



LTANT Conference 2023 at CDU, Friday 10th November.
Martin Wallace

As usual, the conference offered many ideas and voices representing thinking in the space of language learning. Andrew Scrimgeour was Keynote Speaker and also conducted a workshop on the language of policy writing for languages education. Scott Cardwell introduced his ImmerseMe website, an AI boosted virtual reality language learning platform, Ken Rowley gave a very helpful talk for teachers who need to negotiate the SACE maze of offerings and who might find possibilities to sustain language learning in their schools using Modified Language and Culture subjects or Community or Industry Connections. Finally, Lynn-Maree Harvey conducted a workshop replete with tips and strategies to enable students to develop their language abilities in a structured yet entertaining way.

So will it all help the (sometimes) overburdened language teacher? I have to question the probity of allowing what was basically a skill for the ImmerseMe website on to the conference platform. For a teacher who struggles in his own school with Education Perfect (no laptop, no battery, password not working, programme set up and then wiped out/can't be seen by the student etc.) another offering of this kind doesn't make a whole lot of sense. My preference for conference topics lies in looking at the totality of the subject rather than the minutiae of the "tips and tricks" approach. Let's face it, we are doing this every day in every way anyway. That's why Scrimgeour, for me, offered the deepest and most relevant learning at the conference.

Andrew Scrimgeour, by posing the question "What are language programmes achieving in the short and long term?", enabled the conference goer to think more broadly about the subject that we love and to deal with external forces that bedevil our subject such as over-demanding curriculum standards. This discussion enlightened me personally as I could see that the equivalency between French GCSE exams (where students study in the UK for a minimum of 4 years and the SACE/HSC Beginners French, which is a 2-year course) is an over-demanding imposition on the language teacher. In effect, the teacher of the SACE subject must run twice as fast as the UK teacher. For Scrimgeour, it was clear that these "external forces" are ruining our possibility of success.

This overview, to me, was vital and valuable as it enabled me to see where language learning intersects with society and policy and even politics. "Tips and tricks" or skills don't provide this kind of learning experience.

