous learning rather than one that is fully asynchronous or fully synchronous. Regarding the course duration, fifty percent responded that the estimated 30 hours of instruction should be spread out over four weeks while nearly twenty percent preferred three weeks.

Target audience: NATO staff officers or future staff officers whose STANAG 6001 writing proficiency is 2+ or 3, Professional Level

Course goal: to develop the participants' work-related writing skills and to familiarize them with strategies for producing written documents and correspondence IAW NATO conventions.

Performance objectives:

- Produce clear, concise, and well-organized writing
- Demonstrate characteristics of STANAG 6001 Level 3 Professional writing proficiency
- Implement standard NATO conventions in written documents and correspondence
- Apply the principles of the writing process

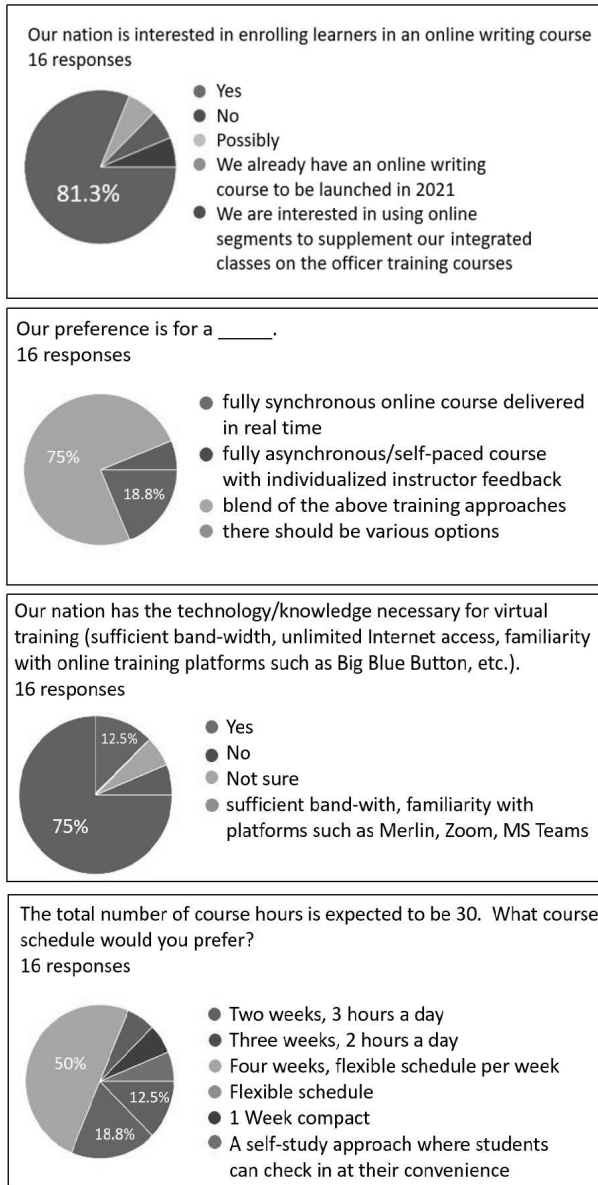


Figure 5: Survey results, respondents from 16 nations

Design Phase

Taking into consideration the survey responses, the PLTCE team decided on a fully online course that would be available to staff officers, allowing them to connect with instructors and classmates without the need to travel (Budhai and Skipwith, 2017). Additionally, the course would contain a mix of asynchronous or self-paced e-learning, synchronous e-learning, which requires real-time active learner participation (Budhai and Skipwith 2017; Hrastinski 2008), and one-on-one feedback sessions with an instructor. The NATO Writing Strategies Course would use a video-teleconferencing (VTC) platform for synchronous and one-on-one feedback sessions. Asynchronous sessions, document handling, and communication would employ a Learning Management System (LMS).

The course would include a total of 30 hours spread over four weeks. One of the constraints with the course design is that the participants would need to fit course obligations into their work routine; therefore, the team decided on one and a half hours of synchronous sessions twice a week with an additional one hour and/or two 30 minutes of individual conferencing sessions per week to focus on targeted feedback. The team estimated four to five hours of asynchronous work per week consisting of micro-lectures, application of new concepts, and time to draft and revise a different weekly writing task.

