



Body Language! - Language Learning Integrated in Learning Games for Migrant Students in the Health Care Educations-

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Abstract

The BODYexplorer project will make computer game technologies available for advanced learning games. The health care student will be able to explore lifestyle diseases from within the fully animated body, travelling along the natural transportation routes of the body, meeting and working with different levels of lifestyle disease challenges along the way.

As the learning game is primarily targeting migrant students in the care sector, a language learning dimension about the body and about lifestyle diseases will be integrated in the learning game, allowing the student to learn the languages of the body and of lifestyle diseases in the exploration process.

The benefits of this integration of language learning in the content is clearly that the game based didactics and the synchrony of the content and language processes will be highly motivating for the migrant students.

A word of introduction

The following lines will try to contextualize the development of the BODYexplorer [1] learning game, integrating language learning in the exploration of lifestyle diseases.

The aim is to demonstrate that the need for learning games and language games is actually to consider an intersection field between a number of European policies and exploitation of available resources.

The text will briefly introduce these different fields and synthesize these needs at the end.

The EU language learning strategies

Language learning for all citizens is becoming a stronger and stronger priority in Europe, represented by the EU Commission's language initiatives and actions.

Language competences are regarded general competences, along with learning to learn, ICT and communication skills. All European citizens should be able to speak one or two foreign languages. This puts a lot of pressure on language learning in Europe, as these aims are most ambitious.

The European strategies for language learning are not established to support tourist activities. They are established to allow all Europeans to be active European citizens and to promote labour market and educational mobility. To be able to visit, study in and work in another European country is one of the keys in the Commission's Europe 2020 [2]. According to the European Social Model these aims include all citizens, and this all should be considered one of the most challenging learning issues in the next 10 years' Europe

Language skills as a basic competence

At the same time, the European Commission is promoting language learning methodologies that are dramatically different from traditional language teaching [3].

It is directly and indirectly stated that, especially for the millions of non-academic learners, language teaching based on classroom, teachers and grammar exercises will not do the job. Dramatically different language learning didactics are needed, in which the learners work in practice, in the community, independently and in teams, and produce their language skills instead of receiving them.

Fully in line with the Commission's new strategy for assessment and valuing of learning, The shift to learning outcomes [4], the focus is on what the learner can actually do as a result of the learning processes, not how this happened.

This new strategy calls for all sorts of open experiments in the field of language learning didactics, and includes innovative use of ICT and media.

Technology supported language learning

The new language visions include the exploitation of different learning technologies. ICT, multimedia and all sorts of communication through the internet is seen as a strong resource for new language learning didactics, allowing learners to freely communicate and collaborate with people in the country of the language to learn, or with learners from third countries also learning that language.

All kinds of audio-visual and interactive language learning resources could support the development of new language learning scenarios, placing the language learning at the centre of the scene, actively using the language, instead of holding back the learner in the classroom, passively receiving grammar instructions. The technology supported language learning scenarios could especially support the non-academic learners, who prefer to learn from practicing and not from theory. This is totally in line with The shift to learning outcomes, as questions on how many books the learner has read are no longer relevant. The classical concept of curriculum is basically challenged.

Nevertheless, there is a great danger that educational providers and trainers expect technology to automatically change language learning into a productive and empowering process. Professor Mitch Resnick, the founder of the famous global Computer Clubhouse Network [5] for disadvantaged young people, once clearly stated that technology will not accomplish anything in itself [6].

Technology offers great potentials for creative learning, but technology is also totally dependent on the learning strategies, in which it is put to work. Thus we might say that the synthesis between active and producing learning didactics and creative technology is most promising.

Especially in language learning, technology based activities should not replace social communication between people, but complement and qualify this communication, adding a new dimension to it.

To this end, we can learn a lot from the Computer Clubhouse Network learning scenarios.

Language learning integrated in content learning

So, now we might expect a strong and intensified focus on efficient language teaching activities. This is, however, not at all the case. On the contrary, the Commission a few years ago presented the CLIL approach, promoting language learning integrated in the learning of other subjects.

