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# Redefining language centres as incubation spaces for social and collaborative learning

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## Résumé

The advent of new technologies has challenged the foundations of language centres. With a plethora of online learning and teaching material now easily and freely available online, language centres have to redefine themselves to justify their existence (Reinders, 2012). As Ruane (2003) stated, language centres have a "proven capacity for self-renewal" (p.13) which allows them to explore new avenues and expand the remit of their functions in order to remain relevant within their home institutions.

This paper will present some of those new directions, looking at key concepts such as internationalisation, multiculturalism and intercultural communication.

We will see how these new developments can be achieved by shifting the boundaries of independent learning to include social and collaborative activities where the learner is a central and active participant engaging in "more authentic forms of communication" (Reinders, 2012, p. 4).

These initiatives bring together home and international students. While linguistic improvement is still on the agenda, intercultural awareness and multiculturalism are brought to the forth to create new learning spaces.

We will present a number of initiatives developed at the Language Learning Hub (University of Limerick, Ireland) which draw upon the international population in the institution (or further afield) and the use of new technologies to connect students.

Furthermore, we will see how these activities were developed in collaboration with other stakeholders within the institution or beyond (e.g. International office, faculty members...), thus ensuring their success and allowing for increased synergies between the centre and other educational key players.

We will conclude that introducing new projects which encourage social and collaborative learning and help to raise intercultural awareness at a time when institutions are developing internationalisation and multiculturalism strategies can contribute to redefining the role and place of language centres as vital 'incubation spaces' for the development of formal and informal learning environments and for the implementation of new educational approaches.

References:

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\*Intervenant

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