Because the PLTCE team had limited experience with designing online courses, they conducted research to assist with their course design decisions, focusing on the expectations of modern learners, considerations for developing a course in an online environment, and best practices in online writing instruction. The team used these insights to inform their course design. The following review summarizes the most relevant topics that contributed to these decisions.

Principles of Online Writing Instruction (OWI)

In recent years, there has been a significant uptick in the trend toward more online writing courses, particularly for university students. As online writing instruction (OWI) has become a reality for the 21st century learner (Hewett and Warnock 2020), the Conference on College Composition and Communication Committee (CCCC) considers OWI to be a powerful and effective tool for post-secondary, advanced, and professional level writing instruction (Hewett and DePew 2015). Based on research on online writing courses in higher education, the CCCC published 15 grounding principles

(Hewett and DePew 2015; McCool 2016; Harris and Greer 2016) to establish sound practices and quality standards for OWI. Two relevant CCCC principles are:

- Principle 3: Appropriate composition teaching/learning strategies should be developed for the unique features of the online instructional environment
- Principle 4: Appropriate onsite composition theories, pedagogies and strategies should be migrated and adapted to the online environment.

Effective Course Design and Instructional Strategies

Effective e-learning course design and strategies are the foundation of a quality online writing course. The course should be grounded in good writing pedagogy, while taking advantage of technology's affordances and adapting the pertinent strategies for teaching online (Newbold 2015). Harris and Greer (2016) recommend integrating design with teaching strategies, emphasizing proven effective writing pedagogy such as multiple drafts and individualized feedback. Course design should highlight ways to connect with students, while instructional strategies need to include meaningful action and interaction (King, Keeth, and Ryan 2018). Griffen and Minter (2013) note that course designers should also consider the impact of emerging technologies and possible limitations in student accessibility and computer literacies.

Use of Digital Technologies for Writing

Emerging digital technologies and tools can provide multimodal assistance as learners go through the writing process. Podcasts, videos, and recordings can be used to explain writing concepts or as food-for-thought springboards to the planning phase of the writing process. Learners can use online tools, such as spell check and Grammarly, as they edit their drafts. Harris and Greer (2016) explain that “Chunky Multimodal Content” makes online learning more engaging by emphasizing micro-learning with visual and auditory modes in addition to text (51). Multimodal content makes learning more accessible and engaging for different types of learners. Using smaller “micro-lessons” followed by a variety of activities can increase the frequency of student-to-content, student-to-student, and student-to-instructor engagement in an online course. However, some students have been conditioned by experience in other online courses to expect to be able to

read and study quietly by themselves for a few weeks, post a minimum number of discussion board posts in a single day, and complete an exam or writing assignment at the end of a unit or module (Harris and Greer 2016 p.51). Multimodal content may frustrate these learners who prefer to work autonomously and who take online courses solely due to their asynchronous nature (Hrastinski 2008).

Writing as a Collaborative Process

Many writing instructors view writing as a social, collaborative process (Griffen and Minter 2013; McCool 2016; Murillo 2006). Writing in the workplace is often collaborative, beginning with a work-related purpose and audience; peers can provide important input and changes before the document is finalized (Murillo 2006). An added complexity is the multinational workplace, such as NATO, where it is vital to be able to work effectively with others from different cultures (Fitzpatrick and O’Dowd 2012) and linguistic backgrounds (Harris and Greer 2016).

Because online writing instruction occurs in a virtual space, the social nature of learning may not be considered in the same way as it is in a traditional classroom (McCool 2016). Meskill and Anthony (2015) suggest that a major affordance of online learning is to provide an unthreatening environment for learners to practice language, where they can feel valued by their instructors and peers and part of a learning community. In an online writing course, the instructor can promote a sense of community by giving the learners choices as they work through the writing process and by encouraging classmates to affirm each other during peer review activities (King, Keeth and Ryan 2018).

