

PROeLANG

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PROeLang project rationale

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The **PROeLang** project came about from a desire to create online materials and routes to learning that would **empower the postgraduate independent learner to work alone and to find personal and personable ways to meet their learning needs**. We also wanted to **create a bridge between two very different languages** in order to show the learners that language learning skills are transferable to any language as long as one finds his own path to learning.

The experiential approach (Kolb:1993, Usher et al: 1997) is a popular method in language learning as it allows for self-regulated learning which is personal and relevant in unique ways to each individual learner as described in the theory of *andragogy* designed by Knowles (1990) and later on interpreted by Toohey (1999). The main elements in the experiential approach that draw on andragogy are self- motivation and self -direction in learning by identifying one's own learning needs, goals and paths to achieve the goals. It generally presupposes an intense participative attitude of the learners in the learning process as well as relevance of learning as a personal experience.

Smith is another influential theoretician that inspired our project as he **differentiates between competence and competency** as learning outcomes by pointing out that competence refers to the broad capacities of a person whilst competency refers to specific abilities gained through learning

activities. For such an online independent course, we believe that acquiring certain **linguistic competencies** is more desirable as this would inevitably lead to competence that would, in its turn, lead to further confident self-directed learning for adults. (Smith: 2005)

We believe language teaching in our contemporary world has created a new digital learner and digital teacher, as they are defined by Kalantzis and Cope (2010) in their Learning by Design project.

The new learner is engaged in their learning and owns it by connecting their identity, subjectivity and agency in their learning. He brings his own voice to the learning process by taking responsibility of their learning through a certain degree of autonomy and self-control. He is also producing knowledge through a range of resources that he is willing to share with peers. He continues to learn outside formal classroom settings using multimodal social media anywhere anytime. He can critically self-assess and improve their learning in recursive feedback loops by involving peers and online peers.

The new teacher designs learning experiences for their learners based on diverse and evolving learning goals and needs. He is a learning designer rather than just a curriculum implementer. He is able to let go of power by giving learners space to take responsibility of their learning. He creates and shares reusable knowledge banks to save up time and effort. He engages learners in a multifaceted environment simultaneously. He creates assessment tasks for learning rather than just summative end of course assessment by making use of a variety of online sources that allow independence both temporal and spatial.

Not every learner is the same. By creating and facilitating several alternative learning paths our project allows learners to find the best one for them by prioritising and reordering knowledge acquisition steps according to their preferred learning style. Some learners prefer to see the whole picture before starting to learn individual elements of the language, whilst others prefer the opposite, of learning in a scaffold manner and gradually conquering the knowledge blocks. The hypertext basis of our project enables learners to do both and follow or change their learning paths as the needs require.

Our project manages to cater to learner diversity and collaborative as well as individual learning. It also makes the teacher a knowledge expert and designer and the learner a creator of their own learning, in contrast with the traditional roles of the teacher as a provider and the learner as a recipient.

The phrase Personal Learning Environment (PLE) is used by us in a broader sense of both enabling the learner to choose external tools that help him learn as well as to choose their learning path. Conservatively the PLEs refer to a collection of tools and resources needed for a certain learning goal. Through our project we endeavour to offer not just a set of tools and resources but also the autonomy to choose the learning path. Kolb (1993) in his experiential learning theory defines learning as a continuous process of creating knowledge which forms the basis of digital learning as it confers the learner the role of being both a creator and a user of knowledge at the same time.

Obstacles and lessons learned:

During the pilot project in the academic year of 2012/2013 we aimed at collecting many useful bibliographical resources, to research the on-line possibilities that we wished to use for our project (such as popular websites servers and on-line tools). We created a pilot toolkit 1 on the website in

order to test preliminarily the way to build the hyperlinks and to construct the system of learning paths.

Below we list the obstacles we have encountered and for which we have found solutions or we plan to address and find the best answer in the further stages of the project:

- The copy right of the materials that can be incorporated into the web (among which are the pictures);
- The best way to incorporate the speaking practices (such as peer learning and collaboration);
- The way to optimize the use of the website (the paid services);
- The need of taking into consideration the time-consuming design (pictures, practices) and recordings (involving other native speakers of the language) etc.;
- Proofreading (the editing process).

Future plans:

We plan to further develop our project. The provisional plans (subject to available funding) are:

- To complete the website to level A1 (two toolkits), possibly to be used already as a tester during the teaching period of 2013/2014
- To develop the whole website to levels A1 and A2 (possible in the academic year of 2013/2014 and 2014/2015)
- To develop the project further from the beginners level to the intermediate and then advanced levels (medium term plan)

References

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