INTRODUCTION

In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, the move to online learning has become a necessity for most teachers across the UK, but it is a challenge for many who have no prior experience of distance or online teaching. Online and blended language learning does offer students opportunities for engagement in ways which go beyond traditional classroom settings. However, approaches which are put together with little previous expertise of online learning and teaching are unlikely to be successful in providing an effective and motivating learning environment.

Our team of Open University distance language teaching specialists has produced this toolkit to support colleagues from other higher education institutions. Based on our research and extensive experience in aspects of distance and online language learning, the help sheets in the toolkit highlight some of the principles of online language learning and give practical advice about how teachers can create an interactive online environment for their students to support language learning within a coherent and pedagogically informed framework.

The toolkit reflects the approach developed over the course of over 25 years by colleagues from the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics at the Open University. Although we have made efforts to avoid using terminology that is specific to our institution, we acknowledge that it may still be confusing. We can refer colleagues to Valerie Irvine's interesting discussion of this subject and her statement that 'If you are engaged with online learning and are confused by the terminology, you are not alone'[1].

We do not claim to hold the only key to successful online language teaching, but we do hope that by sharing our own expertise we will provide some support to those who have to teach languages at a distance for the first time, and to their students.

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[1] Valerie Irvine (2020). 'The Landscape of Merging Modalities'. EDUCAUSE Review 55, no. 4. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/10/the-landscape-of-merging-modalities