The Flipped Learning Approach

Although flipped learning was not originally designed to be implemented in an online instructional context, connections can be made to Garrison, Anderson, and Archer’s (2000) influential Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework for online learning (Marshall and Kostka 2020). The flipped classroom in the online context can balance the asynchronous and synchronous interactions to increase cognitive, teaching, and social presence. Although the asynchronous micro-learning approach (Shail 2019) such as ELTEC2 provides learner-centered “bite size,” just-in-time learning activities (Hudspeth 1992; Hug 2005), asynchronous self-paced activities can be seen as a path to isolation. Hiltz (1998) refers to this lack of social

presence in asynchronous learning contexts as a weakness that leads to decreased student motivation and engagement. Until recently, asynchronous instruction has been the principal form of computer-mediated communication (Johnson and Aragon 2003). While synchronous discussions are more difficult to implement than asynchronous ones, they have the advantage of providing a greater sense of social presence (Hines and Pearl 2004).

The Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA) (Marshall 2017; Marshall and Rodriguez-Buitrago 2017) aligns flipped learning principles with online instruction (Marshall and Kotska 2020) and ensures inclusion of the interrelated pillars of CoI: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence (Garrison 2016). Marshall and Kotsky (2020) suggest decisions to increase cognitive presence and enhanced social presence through interaction and collaboration in asynchronous and synchronous modalities underpin the increased teaching presence inherent in those choices.

Online Feedback Techniques

An integral part of a quality writing curriculum is student access to effective feedback about their writing (Grigoryan 2017). However, the move to more online writing instruction has maintained traditional text-based feedback techniques rather than innovating in online spaces (Hewett and DePew 2015). The difficulties in using written commentary to give feedback on writing are compounded in online courses where opportunities for one-on-one interaction and sufficient time can be scarce. Digital technologies allow instructors to engage in multimodal feedback to help overcome the limitations of traditional textual feedback through the use of audio or video communication technologies (Grigoryan 2017). Hewett (2015) favors asynchronous conferences where students “speak” through their writing; instructors “listen” and “reply” by reading and responding. Students then “reply” by revising and resubmitting (Hewett 2015, 27). This text-based asynchronous conferencing resembles the comments written in the margin and according to Hewett, students respond to asynchronous instruction “with serious purposefulness” (Hewett 2015, 28). Grigoryan suggests a different approach using audio-visual and text-based feedback, what she refers to as AV + T. In her study which employed Screen Capture Software, she found statistically significant improvement in content and final drafts compared to only text-based feedback. While AV discussions are more difficult to implement than asynchronous discussions, they have the advantage of providing a greater sense of social presence which fosters critical thinking and makes interaction intrinsically rewarding (Hiltz 1998).

Insights gained from the literature not only affirmed the PLTCE team's plan for the overall design of the course but also informed some decisions regarding course structure and interaction in the online teaching environment. For one, in order to ensure students were able to use the VTC platform and LMS (Griffen and Minter 2013), the team conducted a virtual connectivity check to familiarize participants with the course platforms and alleviate any anxiety students may have related to technology prior to the course. The team also decided to utilize a discussion forum to foster a community of learners and engage the participants in developing a social presence (Garrison 2016; Marshall and Kotska 2020). The team concluded that the asynchronous assignments should be straightforward and simple enough to be completed independently and that the micro-lectures should be made up of a variety of multi-modal materials (Harris and Greer 2016). Peer-editing would be introduced early on in the course as an opportunity for students to collaborate and share feedback before submitting final drafts (Murillo 2006). Instructor feedback on student drafts would include electronic comments sent prior to conferencing sessions; in addition, AV discussions (Grigoryan 2017) would be supplemented by virtual face-to-face conferences conducted in real-time synchronous sessions to further shorten the "transactional distance" (Moore 1997 p.1; Falloon 2011).

