Supporting Mobility: An Integrated Mobility Process for Culture and Language Learning

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Abstract

Supporting the mobile workforce is one of the key challenges in a united Europe. This support incorporates different aspects, such as language learning, acquiring cultural competencies but also general collaboration competencies. In this paper, we show the lifecycle of a mobility process and how ICT supported resources can support individuals in their mobility activities. We show the concept and the implementation within the project LaProf "Language Learning for Professionals in ICT and Agriculture". The main aim of the project is to create language learning resources embedded in an overall pedagogical strategy which incorporates learning on cultural issues.

The paper will show the overall concept and the implementation using a web-quest methodology. This means that we use a problem-based approach for learners (solving a task in the mobility process) with the support of existing and new resources. We will show the use of language learning resources in the mobility process as a good practice for other domains and target groups.

1. Introduction

This paper shows the usage of a WebQuest methodology for language learning in migration settings. The concept has been successfully applied in a project context: LaProf is a Multilateral Project that aims to promote cultural integration by elevating language awareness to immigrating workforces in two sectors: ICT and agriculture. The main goal is to provide access to language learning resources that will help familiarize candidate immigrants with the terminology and cultural issues in their sectors through developing and disseminating language learning exercises. The pilot user communities addressed are (a) ICT teachers living in Estonia (and the Baltics, in general) who want to move and work in Finland, and (b) agricultural professionals living in Romania who want to move and work in Greece.

The project's objectives are based on a strong belief that language proficiency helps immigrants in social integration and cultural adoption [1]. According to Bourdieu [2], linguistic competence (or capital) directly correlates with economical and social capital, i.e. the way to speak reveals a speaker's social status and linguistic capital. This assumption leads to the conclusion that language must be one of the most crucial factors of a successful cultural integration. By this we mean that if native speakers are divided in different groups containing different amounts of social and economical capital by the way they use the language, the same policy is probably applied to migrating persons as well. In addition, according to Solin [3] socialization in different kinds of professional communities means adoption of awareness of their genre or in more general level adoption of the way or style the community uses the language. Therefore teaching or studying Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) will become a greater necessity in cultural adaptation of migration people.

Additionally, language learning activities which are relevant to the users are more effective as methodologies of teaching and acquiring new languages. This means that the motivation of the users to acquire a new language is higher if language learning activities are targeted within the professional or otherwise relevant areas of the learners and therefore could be applicable to advancement in their profession [4]. As the whole process of the mobility process is in main focus, the selection of WebQuest as one of the tools for assimilations of immigrant into a new culture proves to be more than advisable in LaProf project context. In this way, the language learning is embedded in the overall process. The scope of the project is not to provide the whole range of language learning activities but the combination of new and existing language learning resources.

2. WebQuests

A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented or *problem-based activity* or method in which the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet. WebQuest can be seen as based on social constructivist theory. WebQuest aims not only at expanding student's knowledge on a given subject but at improving their problem-solving skills and social skills in collaborative environment [5].

In the LaProf case, the main focus is on different kind of problems that an immigrant can face in mobility and migration processes. One of the main problems is most probably the language. Language and cultural preparation is seen as an ongoing process after the immigration in a country.

Problem Based Learning (PBL) or problem-based activity is a widely known approach of which stages will not presented in details in this paper. PBL was developed in medical education in the mid-1950's and since that time implemented in other areas, e.g. business schools, school of education, architecture , law [6]. PBL in a form of WebQuest is highly useful for LaProf's purposes, i.e. there is a problem(s) which needs to be resolved. The dominant view is that PBL is an instructional strategy that attempts to induce cognitive conflict which may results from a disagreement or mismatch between the existing and new knowledge of students. This conflict should then cause conceptual change in students' knowledge. [7]. In PBL approaches learning is learner-centered in which the teacher acts as facilitator. The problems to be solved are meaningful for the learners. Most of all, new information is acquired through self-directed learning but as a result of goal orientated communication with other learners (e.g. [8], [9], [10]).

3. Mobility and Migration Processes

Our goal is to provide the most relevant information in a form of various resources existing in the Internet to support immigrants, in mobility and migration processes including socio-cultural integration. Since the end of the 1980s immigrants are expected to be better educated and to possess valuable skills that can be adapted to modern technologies, therefore in the LaProf case the main target group among four different inflows of workers presented by Bonifazi, School and Okólski [11] is immigrating workers with special skills, in other words immigrants who respond to demand-based signals from labour markets.

The whole mobility and migration process can be divided in seven sub-processes which form a step-by-step process until 6th process of Working Life (see figure 1). The whole process is a continuously process which does not end at a certain point but goes on even in a form of improving working and everyday-life.

