Chapter 9

Collaborative Student Translation Projects: Sharing Best Practices From the EMT Network

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how Project-based learning (PBL) is a training method proven to make learning experiences memorable, motivating and meaningful. This article summarises the responses given between 2015 and 2016 by members of the European Masters in Translation (EMT) Network to a detailed questionnaire on the way in which collaborative translation projects are conducted throughout the network. These responses have also been enriched with the outcomes of follow-up discussions led by the EMT Working Group on Collaborative Learning and e-Learning, as well as 1.5 million words’ worth of collaborative localisation projects organised in the University of Leeds Centre for Translation Studies between 2012 and 2017. The result is an inventory of approaches and best-practice tips organised into five major sections covering the main aspects associated with designing, implementing and promoting collaborative student projects in translation and localisation.

INTRODUCTION

To the uninitiated, Translation Studies appears to be a highly theoretical discipline struggling to keep up with the fast-paced world of language technology and agile localisation projects. In this discipline it is still (wrongly) assumed that the training methods are exclusively teacher-centred, the amount of student initiative and interaction minimal, and the training resources constantly mellowing with age.

The real situation is rather different, however: industry practices have long been used both in Translation Studies teaching and research for a wide range of practical purposes: to narrow the gap between the industry and the academia, and consequently enhance course design (Gouadec, 2007); to understand the dynamics of the translation networks (Abdallah, 2011; Alonso, 2016; Olohan & Davitti, 2015; Risku, DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-4154-7.ch009
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Rogl, & Pein-Weber, 2016; Rodríguez-Castro, 2013); to foster collaboration among trainees (Prieto-Velasco & Fuentes-Luque, 2016); to support the acquisition of relevant soft skills (Li, Zhang, & He, 2015; Risku, Pein-Weber, & Milosevic, 2016); to inform the introduction of new skills in the curriculum, such as localisation project management (Dunne & Dunne, 2011; Matis, 2010); and to update quality and assessment practices (Delizée, 2011; Drugan, 2013; Matis, 2011) to name but a few instances where the industry has informed academic practices in Translation Studies—and there are many more.

For years, translation students across the world have been engaged in “process-centered activities” (Gambier & Doorslaer, 2012, p. 164) alongside product-centered ones, collaborating on tasks ranging from translation—such as in the 70-partner strong Optimale project (ibid.)—to editing and technical communication (Maylath et al., 2013). All these initiatives are slightly different due to the varied local realities and actors involved, but at the same time they have all been successful in bringing academic training closer to language services industry needs and priorities.

Translation Studies trainers on all continents continue to make the learning experiences meaningful, memorable and motivating, and to date PBL is one of the most effective training approaches which enables the design and deployment of rapid learning cycles with which learners are fully engaged and throughout which they benefit from constant peer and tutor feedback in addition to their own self-monitoring.

PBL BEST PRACTICES FROM THE EMT NETWORK

Project-based learning approaches emerged in response to teaching practices which emphasised passive, individualistic and competitive knowledge acquisition instead of promoting a more meaningful focus on “purposeful learning” (Dewey, 1938) and applied, cooperative skills acquisition. Subsequently, PBL gained in popularity in all subjects because of its proven benefits with regard to student achievement, student attitude to learning, as well as student soft skills acquisition and relationship-building (Slavin, 1991). As opposed to other cooperative learning approaches, PBL is flexible enough to allow individual group members to explore learning points individually as long as at the end of the task there is an actual project result delivered by the team.

Because of these benefits, the importance of PBL cannot be overstated in translation studies training, especially in light of relevant language services industry surveys, such as ELIA et al. (2017) and Carnegie-Brown (2013). The former study highlights that, in addition to native language competence, foreign language competence, and translation competence, language service providers currently also need their recruits to have—in reverse order of importance—computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools skills, generic ICT skills (e.g. office, file management), interpersonal skills, organisational skills, localisation competence, machine translation (MT) post-editing skills, and MT system management skills.

This complex skills portfolio is also part of the European Masters in Translation network (EMT Network) competences framework to which all EMT programmes subscribe and which equip EMT network students with a wide range of skills grouped into six main categories: Language, Intercultural, Information mining, Technical, Thematic, and Translation service provision skills (EMT Expert Group, 2009). The challenge nevertheless remains how to foster the acquisition of all these skills in two—and in the case of the majority of MA programmes in the UK, only one—years of study. The solution involves integrating project-based activities in the translation studies curriculum in order to give students the opportunity to design, experience and refine complete translation workflows involving a realistic multitude of participants, roles, project requirements and technologies.