Development Phase

a. Course content and tasks

Only authentic NATO texts and writing tasks would be valid sources consistent with the requirement to "Prepare written documents in accordance (IAW) with NATO conventions". Four major writing tasks were identified:

1. E-mail, formal
2. Point Paper
3. Executive Summary
4. Extended opinion and analysis

The team decided on the progression of the writing tasks, starting with a formal e-mail, the most common and familiar to all participants, and working up to the extended analysis, the most challenging writing task. The Point Paper designed as a peer editing task was included early in the course. Finally, the Executive Summary would be an effective way to scaffold the final extended writing task. Following the establishment of the writing

tasks, the team designed activities that would prepare participants for a subsequent session or allow them practice applying concepts.

b. Assessment

Portfolio Assessment was the primary method for evaluating the participants' writing and attainment of the course objectives and, as Burner (2014) suggests, Portfolio Assessment can lead to increased motivation, learner autonomy, and improved writing performance. After researching rubric types and designs (CARLA 2019) and analyzing various samples of writing assignments found through basic online searches, the PLTCE team created rubrics for the weekly writing tasks and final portfolio. The writing task rubrics were multi-trait based on the major principles of effective NATO writing, such as incorporating BLUF, using clear and concise language, and maintaining a professional tone. The portfolio rubric was holistic in design and written to describe the level of success in meeting overall course objectives.

c. Asynchronous and synchronous balance

The team built on the micro-lesson concept from ELTEC2 by incorporating micro-lectures. Asynchronous micro-lectures were conceptualized as recorded pieces which would introduce major writing topics, and which would be integral to understanding global writing principles related to course objectives. They could be viewed independently and would provide foundational knowledge without reducing time for synchronous, hands-on work.

Since the team adopted a modified version of the Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA) (Marshall 2017; Marshall and Rodriguez Buitrago 2017), some asynchronous activities would support subsequent synchronous interaction. The asynchronous activities included short video presentations, readings, and peer interaction. A VTC platform would be used for the synchronous sessions and individual conferencing and the asynchronous content could be accessed on the LMS.

The team viewed the synchronous sessions as time for participants to interact for three main purposes: to foster interoperability, to practice writing concepts through practical, hands-on application, and to increase social presence. Instructors and participants could interact in plenary sessions and participants could explore and apply concepts, collaborate and brainstorm, and share experiences and knowledge in independently run

small groups or ‘syndicates’, the term commonly used in NATO for break-out groups.

Implementation Phase: Pilot Course

a. Participants

For the pilot course, BILC representatives recommended staff officers with a STANAG 6001 Level 2+/3 writing proficiency who were in national positions or who were expected to serve as NATO staff officers in the future. The enrollment was limited to eight participants. Smaller online writing course sizes can offer significant benefits to students and instructors: smaller class sizes provide instructors the opportunity to offer “more frequent (and possibly more substantive or more helpful) formative feedback on student writing” (Meloncon and Harris 2015, 427). The eight participants were from seven different countries: Bulgaria (2), Czechia, Denmark, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. Their ranks consisted of four majors and four lieutenant colonels with a variety of experience and duties. The course registration included a self-assessment survey of work-related English writing tasks, frequency of work-related English writing, editing strategies, course expectations, and previous experience with online courses.

b. Instructors

The two instructors, who also served on the PLTCE team, developed and taught the course. Both were experienced ESL/EFL instructors but were fairly new to online environment. They conducted the conferencing and the synchronous sessions and made modifications to the course content while teaching.

Evaluation Phase

a. Data collection and analysis

Following the ADDIE model, evaluation took place continuously as instructors assessed the participants, gathered informal feedback in one-on-one conferences, reflected collaboratively on the course progress, and evaluated weekly surveys. Participants completed each survey independently; all surveys were delivered through Google forms, and most participants provided feedback each week.