But, will that not weaken language learning instead of reinforcing it? Putting the focus on the subject in question and not on the language learning?

In fact, that might happen if the language dimension is not supported by qualified didactics, systematically integrating language training in the learning process. But in case of a qualified learning scenario, this kind of language training will take the language learning further away from the abstract grammar teaching and link the language experience to all sorts of practices. And inserting a strong international dimension in the teaching of different subjects would also produce the need among the

learners to begin to master the new language. The need is the best motivator, especially if you wish to communicate with people from the country of the language to learn.

So in fact, the proper scenarios provided, this language training will take away the abstract and formal focuses of traditional language teaching and integrate the language experience in all sorts of learning contexts, allowing a more informal and "natural" language approach.

The new learning generations

All this is of special relevance to a considerable part of the new generation of learners. Millions of young Europeans are not using technology, but are living technology. The teachers are integrating technology from time to time, the young people are born with it.

The traditional educational sector in Europe is in the middle of a major crisis: the teaching framework from the old industrial society does not work anymore. People born in the knowledge society learn in different ways. Young people of today are not stupid or lack concentration and focus; they are just different, in fact very different.

The educational system complains: many young people are restless, un-concentrated, uninterested, "wild" and will not leave behind their technological toys during the teaching.

Some brave teachers try to integrate technology in their still very traditional teaching, but these attempts are often a long way from the way the young people themselves use technology. They use it fluently, living, learning, working... The teachers use small elements of technology in the form of exercises, still deeply rooted in the traditional didactic set-ups.

The problem is that the traditional educational paradigm of the old society is still maintained.

The educational system tends to focus on all these weakness of the young learners, instead of exploiting and building on their resources and talents.

These descriptions are especially valid to language learning. Along with natural science learning, language learning is extremely linked to old didactics and abstract academic paradigms. The young people contain great potentials for learning languages, as their entire lifestyle and communicative and international orientation is a perfect platform for working with language. But it does not happen. Especially not among young migrants, who are in fact those who need language learning the most.

The sporadic, brave but also naive efforts to integrate technology in language teaching will not help much.

The problem is: these attempts are still linked to the old educational paradigm, and technology will in this case simply reinforce this paradigm, not change it.

The young migrants

Millions of young first and second generation migrants across Europe need language learning. Most of them do not have families with academic backgrounds, and they have different learning styles than some of their friends in schools and colleges.

Young migrants are an extremely important and interesting group for innovation in language learning. They are the ones suffering the most from the traditional language teaching approaches. They need language empowerment to be successful in their working life, in education, in social life and as Europeans able to benefit from what the knowledge society can offer them.

At the same time they are talented and full of resources. And as migrants or having migrant backgrounds they are in a natural way situated in a language learning environment: living and learning between two languages.

Their great language learning potentials are usually not exploited. On the contrary they might be the ones doing badly in the grammar classroom.



Many of these young migrants do not learn by listening or by remembering. They learn by doing, by being active, by producing, by interacting with other people. They do not learn by turning to their inner world, but by acting in the outer world.

These are perfect talents for CLIL and for innovative learning didactics. The young migrants are the perfect target group for the Commission's different learning, language and technology strategies.

In theory. Very little practice is seen across Europe basically changing the old paradigms.

Taking technology supported learning to a higher level

Many language teachers' attempts to integrate elements of technology and media in their teaching are positive and well-meant. But in fact they are all limping behind, trying to catch up with the young learners. Perhaps they should let the young learners organize the learning and play the facilitator role instead...

We need to take language learning technology to higher level, in close collaboration with the learners, especially with the young learners. There is a name for this these days: *user-driven innovation*.

Language learning technology can be taken to a higher level in very many ways: by changing the learning paradigm with technology, by integrating all sorts of "young" technologies in the learning activities, by using different kinds of computer simulations, by using technology for transnational communication between groups of learners, by collaborative processes between groups of learners in different countries – and by exploiting *computer technology to the max*.

