An Online Training Course to Learn How to Teach Online

Former en ligne pour apprendre à former en ligne

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Abstract

This case study deals with the implementation of ongoing training, offered wholly through distance and online learning, and conducted within the framework of an inter-university partnership linking two European countries. The case story relates the experience of several instructional designers (called *Academic Advisors* in this part of French-speaking Europe) who were in charge of designing, developing, and implementing an online course as well as conducting follow-up assessment on the skills acquired. The project occurred over a period of two years, from the initial course design during the first year to its implementation during the second year. During the design phase, a number of issues arose with regard to the didactic method used, institutional isomorphism, and the digital platforms operating in the two universities. Hindrances and facilitating factors encountered in the second year, during the trainees' tutorship and guidance, are also analysed.

Key-words: online learning, inter-university course, digital platforms

The Institutional Context

The training course described in this study was delivered in Europe. Two universities decided to create a joint online training course with the aim of teaching faculty how to develop online courses. This 10 ECTS-credit university diploma (1 ECTS credit point equalling 30 student working hours) involved having participants take part in a real online experience, while

providing them with step-by-step guidance in acquiring the necessary skills to build their online courses. As both universities had acquired a previous experience in the field, they intended to offer a training course that would meet the following expectations:

- flexibility of space and time as required by local participants who, generally speaking, were already heavily engaged in their professional activities;
- a demand from participants unable to attend conventional or even blended training courses;
- the principle of isomorphism, i.e., treating participants the same way you would expect them to treat their future students by offering a training course that applies everything it prescribes;
- a commitment to quality and to scientific excellence that higher education training courses are expected to maintain;
- the technical requirements of both LMS (*Claroline* and *Spiral Learning Management* systems) by promoting mobility in this training course using various digital spaces;
- instructional designers' expectations with regard to with their tutoring tasks;
- participant expectations that their tutors will effectively guide them towards creating their own online course projects.

Project Stakeholders

Louis is an instructional designer and manager of Alpha Center at Alpha University, as well as being a tutor there. Louis is in charge of the online training course project. This is his story. The other participants in this case study are:

- Sylvie - an instructional designer and tutor, also at Alpha Center;
- Nathalie - an instructional designer at Epsilon Center at Epsilon University;
- Sandra – a Master's student in instructional design and tutor at Epsilon Center;

- Charles - Manager of Epsilon Center and also a tutor there;
- Sophie – a tutor at Epsilon Center;
- Jean and Barbara - both tutors at Alpha Center;
- The authors

Louis:

> "The design process of the training course was piloted by me and Charles, as we had initiated this project together. We met several times at European project seminars and meetings organised by the *Agence universitaire de la Francophonie* (the Francophone University Agency). The idea of creating a common diploma, by means of online learning, emerged from this collaboration. We both put in requests to our respective universities for financial help in order to launch this training project."

Sylvie, an instructional designer, was assigned half-time to the project at Alpha Center, as she already had considerable experience converting university courses to the online format. She was then joined by Nathalie, an instructional designer at Epsilon Center, who also was assigned half-time to this project. Nathalie was more familiar with computer applications and data processing than with teaching. She worked on the project for three months before being replaced. Sandra, a Master's student in instructional design at Epsilon Center, replaced Nathalie. This replacement had a critical effect on the design of the course itself, as we shall see later on. A number of other participants also joined this initial group of IDs in order to implement the tasks planned in the training course.

The Timeline of the Course Design

In September 2010, Sylvie and Nathalie met to discuss the project and to plan their subsequent work, which was to occur online from their respective centers. This first working session provided a great opportunity to review resources, a number of which had been developed during previous face-to-face and online training courses organized by Alpha

Center, namely the course framework and task analysis. In contrast to the earlier training courses, the goal of this project was to deliver a training course completely online, totalling 10 ECTS credits. This required reviewing existing materials at both centers and determining what new materials had to be designed, developed, and implemented online. A major issue to be resolved comprised establishing the length and breadth of the proposed training course. Furthermore, the instructional designers were not convinced that the training course needed to be delivered online.