Participants also completed a final Pilot Course Feedback Questionnaire designed to elicit information about the various aspects of the course, from the LMS to ELTEC2 to course content. The instructors were interested in learning additional information apart from the weekly surveys, such as whether the content was sufficient overall, if the participants perceived that the course met the objectives, whether participants believed that their writing had improved, and how well-prepared for a NATO position they felt after the course.

b. Findings

Comments collected from the weekly surveys, final questionnaire, and focus group were positive regarding course content. Participants felt their writing had improved relative to course goals. Although results were mixed regarding course structure (length of synchronous sessions and blended vs. online), all participants responded that a synchronous component was crucial to the course. They appreciated the interaction with peers and the opportunity to receive targeted, individualized feedback through the one-on-one conferences. Variations in answers to survey questions about course structure could be based on personal preference; therefore, the instructors believe the course should be conducted again as is (structurally) to gather more information about the effectiveness of the original design.

The instructors found the surveys to be informative in determining the types of activities the participants preferred. Specifically, they provided insight into what was effective and what could be re-designed regarding the synchronous sessions. In addition, the value of the individual synchronous feedback sessions evolved into opportunities to discuss issues beyond the course, such as current trends in NATO, typical staff officer work, and additional kinds of NATO documents produced. It was in these individual sessions that the facilitators discovered that the one-size-fits-all approach to genre analysis does not align with the variation in document conventions from one position to another.

Action Research

Action research is used in this paper to refer to the involvement of instructors in their own classroom to understand the dynamics of teaching and learning and to bring about change in classroom practices (Richards and Lockhart 1996). Action research focuses on features of the teaching and learning experience over which the instructor/designers have influence and can enact change (Ferrance 2000). Most importantly, action researchers use

the findings from the investigations to “deliberately change, modify and improve practices” (Burns 2005, 60).

The two action research questions were:

RQ1. How effective were the synchronous sessions in creating a social presence?

RQ2. In what ways, if any, can the synchronous sessions in the fully online NATO Writing Strategies Course contribute to NATO interoperability?

The PLTCE team employed action research to elicit the participants’ perceptions of the value of the synchronous sessions in the fully online NATO Writing Strategies course, especially whether the synchronous sessions created the social presence integral to a Community of Inquiry. This social presence has been linked to several desirable aspects of student perception and learning in online courses. For example, high levels of social presence can lead to perceptions of increased learning, course satisfaction, and emotional satisfaction (Nippard and Murphy 2007). Social presence can foster critical thinking and makes interaction intrinsically rewarding (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer 2001), and may be necessary for effective online instruction, the construction and negotiation of knowledge, and the establishment of a community of learners (Rockinson-Szapkiw 2009). The importance of developing a community of learners is emphasized in CCCC Principle 11, “Online writing teachers and their institutions should develop personalized and interpersonal online communities to foster student success” (Hewett 2015, 73).

Focus Group

On the final day of the courses, four participants from Bulgaria, Denmark, Romania, and Slovakia took part in the focus group session. They responded to guided questions (Appendix A) and elaborated on their points of view. The focus group session, led by the Department Chair, was conducted online using the VTC platform and recorded for subsequent analysis.

Participants were asked to describe their learning preferences, specifically whether they prefer learning as part of a class or a community of learners or whether they preferred independent learning or self-study. One participant was adamant that he was a social learner who preferred working with peers, while another participant mentioned he learned better on his own. The

remaining two revealed that they did not have a preference but liked the combination of both options, with one of them describing his preference for social learning but “asynchronous is also needed.”

Participant N⁵, who expressed a preference for the synchronous sessions, commented on feeling like a member of a community of learners:

The synchronous work was pretty much like a classroom lesson. It gives one the sense, the social sense of being in a group with someone, and that you are trying to learn something.

Participant M gave his viewpoint on asynchronous and synchronous learning:

I prefer asynchronous work just because it suits me more. I can pace the rhythm of my learning process.... I really enjoyed the asynchronous sessions.

The synchronous sessions were helpful because there are different points of view on different topics. To hear the opinions of others from different countries is beneficial and fruitful. This usually gives me a different perspective on some things.

Participant H spoke of the added value of the synchronous sessions:

Sometimes I needed the collaborative sessions to give me a nice little push.

The participants generally agreed that synchronous sessions supported interoperability for different reasons and to different degrees.

⁵ To maintain anonymity, the first letter of the participant’s given name was used.