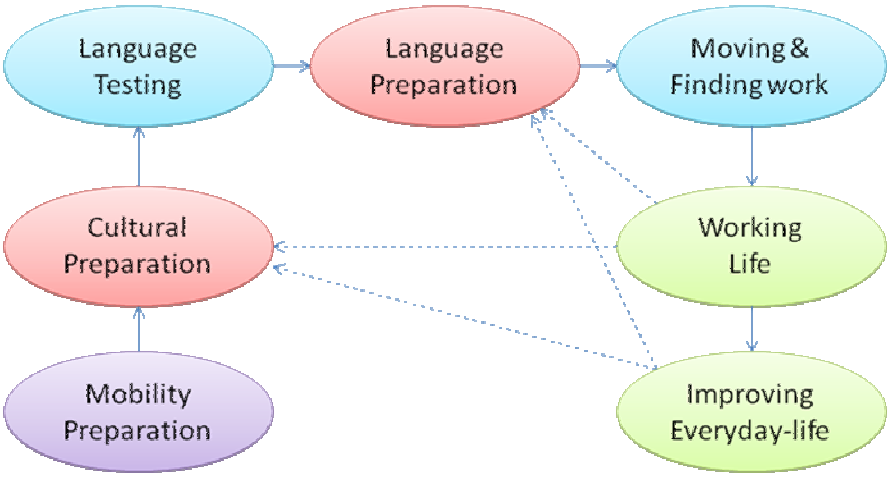

Figure 1. Mobility and Migration Processes

Each phase has its main questions to which an immigrant might need to find an answer (see table 1). These questions or problems are presented in WebQuest and the resources provided in WebQuest offer some optional answers to the questions.

Table 1. Mobility and migration processes

Mobility preparation	After the consideration of a mobility/migration process, the preparation starts.	○ How do you prepare the migration / visit? ○ What are administrative and practical issues in the new country?
Cultural preparation	To prepare for working and living in a different culture, preparation is necessary	○ What do you expect from the new culture? ○ What is different, what is similar, what are the challenges?
Language testing	As a basis for learning a new or a familiar language, it is necessary to assess the current level.	○ Which is your current level of the language? ○ How could you test and reflect the current level?
Language preparation	In order to prepare for the migration, self study can be used, also in combination with other face to face courses. The key aspect are how to use self study and LaProf materials to get prepared - we focus on understanding and reading skills but also provide further links and recommendations to excellent, tested materials.	○ Which are the necessary language competences for your intended job? ○ Which main terms will you need in your working life? ○ How to communicate in the work and private environment? ○ Which are the best ways to acquire these competences?
Moving, finding work	This is the actual realization of the migration, so the moving process as well as finding	○ How could you find a job, how to prepare for it? ○ What are administrative and

	employment. Also in this phase, the familiarization with language in the new social context is essential.	practical as well as cultural challenges?
Working life	In case of a successful employment, it is necessary to continuously improve work-related language skills. However, also cultural aspects are essential.	○ How do you work in the new environment? ○ How could you deal with different working cultures?
Improving everyday-life	After the initial migration, often a culture shock or integration problems occur. Some of them are language related but most are culture related.	○ How can people acquire skills to address those problems? ○ How could you get out of problematic situations, culture- and language-wise?

4. WebQuest as a tool supporting socio-cultural integration

In this chapter, we present WebQuest as a tool supporting socio-cultural integration that is used in LaProf project focusing on three separate learning scenarios: 1) self-directed learning, 2) classroom problem-based learning and 3) blended problem-based learning. In general, the concept of blended learning is still quite ill-defined, i.e. there seem to be various definitions. The term refers often different kinds of forms of teaching with technology (e.g. [12], [13]). In LaProf, we understand blended learning as a form of instruction and learning accomplished through the use of virtual or technology-based materials and some face-to-face sessions. As LaProf provides online language learning resources, the difference between classroom problem-based and blended problem-based learning in LaProf settings would be the frequency of a teacher's support and the level of formality, i.e. in classroom problem-based learning students learn in a formal course whereas blended problem-based learning there can be informal learning among the learners in divers discussion forums, chats and Facebook groups.

4.1 WebQuest in self-directed learning

In self-directed problem-based learning, an immigrant enters into WebQuest and follows its step one after another (see image 1). Every step has its own questions and provides information on the questions. At the end of each step there is a check-list by means of which a learner can identify her/his information gaps. Even if self-directed learning does not generally contain any interaction with other learners, immigrants are encouraged to use interaction tools like a Facebook group, discussion groups in order to develop for example their problem-solving and reasoning skills. One more notable benefit of interaction is that it has perceived as the defining element for quality, value and engagement in learning, i.e. interaction encourages an active and constructive learning. It also enhances the learner's autonomy, self-esteem and learning motivation. [14].