Sylvie: "*We have a lot of teaching materials available from our previous training courses. Are we going to use them 'as is?' And what should the dominant learning paradigm be in our training course*?"
Nathalie: "*What do you mean*?"
Sylvie: "*I am wondering if we shouldn't just concentrate on transmitting theoretical concepts rather than sticking to the ECTS grading scale philosophy, i.e. focusing our training course on learner achievement. The latter approach would obviously require us to go deeper into what skills we are targeting, as well as the teaching activities involved*."

Additional information about ECTS credits: when working online, it is often difficult to fully assess the time needed for the learning process. The ECTS grading scale was developed to provide a common measure of the work to be done by students within the framework of their courses. Therefore, by awarding 10 ECTS credits to the training course, the instructional designers were in a better position to select and calibrate the appropriate learning materials and activities.

Sylvie and Nathalie also had to take into account the statutory provisions in their respective countries so as to credit this training course leading to a certification.

Sylvie: "*In our country, this training course will be officially recognized by what we call a university certificate*."
Nathalie: "*Do you think it would be equivalent to a university diploma*?"
Sylvie: "*This is something we will have to sort out by asking our respective institutional and administrative decision-makers*."

The tasks to be performed were scheduled over a full year, a period based on the agreement signed by the two universities for the course's design. The first year, devoted to the design, was split into two parts; the first semester was dedicated to script-writing and the second to putting the course online.

Script-Writing Issues

Right from the start, the instructional designers working at both universities realized that their assignment went well beyond the mere design phase, i.e. the design of a training course. Nathalie told her colleague from Alpha Center: "In addition to this assignment, I have other courses for which I'm responsible, not to mention ongoing faculty support and taking part in the overall functioning of my Center."

Tasks were assigned to Sylvie and Nathalie according to their availability and skillsets. They began by defining the content of the modules that would comprise the training course and by establishing a design strategy in accordance with the principle of isomorphism to be implemented within this training course.

Additional Information about isomorphism. The isomorphism principle requires that "the form" used in the training course - the workflow, the methodology, interactions – be the same as that expected of participants in their future teaching, such as active methods, discussion, differentiated instruction, and formative assessment. In other words, participants had to pay as much, if not greater, attention to the form (the method) than to the substance (the content) of the training course. However, the point was not to ask participants to reproduce activities to the letter but rather to have them adopt and adapt general processes and principles to their specific forms of teaching.

So as to assure that these aspects were communicated to the participants, the instructional designers quickly agreed on the assessment criteria for certificate achievement. By the end of the course, participants were expected to complete at least one module of their online courses as part of their course projects and to write a report based on what they had learned and what they had adapted to meet the institutional, technical, and teaching requirements of the context in which they worked.

During the storyboard phase, the designers kept in touch via Skype so as to give one another feedback. To begin, Sylvie worked on the first module dealing with drafting clear course goals and learning objectives while Nathalie focused on the module related to online teaching tools. During the feedback sessions, they resolved issues dealing with individual concept designs. Indeed, they worked through all of the content, the materials, the activities, the purposes and modes of assessment, the tasks assigned to tutors, and even timelines estimating learner completion rates for each module. To assist them in this effort, they designed a worksheet (Table 1), dividing it into columns.

Table 1 **A Model Work-Sheet**

Modules	**Content**	**Resources**	**Activities**	**Assessment**
1	Skills targeted?	Already available? Needs to be produced?	What type of learning activities?	Formative or summative?
2				
3...				

They also reviewed the way in which tasks were organized.

Sylvie: "*How are we going to work? Shall we split modules between us, or shall we work together on all of the modules*?"

Nathalie: "*I'd rather we worked together on each and every module. That would allow us to better select and determine the right materials, the most relevant activities, and so on*."

Yet another problem arose. Earlier work that had been split into modules did not allow them to adjust the choices in methods from one module to the other in the *Activities* column. There was a conscious desire to use various teaching methods such as group work, exercises, case studies, forum debates, and so on, but without an overall view, some decisions that had been made were suspended.

Once all of the modules had been drafted on paper, Sylvie and Nathalie held a meeting to consider learning sequences. As Nathalie had reached the end of her assignment, Sandra, Nathalie's replacement, also attended. This was a good opportunity to explain to the newcomer all of the work that had been completed up to this point.