The BODYexplorer project and strategy serves as an example of this last direction: exploiting advanced gaming technology for learning and integrated language training. The BODYexplorer technology should be embedded in an innovative social learning community, but in this context we focus on the BODYexplorer program itself, offering exploration of the body from inside the body, challenging the learner by offering lifestyle disease dilemmas and at the same time integrating health language learning in the game activities.

The meeting between education and computer gaming: learning games

The immense learning potentials of advanced computer gaming have never been exploited by education and learning. The world of commercial game industries and the world of education have been separated like two planets with a virtual Berlin wall between.

This scenario is changing. Words like serious games and *learning games* are slowly making their way both into the game producing sector and into the educations.

Among some game developers there is a clear interest in this meeting with the educational world. The producers see the potentials, also the business potentials of course. But the educations are reluctant. They are still haunted by the technology alienation ghost and fight the idea that technology should take over education.

Even if language teaching is not all that successful, especially regarding non-academic learners, the educational world still basically resists advanced technology, and especially technology emerging from *entertainment*. Somebody invented the word *edutainment*, but edutainment is not what we are talking about. BODYexplorer is not edutainment. Edutainment seduces learners, putting a little candy on the apples. Instead learning games should be based on the genuine explorative desires of the learners.

Learning games are not about shifting the content of commercial computer games from killing the enemy to learning English or health care. It is about shifting the very logic of the gaming plot from entertainment to learning, shifting the narrative paradigms, shifting the very didactics of gaming, one might say, also integrating the social contexts of the learning – but exploiting the immense potentials of advanced animation, plotting and game driver technologies.

Learning games require new gaming logics, new scenarios, new player or learner situations.



Learning games are exploring, not entertaining in the traditional meaning of this word. One might say: people turn to entertainment, when they are not allowed to explore...

In connection with the launching of the BODYexplorer project, a number of stakeholders in Denmark will organize the *first genuine meeting between game producers and educations* aiming to outline a number of possible pilot projects for learning games, including their funding. The event will take place in Denmark in spring 2011.

BODYexplorer as a general model, though addressing health issues

The learning game BODYexplorer will allow all sorts of health care learners at different levels to explore how lifestyle diseases works, by travelling and exploring inside the fully animated body and along the natural infrastructures of the body. The game will use advanced animation and programming technology and will refer to the classical European exploration narratives.

The learner will meet different challenges along the way and will be forced to combine elements from different places in the body to construct the lifestyle disease knowledge needed. The exploration can be carried out in teams as well, and the exploration will always interact with the social and digital learning scenarios.

The learning challenges emerging from travelling the body will integrate a strong language training dimension, directly linked to the visualizations of the animated body as well as to the need to handle the plots presented. The elements of the body and exploration will be presented in the learner's own language, in Latin (in a playful way) and in English. The language elements should not simply be accompanying the "real plot", but should be an integrated part of the plotting and the search for knowledge and solutions.

Although BODYexplorer is thematically linked to the health care field, it is expected and hoped that the very logic of the game could be used as a model for other learning games, being inspired by the narrative, the animated universe and the game plotting.

The perspectives: teachers and learners as game producers

The BODYexplorer project and learning game includes two additional visions. The first is to identify or develop game technologies that can be used by trainers and learners to construct their own games. And in connection to this, the second vision is to develop pilot projects, in which learners are producing learning games in team based projects, constructing their knowledge by producing a learning game instead of a paper or a video. The point is that this learning game, produced by a team of learners, should be constructed as to help other learners acquire the needed learning in the form of gaming activities.

This perspective looks quite interesting to the people behind BODYexplorer: the idea of embedding the learning processes in circular game constructions, allowing the learner to learn by gaming and obligating the learner to contribute to the learning gaming of other learners.

Content and language integrated learning seems a perfect playground for such initiatives.

References

- [1] The BODYexplorer project was submitted to the Commissions Lifelong Learning Program (Transversal Action) in spring 2010
- [2] http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm
- [3] http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/language-teaching/doc236_en.htm
- [4] <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/12900.aspx>
- [5] <http://www.computerclubhouse.org/>
- [6] <http://ilk.media.mit.edu/papers/mres-wef.pdf>