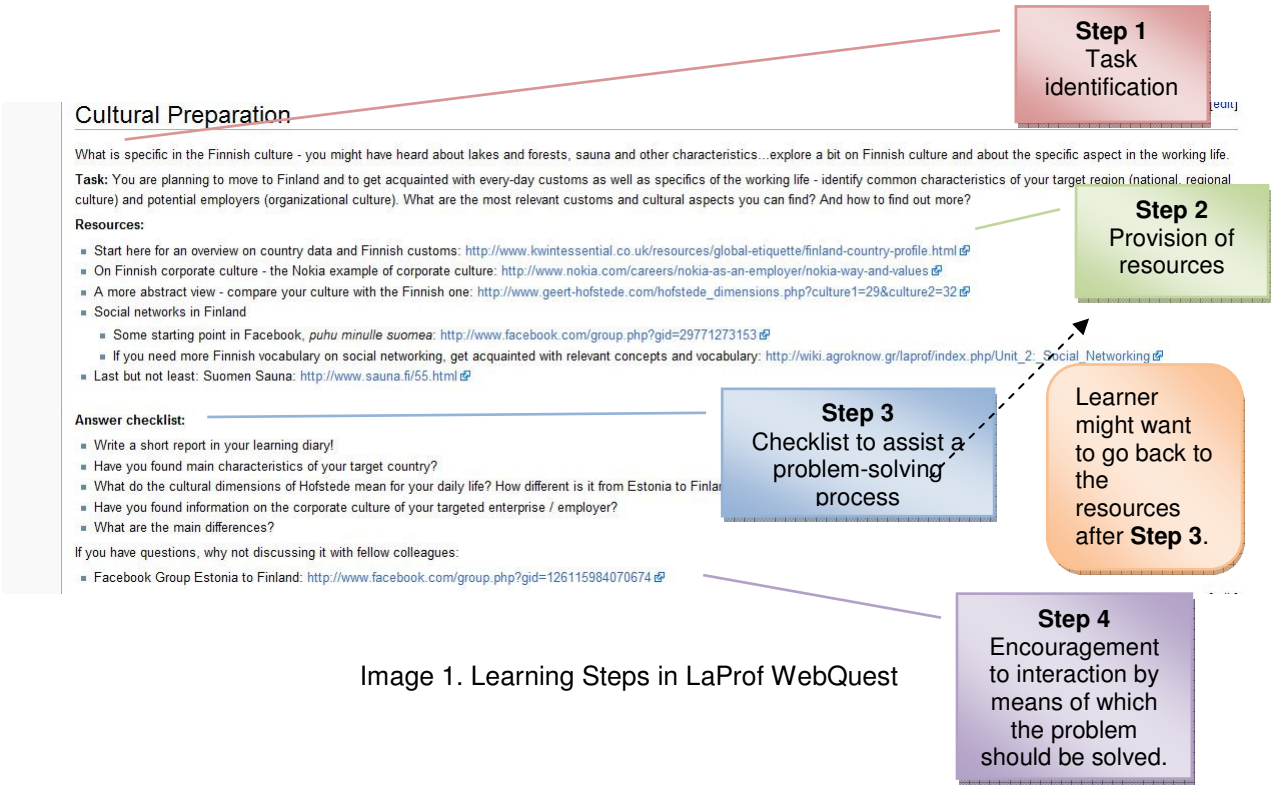

Image 1. Learning Steps in LaProf WebQuest

4.2 WebQuest in classroom problem-based learning

By means of interaction with other learners and a teacher's guidance, realistic problem-based activities can be actualized in classroom settings. The teacher acts as facilitator who identifies a problem situation, conducts the discussion in the problem analysis stage. During this stage, learners identify what they know or do not know about the problem at hand. As the next step, individual study is carried out by means of WebQuest. The teacher can provide technical guidance and support, if needed. When the individual study has been carried out, learners share their first perceptions in group discussion. Interaction with other learners will help learners elaborate on their knowledge and can enrich the cognitive structures of the learners. After the interaction section, learners reformulate their perceptions about the problem at hand.

4.3 WebQuest in blended problem-based learning

Blended problem-based learning in the context of LaProf can be defined as combining problem-based activity with online interaction with other people struggling with the same problems. There are several options to organize blended problem-based learning experiences. In this paper we will present only one optional form of it. In blended problem-based learning learners discuss the problem after problem identification in the guidance of the teacher. The discussion could be held in diverse online discussion channels such as learning management systems allowing discussion, discussion forums, chats, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Skype or in a Facebook group or in classroom settings. In the next step, learners search more information by means of WebQuest. At this stage, they can again contact other learners to collaboratively reflect on the problem but this interaction is not guided by the teacher. This can be realized by means of some asynchronous communication tools such as email, electronic bulletin board, forums or by means of some synchronous communication tools such as chats, IRC, videoconferencing. After this stage learners gather again together to collaboratively reflect on the problem and draw their individual conclusions from the problem. Last interaction session can be realized in classroom settings or online.

5. Preliminary results and conclusion

We presented a WebQuest as an integrating tool for immigrants in a language learning context. The usage of WebQuest set out to conceive and implement an instructional design that would have the potential to cause desirable learning outcomes in immigrants in order to support them with cultural integration. The presented approach has been applied to small test groups in an early stage, in particular for self-directed and blended learning settings. Learners on the level of A2 have initially tried out the language learning units embedded in the WebQuest. The first results show that a WebQuest is suitable to be used in different contexts and learning scenarios. We support the findings of previous research that WebQuests can be successfully used in different settings. However, our usage of WebQuests is broader than previous usages as we cover a broad range of learning activities, from fully self-directed to classroom settings.

However, the presented setting is only an initial stage of our research. It brings up the question in which part of the migration processes, language learning activities are most appropriate. As an appropriate means, a longitudinal study with potential immigrants would help to understand the full process and the role of our language learning units and the methodology.

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