Meta-reflection (an examination of the design process itself, as well as a critical self-analysis). "Passing the torch" in the Design Process: Sylvie and Nathalie found out that, even though this opportunity for expounding on the course content as it had been designed thus far turned out to be a great way to test its consistency, module by module, it actually proved quite time-consuming. That is, they found that they had to explain everything all over again and, at times, to cover the most basic teaching concepts for Sandra, for her to be able to grasp the whys and wherefores of the project.

During this important working session, an issue in the teaching design occurred and Louis, the project head, decided to get involved.

Louis: "*After seeing the content of all seven course modules, I can't really see how they complement one another or integrate as a whole within the course*."

Sylvie: "*You're right! Up until now, we have just focused on introducing the modules one after the other. What can you suggest to better integrate them?"*

Louis: "*Maybe we could think of the modules as being contained one within the other, a bit like Russian nesting dolls; for each new module, you would need to have completed the previous one, so as to stress how complementary they are*."

Sylvie: "*OK, I see. Let me draw a picture in order to better visualize this*" (Figure 1).

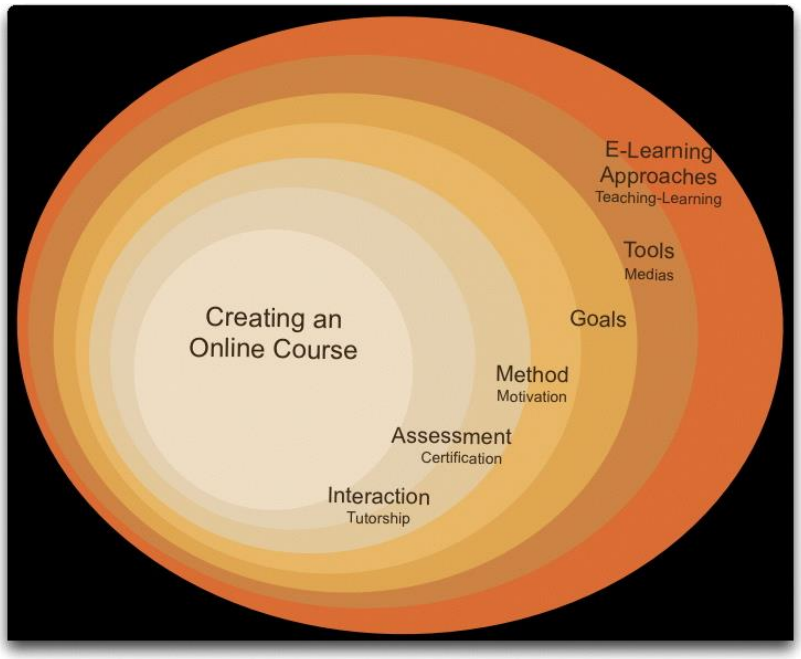

***Figure 1* –An integrative representation of the seven modules making up the online training**

Meta-Reflection - Consistency Sylvie is thinking: "*I am familiar with this issue. It derives from course planning by objectives – or "chunking" – which is at odds with producing integration as expressed by participants (De Ketele 1995): a consistent training course. In other words, you have to offer interdependent modules (Figure 1). That means, for instance, that the methodological or the "How-to?" module should be aligned with the goal or the "what-for?" module, and that the latter should serve as a basis for student assessment, i.e. "Have they reached the set objectives?*"

Sylvie, with Nathalie and Sandra's help, then wrote the storyboard for the "Train-the-online-trainer" course so that each module would review the most significant elements from the

previous ones by linking their content and by devising an integration assignment (the e-portfolio) to facilitate students' reflections on their own learning.

The storyboarding was completed within the set deadline. Once the content had been chunked into modules, weekly learning and integration activities were designed so as to provide a structure to the training course; each module would occur over two to four weeks. For each week, Sylvie and Nathalie, wrote the targeted learning objectives, the topics to be covered, the type and guidelines for the activities envisioned, the materials available and to be drawn up, the assessment criteria, the work tutors were supposed to perform, and so on. Thus, the agenda for every single week was fully and precisely set out.

