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elearnTranslation

TAFE SA

Background

Advanced Diploma of Translating

The elearnTranslation (ET) project aimed to design a translation unit based on the model of blended delivery in order to include learners disadvantaged by distance, culturally diverse backgrounds and economic considerations. It offered the opportunity for learners to have access to online learning leading to industry accreditation.

Many learners cannot enrol or complete the current, face-to-face translation course due to work or family commitments, or due to living outside the metropolitan area. It is often difficult (and impossible in certain languages) to find lecturers with the necessary skills to teach translation given Adelaide has a small population, particularly in communities from diverse cultural backgrounds.

A blended delivery mode therefore ensured accessibility to learners and feasibility of courses as well as the availability of high quality educators, who could be sourced from anywhere in the state, nationally or overseas. The online content was conceptualised as generic and therefore easily customised and adapted to cater for different languages according to demand and need.

What did we do?

Difficulties faced

Initially ET was going to design a translation unit in Moodle with learning resources and trial it with our current students. ET's problems were compounded by the fact that translation involves many languages, all with their different characteristics, quirks and cultural nuances.

Some issues which apply to translation in one language may not apply in another, for example when translating from English to Spanish, verb tenses and agreement is a major issue, so is gender and politically correct language. In other languages, like Chinese, these issues either don't arise or have a different focus or importance. So, how could the writers/course designers cater for these differences when working from a particular language combination background?

Another other major issue that arose was that each language direction would be taught by a different lecturer, usually by an instructor who was paid hourly. How could ET make all the resources available to the different lecturers, allow them total flexibility and benefit from sharing these resources, (when they were not language specific) and build up on the course as we offered new languages.

The next hurdle was whether ET should design for translation from English to LOTE (Language other than English) or LOTE to English. It is quite different to translate in different directions. So, at first ET thought that if it catered for translating from English, the entire source texts would be in English which seemed logical, however this was of limited use to lecturers who wanted to teach in the other direction, and they would not have many examples to follow. In addition, how would ET capture, access, share and benefit from their resources?

Change tack

The project concept therefore had to change for maximum flexibility, feasibility and usefulness. The new emphasis, therefore, was on designing a Moodle course for lecturers with a repository they could use in order to customise their own specific language and direction for delivery and also build on the repository.

There was an index to the repository and each resource was categorised according to source language, it was described and assigned tags. A lecturer was therefore able to read the description of the resource (even if the source language was different to their own) read the comments about how the resource was used and then find another similar resource in their language and adapt it for the same purpose. It took some time to come up with the file naming system and ET were happy that the end product reflected the contents of the resource and was easy to use and search.

Instead of dividing the course in weeks or sessions ET extracted 'principles of translation' (or topics). Some of these principles might be covered quickly; others may be covered throughout the course. Some varied in content according to the language taught. All resources were assigned to a principle initially, but this did not preclude them from being used for other principles, assignments or exercises. (The tags made it easier to find resource language, topic, genre, register etc). See Moodle teacher's resources repository screen shots under 'Results'.

Benefits experienced by TAFE SA (interpreting and translating)

The project (and other circumstances) forced ET to use the technology, the project provided ET with the support and resources to be able to investigate and access a number of solutions to current and unexpected problems. For example, working with interstate lecturers. ET dived into Centra, and found that it was reasonably good at catering for our needs of using text, voice, whiteboard, video and playback.

ET were able to test it on current learners and see how it worked and created a program which would work with and provide a good platform for assignments which have to be marked in detail using tracking in Word and for large assignments which were constantly reviewed, Dropbox fitted this purpose beautifully. ET have been using Dropbox for six months and no longer email students with assignments.

ET have also decided to keep the documents which are uploaded to Moodle, this way, any one of the lecturers can update the document and it only needs to be done once and it will automatically link to all the courses. There was an enormous benefit in discovering people willing to share their knowledge. Be part of the community. It made ET rethink the way information was being shared. It also forced ET to take an organisational and operation perspective as well as looking at how it could engage the learners online.

