

Reinvigorating Curriculum Design

Case Study



Project title: Using technology in language education for adults

Developing a model of language learning that combines classroom learning with the use of technology and promotes sustainability

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Blended learning
- Learner self-assessment
- Developing sustainable learning and teaching models

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Participating organisation:
Sutton College of Learning for Adults (SCOLA)

What the project set out to do and why

The project set out to develop a model of language learning where learners meet with a specialist tutor on a regular basis then consolidate learning and acquire greater independence through different types of technology – at home or in the classroom, on their own or in peer groups.

The project also aimed to develop the skills of staff and to increase their confidence in embedding e-learning into their delivery, thereby improving the learner experience. At the same time, the organisation was looking at innovative ways to deliver languages, in particular minority languages, more cost effectively and at how such a model could impact on the whole curriculum offer, not only within SCOLA but also in other organisations who are members of their Peer Review and Development Group, and ensure the sustainability of future provision.

What the project has achieved so far

Specialist tutors of minority languages at SCOLA and two neighbouring ACL providers, Bromley Adult and Community Learning Service (BAES) and Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT), took part in a workshop on language learning using digital

technology delivered by Russell Stannard, an expert in the field from the University of Warwick. They also received training on the development of the connective classroom using *mailV*, software that enables learners to complete tasks on video, then edit and save them. Tutors can view these at their convenience and then feed back to learners at a time that suits all involved.

Learning from the training has been cascaded to other tutors at curriculum meetings and staff at SCOLA and BAES are now piloting the use of *Jing* (screenshot and screencast software) and *mailVU* with a small number of learners across different European and non-European languages. They have recognised the potential of *mailVU* to build on work carried out in the classroom and develop language skills in a way that encourages greater independence and fosters self-confidence.

One tutor sends activities that can be completed in a few minutes (for example short lists of words for to practise) to learners of non-European languages using *mailVu*. An ESOL tutor is using *mailVU* for homework activities and has reported that the learners' videos demonstrate their increased confidence in speaking. This is confirmed by the learners who feel less inhibited when using *mailVu* than in class. The fact that the learners have the facility to edit their video before sending it to their tutor builds in an element of self-assessment.

"Gives me the opportunity to practise speaking tasks and activities at home"
(learner)

Learners have expressed concern that they might pick up bad habits that could go undetected for an extended period (for example, mispronouncing words). Tutors, however, feel confident that they can overcome this issue by giving pointers to improve this aspect of language skills when responding to learners through *mailVu*.

Staff across SCOLA have been offered free training to achieve the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) at level 2 delivered through a combination of face-to-face and e-learning. This has had an unexpected impact in that, as a result of experiencing the online ECDL training, it has become possible to convince staff that qualifications are achievable with a much lower cost base.

"We have been able to reduce course hours for next year's equivalent taught courses by 25% for level 1 courses and 33% for level 2. This has had a very positive impact on the pricing of next year's taught courses for learners and has helped re-enforce the importance of the use of blended learning resources as a natural part of course structures. We are now able to legitimately request that tutors use of this type of material when constructing schemes of work and lesson plans."

(ITQ course tutor)

SCOLA has shared the experience from the project with the London Language Network, a forum for managers from across London for discussing developments in language learning in adult education. At the meeting, a few colleges (including CALAT

and BAES) indicated that some of their tutors were introducing *mailVU* to their students. Most providers saw the benefits of this kind of technology in supporting language learning but agreed that implementation would be a gradual process.

What the project still needs to do

- Pilot the use of *mailVU* more widely with language tutors from September 2012. In particular, the team wants to explore how use it as an extra tool for reinforcing learning in GCSE and A' level language classes.
- SCOLA would like to take the example of use of *mailVU* with ESOL learners and build it into the delivery of the functional skills of speaking and listening which will be offered from September 2012.
- Look at the potential for wider impact across the organisation in subject areas other than IT, languages and English.
- Use *mailVU* as a tool to develop listening skills. There is a shortage of listening material generally and tutors could email learners comprehension questions based on extracts presented through *mailVU*.
- Introduce other applications such as *MyBrainShark* (this allows tutors and learners to upload PowerPoint presentations and add voice narration to them).

What the project wants to share with other schools, colleges and training providers

The following resource is available as a PowerPoint file accompanying this case study:

- Presentation on *mailVU*.

Key learning points

- Developing new methods of delivery always takes longer than anticipated. Organisations need time to develop the confidence of staff and to get tutors on board. Tutors need to understand the wider benefits and will be reluctant to make changes to a programme mid-year.
- Before embarking on a project to develop blended learning, the organisation needs to ensure that everyone has the appropriate tools.
- For any e-learning pilot, tutors need to select learners carefully as an e-learning approach will not suit every learner. However, with the right tutor support, this approach can develop learner confidence.