Meta-reflection – the Design Approach. Sylvie**: "***In terms of teaching design, I became aware that the design activities relied more on a system seen as a whole, which is a clever framework in accordance with the socio-constructivist theory, rather than on accumulated repetitive sequences advocated by the behaviourist theory of learning, such as the Dick & Carey and Willis models*" (Lebrun, 2007).

After agreeing on this breakdown, the teams divided up the work of putting the content online. At this stage in the project, Nathalie left the project and Sandra replaced her.

The Digital Equipment Issues

The training course was to be offered by two universities that did not use the same LMS. Consequently, the project team had to take into account the technical and data-processing specificities of both facilities to adapt the material and its delivery. Since Sandra – who was still in training – had no practical experience, Sylvie first put the course online on Alpha Center's LMS.

Within this digital platform, the modules were designed as teaching pathways which required learners to complete all the tasks assigned. Once a task had been successfully completed by a learner, it was duly recorded in his or her profile. . Accordingly, learners could easily see what they still had to complete in their progress towards achieving the set objectives. This first online version allowed the team to have an overview of the whole training course.

Sandra: "*Now, what we have to do is adapt the course to the LMS at Epsilon Center, which will prove tricky as it is very different from Alpha Center's LMS.*"
Sylvie: "*On the Alpha Center LMS, we can set out teaching pathways, whereas on your platform the central thread might be found in the blog*."
Sandra: "*Yes, I do think we can adapt the course using this tool. Now, what about videoconferencing? You integrated Skype into your platform and Charles is suggesting we use Google Hangout in ours*."
Sylvie: "*Like Skype, Google Hangout is a tool that is external to the platform, but why shouldn't we do that? This would give us an opportunity to experiment with new tools, put them to the test, and explore their advantages and disadvantages*."

After this meeting, it became easier for Sylvie and Sandra to find common points between the different interface specifications. A final meeting was held to complete all the administrative paperwork, to write out the partnership contracts, to set the fees to be paid, and to think about the best way to promote this very innovative training course.

Results of this project

The basis of this training course, named e-Learn² or "e-Learn Squared," was the "*three stages in a teaching strategy*" according to Tardif (1992), which were adapted to the processes of contextualization, decontextualization and recontextualization (Proulx, 1997). Examples of training courses and case studies allow learners to adjust the amount of output required in order to get ready for learning; this is the contextualization stage. Theoretical models, research-based resources from educational sciences, mainly in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as applied to education, form the decontextualization stage

which allows learners to learn, analyse, take in their newly-acquired knowledge and shape it with what they already know. Finally, the training course relies on a recontextualization phase in which learners have to transfer their newly acquired knowledge or skills to a new situation, in order to improve knowledge building and knowledge transfer. In this course, recontextualization occurred with the creation of the learners' own online courses.

The first module introduced the major concepts of the course (Table 2) and became a common point of reference throughout the training course.

Sandra: "*This first module is of paramount importance. We must be able to introduce, using clear examples, the different facets of online and distance learning."*

Sylvie*: "We must convey the message that putting a course online is, in no way, a matter of improvisation. Using a variety of contrasting examples, we can give a good overview of online education. This will engage our participants and they'll have a good idea of the full range of what already exists and what can be done*."

Table 2 **Module 1: Online Training Courses**

Content	Activities
Numerous variations of online learning and delivery methods and their respective value-added, according to a given context	Analysing examples Comparing scripts Viewing video clips
Instructional alignments (goal-method - assessment) Temporary storyboarding	
The "IMAIP" Model for "Information Motivation, Activities, Interaction, and Production" (Lebrun 2005)	

Beginning with this first module, participants were positioned to think about their own projects and were able to start creating their own storyboards. These early efforts took place under the guidance of a tutor.

In the second module, technical tools available and their current uses were explored and analysed against their value-added in teaching and training (Table 3). Without a well-worked-

out storyboard, a budding course designer might get lost in the plethora of resources available to him/her on the Internet.