The project allowed ET to come up with something that would up-skill the educator without taking away from the subtleties of how they approached their delivery. ET tried not to dictate what they must do but support them, and recognised how much time lecturers spent putting materials together and were able to focus on something which would allowed them to spend less time gathering materials and more time with their learners. Where there were synergies across languages ET planned to reduce duplication and teaching effort.

What did ET learn?

Planning

1. Planning, planning and more planning – the initial planning showed ET the need to change its focus. Less planning would have meant a lot of wasted work. The 80/20 rule is applicable here, spend 80% of your time planning and then 20% implementing. There was a lot of time spent working through issues (and reworking), ET found spending longer on the planning meant that it didn't have to rework things so much.
2. It forced ET to think outside the box – to analyse current teaching/assessment practices. ET is now thinking about delivery by multiple facilitators, each working in their specialised area. Part of the course can be generic with complimentary tutorials in the different languages. ET therefore learnt to structure the delivery differently to enable much more than just a lesson plan.
3. Think of future adaptability – organisations don't know who they will be offering the course to or how they will be offering the course, so allow flexibility for the future.

Organising

4. Keep looking until you find exactly what you want. ET knew what it wanted and investigated a number of possibilities until it found what it was looking for.
5. Don't try to make tools do things that they don't do well. For example, Moodle does heaps of great things, but if it doesn't do something, find that thing that does it and add it on.
6. Balance between thinking ahead (and dreaming) and actually getting your hands dirty and doing the work! Just get one thing down at a time, when it works move onto the next one.

Developing activities

7. Think outside Word documents. Translation has a great deal of text-based materials, but needed to be more engaging.
8. Sometimes the simple things are often the best. For example, ET used a Moodle glossary for hints and tips, then had a 'hint and tip' of the day. Every time the lecturer entered they got a new tip.
9. Introduce variety. Look at what is around. Think outside the square. Move out of your comfort zone.

Supporting facilitators

10. Balance both the learner and operational considerations. ET quickly realised that it needed to develop the staff to do this, there was a balance between doing things for them and leaving them (not) to do it themselves.

By changing from a 'course' to a repository meant that ET were able to develop its operational efficiencies, develop its staff and set a high standard and expect individuals will be able to keep up (even if you have to drag them kicking and screaming).

11. The repository has been able to capture the tacit knowledge in teams (which was critical when staff are paid hourly). Using the forums in Moodle has meant ET were able to foster communication on how materials are used and support staff in finding their own materials.
12. Who is going to facilitate the course? They may not have the knowledge/expertise to just get in and do it. ET designed specific features to 'train' the facilitator.

Accessing support

13. Resources - it is often the full time staff that work on these, make sure you tap into your hourly paid staff to assist, critique and run through stuff.
14. Check what is out there already. The Framework have many amazing things to see and access, so do other people's del.icio.us accounts (thanks Stephan).
15. Get yourself a critical friend/mentor/Instructional designer, it's the journey that counts, but they may help you get there a little faster.

The results

1. ET decided to put together a resources repository for lecturers in Moodle. This repository was divided into eight categories (or translation principles)
2. Each category housed relevant resources. Below was a screenshot from the Moodle Repository:
3. ET also built a repository index which describes the resources in detail. It also tags other applicable areas where they might be used (eg topic, type of document, language etc). The index has comments on how the particular resource has been used. This is an example of an entry:



Document number	Document title	File name	Updated	Allocation
P4_11_L3	Sally	P4_11_L1_Sally	19/10/2009	P4

P4 refers to 'Principle 4', number 11 is the resource number (these are numbered in chronological order) and L1 is the language the resource is written in (in this case: English)

Document description	Keywords (tags)	Comments
An email from one company manager to another, informal	Target audience, preparation for translation, register, language use, tone	This is a good exercise in the preparation needed before translation and in the questions one needs to ask the client. The tone/purpose of this text is not clear, therefore the translator must make numerous choices.

- ET decided to write a 'how to' forum for lecturers so that they have clear guidance for delivery and also access tips and hints.
- ET have produced a series of 'tips and hints' for new comers planning to start a e-learning journey.

