Scaffolding is also an important aspect of diagnostic assessment. By providing assistance through scaffolding, teachers are able to gauge what it is that students can do independently and what they can do with particular kinds of assistance. (See also the section on Formative Assessment.)

Questions for reflection

1   What kinds of scaffolds do you provide learners with when setting up tasks, explaining a new concept, examining visual texts, or engaging in ongoing interactive talk? What evidence do you have that they work?

2   Audio-record a segment of one of your classes. Review it in terms of (1) the way you use questioning and your own responses as a form of scaffolding and (2) the way you invite students to add to, elaborate, clarify, challenge the input and responses of another student.

Technologies in language teaching and learning

KEY IDEAS

- Communication and information technologies are integral to teaching and learning

- Technologies enable teachers and students to access contemporary materials and globalised communication interactions

- Technologies facilitate participation in the target language and with its communities

- Technologies increasingly provide students with personalised, flexible, asynchronous and networked learning opportunities

Information and communication technologies have become significant in social and economic development and increasingly important in education. As educators, we are faced with selecting and using appropriate technologies from an ever-increasing range. We know that technologies have the capacity to transform our teaching and our students' learning. We know that different technologies can change the ways our students learn and mediate the learning differently. We seek to make our use, and our students' use, of technologies integral to the whole language learning process and not an add-on to teaching or a replacement for teaching. We know that when we do this, our pedagogies engage students, enhance achievement, create new learning possibilities and extend interaction with local and global communities.

For many of us, the productive use of information and communication technologies presents a challenge in our teaching practice. Students are usually very engaged with technology and have developed expertise outside the classroom which the teacher may not have. This expertise can, however, be constructed as a resource upon which the teacher can draw, while scaffolding the linguistic and cultural dimensions of the students' engagement with language and culture through technology. We know that these technologies have a transformative role in languages education and our stance as languages educators must encompass them.

The role of teachers is to ensure that the use of technologies adds value to the intended learning. With sound educational direction, technologies support conceptual learning and enable the construction and creation of knowledge. Teachers can use technologies to achieve this by:

- requiring students to choose activities, applications and modes of communication
- selecting and using learning objects to create learning tasks and sequences
- exploring the use of games and programs that contextualise concepts
- exploring how texts may be constructed
- discussing how students are positioned in virtual spaces
- engaging students in language and culture simulations, modelling and creative tasks.

Technologies help build learning communities by enabling teachers and students to join online collaborative projects and connecting with other students, teachers and experts.

Digital technologies provide access to language and culture and also a means of self-expression through language (Debski, 1997). Our students use contemporary technologies to create a language and communication unique to themselves and their subcultural group. Technologies provide enhanced opportunities to interact with speakers of the target language in a variety of ways – websites, emails, videoconferences, podcasts, music and video streaming, etc. For language teaching, information technologies provide access to a vast range of contemporary material in the target language and about target language communities. This material makes the target language and target language communities available both in and out of class and therefore much more present in students' lives. Communication technologies allow for direct participation in the target language culture in a range of ways and with a range of different levels of engagement. They also allow learners to pursue their own interest and agendas in the target language community outside the classroom.

Questions for reflection

1 How can or do you incorporate technology in your own practice in language teaching and learning? Explain specifically the way in which the technology itself actually mediates learning.

2 Begin the process of building up a digitally sourced bank of contemporary material that you can use with your students. Think about the considerations you need to take into account in making your choices. Engage with your students in this task, acknowledge their expertise.