Sylvie: "*There are so many tools for online teaching out there. What should we show them?"*
Sandra*: "Ideally, we ought to show them tools in relation to the various components of the theoretical models in module 1."*
Sylvie*: "I'm going to create an interactive concept map that deals with characteristics such as information, motivation, activities, and so on and so forth. And I will connect them with various tools outlining their technical specifications – PC or Mac compatible – as well as the uses that can be made of them in teaching."*

Table 3 **Module 2 - Tools**

Content	Activities
A variety of tools and media and their potential usefulness in online education	Analysing resources and "tools" freely by referring to a map that defines them.
Connecting the tools' value-added to the two theoretical models presented in module 1	Implementing and using a portfolio under the tutors' guidance

The third module (Table 4) was dedicated to the teaching objectives and skills to be learned, answering questions such as: *What do we have to do to make sure that students learn what we want them to learn? What do we have to do to make sure that what students do is in line with the teacher's intentions?* (Biggs, 2006). Initially, Sylvie and Sandra had been tempted to start with this module. Nonetheless, so as to ensure the objectives were precise and clearly written, they decided that participants needed to first analyse their technological environments (i.e., what type of online leaning and what kinds of tools were to be used), although the answers to these questions were often set by the teaching institution. Considering these constraints first, would facilitate the implementation of realistic and achievable teaching objectives.

Table 4 **Module 3 : learning objectives**

Content	Activities
Defining learning goals, abilities, skills, and explanations given to the trainees – course outline	Analysing learning goals through video viewing Comparing learning activities in alignment with the goals Integrating the content of this module into the learner's own e-Portfolio
Linking goals and learning activities, consistency of the course	

These explanatory and contextualization details, which added more meaning to the activities, were deemed critical to enthuse and inspire students to join in the scheduled activities (Viau, 1994).

The fourth module followed the same interdependent logic that existed between modules. The focus in this module was on choosing teaching methods that were consistent with the specified objectives and tools used (Table 5). In this module, participants evaluated their own learning habits in order to identify the teaching methods best suited to their own way of acquiring knowledge, which will typically match their own teaching strategies.

Sylvie: "*In order to highlight various teaching techniques, why not allow participants to experience them themselves?"*

Sandra: *"What you're suggesting relates to the isomorphism principle, doesn't it?"*

Louis: *"Yes, it does. Besides, it is essential to help participants realize that the methods they choose are influenced by their own learning styles."*

Sylvie: *"In the previous modules, we suggested learning methods like case studies, analysing video presentations, and prompting individual follow-up through the creation and maintenance of a portfolio. In the next modules, let's target some other types of methods like teaching in small groups, doing exercises designed to apply the lesson to a practical situation, and so on."*

Table 5 **- Module 4 – Teaching Methods**

Content	Activities
Learning styles	Determining one's own learning profile using a questionnaire Exploring different learning styles common among learners Adapting teaching methods to the course goals and matching the goals to the methods used Integrating the content of this module into the learner's own e-Portfolio
Teaching methods – stress on diversity	

The fifth module provided participants with the opportunity to think about how to assess knowledge acquired in view of certification requirements (Table 6). Participants were requested to explore a variety of assessment tools for checking that the knowledge and skills taught online had been retained. There was a lot of discussion with regard to the position of this module in the training course. The initial idea was to place it immediately after the module in which participants identified learning objectives. Indeed, you define your objectives according to what you are aiming at, and what you are aiming at is then assessed. The instructional designers eventually decided to put this module after the teaching methods module, since assessment is also based on teaching methods which require adjusting the amount of cognitive output required on the learner's part. This, in turn determines the level of expectations specified in the objectives (Biggs,1982[1]).

[1] Biggs and Collis' "*model describes levels of increasing complexity in student's understanding of subjects*" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structure_of_Observed_Learning_Outcome

Table 6: Module 5: Certificate-based Assessment

Content	Activities
The notions of criteria, indicators, and scales for relevance, accuracy, and reliability	Group marking of a sample student's paper and chatting on a forum to discuss the assessment requirements Exploring the various assessment tools - multiple-choice questionnaires, assignments, etc. - and determining whether or not they match the goals set and methods used Integrating the content of this module into the learner's own e-Portfolio
Implementing Biggs' Constructive Alignment and the SOLO Taxonomy (1982) Assessing the skills and level of the answers given by students	

The sixth module provided an introduction to formative assessment (Table 7) and the parts played by tutorship and support in an online course, so as to keep learners motivated and to guide them in the learning process.