Reflections and suggestions

User testing – comments from translation lecturers not involved in the project at this stage:

"We desperately need a database which is searchable...so the tags and the comments really help".

When demonstrating Moodle: ... "That's really good, it'll mean that our own classes are closely linked to everyone else's".

"The other benefit is that students have more than one way to access classes, in person, in a forum or playback notes or Centra sessions".

What do you think about this project?

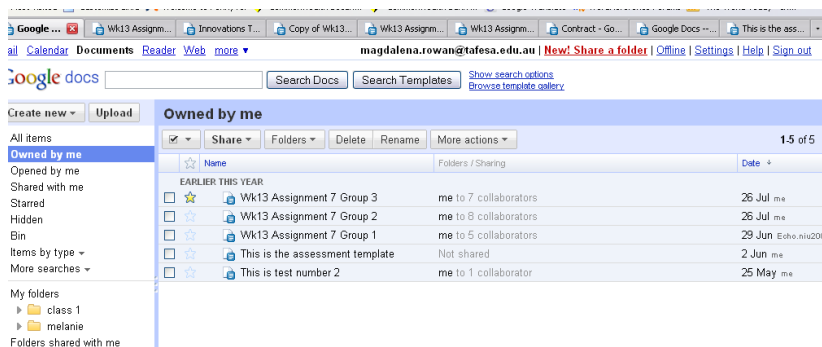
"It is very complete, you have covered everything, and this idea has covered everything".

"There is a framework for every lecturer and whilst I can see how other lecturers teach, I can also have the flexibility to change, adapt and teach it my way. I can also see what has been covered in other classes, which is very useful".

Tools: While ET have used tools common to many other e-learning programs, Dropbox was a real find and it seemed unfamiliar to most other colleagues. It is a tool which ET used extensively to share files, cooperate on documents, review documents etc.

All students are now given a folder which they share with lecturers and where they deposit and collect their assignments. Dropbox is different from other portfolios, you do not need to upload or download these documents. Dropbox synchronises them with the folder on your desktop. You can have this facility on several computers if you work on more than one. In addition, if you are working from another site you can access these files from the internet and download/upload them. With 2G of space you can easily use it to share large files.

Google Docs was also useful. This tool allows several people to collaborate on one document online. Therefore several learners were able to collaborate on a translation exercise and almost use it as a chat site as well as adding comments as they worked. Each learner selected a different colour to work in. The only drawback is that the colour of the text needs to be selected and does not automatically come up with each different writer.



The disadvantage with Google Docs is that collaborators need to have a Gmail address. This is time consuming and unworkable with a large group. Collaborators without a Gmail address can see the documents and sometimes can have an input, but this is not stable. Additionally ET found Google Docs to be somewhat unstable at times.

Framework connection

The national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework¹) funds and supports [E-learning Innovations](#) projects which aim to embed e-learning into the national training system by supporting and enabling innovation in training design and delivery, at the state and territory level.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework ([Framework](#)) provides the vocational education and training (VET) system with the essential e-learning infrastructure and expertise needed to respond to the challenges of a modern economy and the training needs of Australian businesses and workers.

[E-learning Innovations](#) aims to embed e-learning into the national training system by supporting and enabling innovation in training design and delivery, at the state and territory level.

In engaging in this E-learning Innovations project, the following Framework products and resources were used:

- Toolboxes²
- Copyright Kitchen³
- Designing e-learning⁴
- E-learning case studies⁵
- Flex-e-news⁶
- Knowledge tree⁷
- E-learning coordinators⁸
- E-Portfolio business manager⁹
- Toolbox champion¹⁰

¹ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>

² <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/toolboxes>

³ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/copyrightkitchen>

⁴ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/designing>

⁵ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/casestudies>

⁶ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/flexenews>

⁷ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/knowledgetree>

⁸ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/sa>

⁹ <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/content/e-portfolios-4>

¹⁰ <http://toolboxes.flexiblelearning.net.au/champions/index.htm>

Acknowledgement

This is a SA [E-learning Innovations](#) project output, developed by TAFE SA (Adelaide City Campus), with seed funding from the Framework.



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