Sandra: "*Isn't it actually a bit late to award certification at the very end of the course? What about students who experience difficulties during the course or who withdraw from the course altogether?"*

Sylvie: *"As far as distance education is concerned, I tend to side with Perrenoud (2001) who stresses the paramount importance of monitoring students' progress, of supporting the learning process, and of assisting learners in reaching the objectives set for the course."*

Sandra: *"That's exactly the role and functions assigned to tutors in this training course."*

Table 7 **Module 6 – Formative Assessment/ Diagnostic Testing**

Content	Activities
The purpose of formative assessment – the tutors' functions	Analysing instances of interaction between tutors and learners to regulate the learning process Integrating the content of this module into the learner's own e-Portfolio
Feedback techniques	

Finally, in **the seventh module**, learners revisit the storyboards (table 8) produced during the first module, which was to have been further developed and improved throughout the training

course. Learners were expected to flesh out their storyboards in accordance with the elements studied throughout the eLearn[2] training course.

Sylvie: "*We have reached the end of the training course, in which the learners are expected to demonstrate that they are able to write a congruent storyboard*."

Sandra: *"They have already been given the opportunity to elaborate on some elements of their course in their e-portfolios but also to think, with their tutors, about how congruent and efficient their choices are. They now have to reflect on the materials they are going to use to help their students achieve their objectives."*

Sylvie: *"I also think we should include legal information, such as the rules regarding plagiarism, copyright, or creative commons (CC) in this course*."

Table 8 **Module 7 : Teaching Scenario**

Content	Activities
Teaching scenario	Writing out the scenario of one's own online course Drawing out the organizational graph of the course Debating on a wiki web application about the choice of teaching materials and associated copyrights Finalizing the personal reflection project and training plans
Copyright, plagiarism, Creative Commons	
Assessing a course in pedagogical terms	

To be awarded certification, participants were required to make presentations of their online courses, housed on the LMS of their choice. Additionally, they were expected to submit their journals with documented proof of what they had learned together, demonstrating the reflective and critical work in which they had engaged throughout the training course. Participation in weekly activities was also taken into account.

Implementing the Training Course- during the Project's Second Year

In this section of the case study, we explain how the training course worked, which was somewhat unusual. In addition to its complex design process, we think it is useful to give an overview of how the training course was managed simultaneously across the two countries.

After a face-to-face "course launch" meeting, including about forty interested parties from both departments in the partnership, the training course started in October. Interestingly, the work assigned to the instructional designers on the two teams differed. Charles, Sophie, and Sandra from Epsilon Center were involved in tutoring the learners and providing them with individual follow-up. Yet Sandra, from Alpha Center, was the only designer who had actually participated in the design phase, and only towards the end of it. Therefore, Charles and Sophie had to learn the content of the seven modules on-the-fly, while tutoring students.

Charles, Sophie, and Sandra from Epsilon Center were involved in the learners' overall and individual follow-up work. Yet Sandra was the only designer who had actually participated in the design phase, and only towards the end of it. Therefore, Charles and Sophie had to learn all of the content of the seven modules as it was new to them.

At Alpha Center, things worked differently. Sylvie, who designed the training course, was also in charge of the follow-up of all of the participants enrolled at her Center. Every week, she would send learners the information and activities to be completed. In addition to being in charge of learners' overall tutorship (i.e., correcting written assignments, performing formative assessment, managing group work, providing technical assistance, etc.) Sylvie also supervised ten learners in particular. This guidance consisted of giving them feedback on the way their work was organized, analysing contextual situations, and providing the best guidelines possible concerning the teaching scenario of their projects.

The other affiliate learners at Alpha Center were supervised by Jean and Barbara. The online courses of those being tutoring were monitored with tutors reading over and commenting on the developing storyboards. Tutors also took part in discussions on message boards.

Sandra, who was a tutor at Epsilon Center, also met face-to-face, on a part-time basis, with the tutors from the Alpha Center after they were three months into the training course. At this time, the authors were replaced by other tutors who then performed the follow-up tasks for the learners assigned to them. Thanks to her two-fold assignment, Sandra was able to engage in direct contact with both teams.

At Alpha Center, monthly meetings were organized between Sylvie and the other tutors. She provided updates on the evolution of the modules, the new activities, and any other organizational issues. These sessions also addressed any existing learner difficulties, ideas on tutorship, and ideas for assessment of the modules. Sandra would then pass on the information to Epsilon Center when she went back to work there. Sylvie, Sandra, and Sophie continued to contact one another on a regular basis via Skype. As such, Sylvie was able to assist her two colleagues in the implementation process. This approach allowed the training course to proceed in a virtually identical fashion at both Centers, except for tutorship.

Half-way through the training course in mid-January, a general virtual meeting took place between the two centers with the aim of assessing progress made thus far. After reviewing the first semester, a few minor changes were suggested, for example, the size of a sub-group assigned to perform a task. These changes were directly connected to the degree of involvement of those individuals who took an active part in the training course. Such

flexibility is not only normal, but proves to be necessary when it comes to managing an online course; you have to plan and adjust the course according to participant profiles.

The last project meeting took place in June, at the certification ceremony. The discussion focused mainly on organizational and logistic aspects related to graduation, the upcoming year's student enrolment numbers, preparing for the coming year's training course and so on.

At the end of the first year, 90% of participants received an attendance certificate and 75% received the university certificate/diploma. Of the very few people who dropped out, the primary reason appeared to be to career changes. On the basis on excellent evaluations of the teaching staff by learners, the instructional designers were more than satisfied with the outcome.

Still, they did not have the same experience developing this training course. Sophie and Charles, from Epsilon Center, had not contributed to designing the training course. Fortunately, their team was complemented by Sandra, who was still a student, but who contributed to establishing a link between the design and implementation phases, and who also served as a go-between for the two teams when she was hired as a replacement at Alpha Center. The three team members, together, handled the tutorship and supervising tasks for the 20 people enrolled at their end.

At the Alpha Center, virtually all the work involved in developing and implementing the training course was performed by Sylvie with Jean and Barbara having provided on-demand support to some learners.

The Instructional Designers' Experience

Because the two centers worked differently, a survey was conducted among the seven tutors who were involved in the training course. Thanks to a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), the authors were also able to express their personal feelings about the training course as implemented. Additionally, the instructional designers gave their opinions with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of the guidance and pedagogical follow-up provided to participants, which formed a core part of the e-Learn² training course. The tutors highlighted a number of positive features while pointing out potential improvements that could be made, which were discussed at a later meeting.

Observed strengths

Sylvie*: "The points you stressed regarding the strengths are mainly related to the guidance provided to participants and the flexibility afforded them."*

Barbara: *"Splitting up the training course into modules allowed participants to know what they were supposed to do and when they were to do it and what they were expected to achieve. Moreover, their ability to have access to all the materials in the module right from the start allowed everyone to organize their working time and to work at their own pace."*

Sandra: *"Yes, indeed, this illustrates the isomorphism principle we worked to achieve."*

Barbara: *"This way, participants experienced this online training course as learners while, in parallel, they designed their own online courses as instructors*."

The flexibility of a course, split into modules, and the principle of isomorphism, which lay at the heart of this training course, formed strengths that were highlighted by most participants.

Observed weaknesses

Sylvie: *"You reported three weaknesses in our course, which had to do with time management, participants' difficulty in identifying the role of the tutors, and the time taken for learning."*

Charles: *"Yes, our workloads were such that we were not able to perform our tutoring tasks to the level we would have liked to."*

Sandra: *"And this is the reason why we took over the tutoring assigned to Louis and also why the two learners who were tutored by Jean turned to Sylvie."*

Sylvie*: "Also, this led us to the second weakness that was pointed out. I think that, for a while, learners were at a loss as to know which tutor was assigned to them. I was overall trouble-shooter at times having to take care of learners I was not officially in charge of."*

Charles*: "I think it is safe to say that the discrepancy you felt was due to your being both the designer of the course and a de facto tutor. This will likely decrease if tutors have the opportunity to become better acquainted with the subject matter in the course. But they'll have to be allotted enough time to do that."*

Jean: *"This is an issue that also troubled learners who could not always spare time to absorb and assimilate the course materials."*

After analysing the strengths and weaknesses with regard to the follow-up of learners during the online teaching course, the instructional designers also described their thoughts about the opportunities in favour of, and threats against, institutionalizing such a training course online.

Observed opportunities

Promoting online training courses corresponds to a real expectation expressed by faculty in both institutions. Faculty do indeed have to design their own online courses, to innovate and improve their teaching. They have to face an ever-increasing number of students in overcrowded groups, many students being unable to attend classes locally (Erasmus Mobility Program), and practical training periods. Initiatives from faculty in the field of online learning that had been deemed "on the margin" thus far in these two teaching institutions are now becoming the norm as "instances of best practices."

Sylvie: *"I was able to design this training course thanks to a grant from my institution. But beyond this one-of-a-kind initiative, I am worried about the reluctance to generalize this approach and the lack of any budget to ensure sustainability."*

Charles: *"Yes, the issue of instructional innovation is important. You have to innovate and then fight to hold your ground."*

Nathalie: *"The institution relies on us as part of our assignment to conduct a project follow-up after it has been designed."*

Another possibility that was raised was the participation of course designers in the tutoring teams, something that would greatly improve the quality of training and allow for the guidance of tutors to respond more efficiently to participant expectations.

Finally, international cooperation enabled us to design the training course, and through intra/inter-university discussion, to adapt the training course on a systematic and regular basis. Moreover, this cooperation allowed participants to be awarded certification by both countries.

Observed threats

Tutors reported how difficult it was to have the real benefits and costs of online learning acknowledged by the universities' administration, as the people there still remained unfamiliar with the digital world. Being an online learning tutor was barely recognized as a real job, which led to extra workload for a number of tutors who performed this type of guidance in addition to other tasks assigned to them by faculty. Higher education regulations remain too strict in terms of the flexibility in time and space required when working online. Concerning this matter, Louis admitted: "Let me spare you the number of offices I had to contact here and there to find the information needed to fill in the application form for the accreditation of the training course, in order for us to be able to deliver the certification. It can really get complicated!"

Conclusion and overall assessment of the experience

The implementation of a training course like this one was made possible through initial assistance from both institutions. Indeed, even though the course follow-up achieved a successful and satisfactory outcome, the design of additional online training courses would

require time-release, upfront, for tutors. It proved interesting to compare the tutoring approaches as well as to ponder the impact the designers of such training courses may have on follow-up and tutoring. Accordingly, the tutors all agreed that when they are not in charge of designing the course themselves, as was the case with Sylvie and Sandra, they have to be given time to absorb and assimilate the content, so as to able to provide quality support to learners, which was not always the case. This automatically raised the issue of the recognition of online tutoring by the institutions. This training course was systematically and ably designed through ongoing collaboration between the project instructional designers, Sylvie and Sandra, and its developers, Louis and Charles, at both centers. Such exchanges allowed us to achieve the consistency and level of isomorphism we were seeking.

The project leaders agreed that this project turned out to be an enriching experience, namely designing this training course on two different LMSs, which allowed tutors to highlight the portability of the project, regardless of the technology used. As its guiding principle was isomorphism, or "training them as we hope they will train their future trainees," this training course met the expectations of participants on that point and the completion of participant projects provided undeniable proof of it. The participants in this training course were consequently very happy to be able to experience performing various learning tasks on line.

The online course discussed in this case study was innovative in that it included the principle of isomorphism, the immediate implementation of teaching tools, as well as a meta-reflective dimension in the guidance provided. Right from the beginning, participants were immersed in an approach that helped them overcome their fear of new technology and started them thinking about their own teaching strategies, which led them subsequently to imagine the use of consistent and engaging learning sequences. Participants were immediately introduced to a

method relying wholly on consistency. This way, although they admitted it was not easy, 75% of participants were able to design and implement an online project of their own.

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