Developing Collaborative Blended Learning and Knowledge Development in SMEs through Webquest 2.0

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Contribution

Developing Collaborative Blended Learning and Knowledge Development in SMEs through Webquest 2.0

Whilst educational technology has been adopted for use in large enterprises, research suggests there is little use of ICT for learning in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Attwell, 2007). One reason for this may be the limited provision of Continuing Professional Training opportunities in SMEs. Yet SMEs are seen as critical for economic growth and the creation of employment and rapid technological change and changes in materials, ecological and quality requirements and changes in the organisation of work require the development and deployment of new competences.

Through a European Commission funded Transfer of Innovation project, ‘Webquest 2.0 for HTM’, the authors have adopted the Webquest 2.0 approach trialled before for language learning (Perifanou and Mikros, 2009) to the context of Continuing Professional Development in SMEs.

The name 'webquest' is comprised of two parts: a) ‘Web’ – to indicate that the World Wide Web is used as the primary resource in applying, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information, and b) ‘Quest’ – to indicate that a question is presented within the webquest, which encourages learners to search for new meaning and deeper understanding (Pelliccione L. and Craggs G.J., 2007).

Webquest 2.0 activities take advantage of the possibilities that current Web 2.0 technologies offer and are based on a
revised Webquest 2.0 framework created for educators and trainers. “A Webquest 2.0 is an inquiry-oriented activity that takes place in a Web 2.0–enhanced, social and interactive open learning environment, in which the learner can create his or her own learning paths choosing different tools and the on line resources needed for the completion of the Webquest 2.0” (Perifanou, 2011).

The aim is to develop effective, complex, authentic learning and training environments. Trainers should be able to design and develop their own content and generate learning materials that can help their trainees and can also be shared with others.

The development of the Webquest 2.0 approach is based on the Collaborative Blended Learning Model (CBLM) (Perifanou, 2012). There are four key elements to the model. Firstly the model is based on the idea that Webquest 2.0 activities can be undertaken face to face, in a blended model of face-to-face and online learning, or purely on line. Secondly it is based on a mix of individual and small group activities which collectively allow participants to explore a larger question or theme. Thirdly the Webquest 2.0 should generate outcomes which can form an organisational learning resource for a community of practice beyond the initial learning activities. Finally the Webquests 2.0 are based on a seven-stage model - Learning Circles - which both scaffolds learning and provides templates for trainers to create Webquests.

The model and the Webquests 2.0 are being piloted with SMEs in Poland, the UK and Sweden.

Method

In the first phase of the project the Collaborative Blended Learning model was elaborated resulting in the publication of a research handbook. Based on this model twenty initial Webquests 2.0 were developed in close collaboration between trainers and project partners. Following this, a handbook for trainers was produced and an evaluation framework developed. The Webquests 2.0 and handbook are currently being piloted in workshops with SMEs in Poland and the UK. This includes workshops piloting the webquests developed in the initial phase of the project and workshops for trainers to produce Webquests 2.0 themselves for use in their organisations.

The outcomes of these workshops will be evaluated, and the research handbook and handbook for trainers revised. This, in turn, will lead to another round of piloting in SMEs in the late spring of 2012.

The initial Webquests 2.0 utilise a commercial wiki, PB works, as the main technical platform. It is intended to transfer the Webquests 2.0 to an Open Source wiki to minimise costs for deployment by SMEs.

Expected Outcomes

There are a series of hypotheses which are being tested through the project.

Firstly, the project is developing an updated Web 2.0 approach to webquests for HRM seeking to scaffold learning in a Web 2.0–enhanced, social and interactive open learning environment.

Secondly the project is transferring an approach and methodology for learning in a Web 2.0–enhanced, social and interactive open learning environment previously developed in a higher education and language learning context for training in SMEs.

Thirdly the project is seeking to develop a flexible approach to learning in a Web 2.0–enhanced, social and interactive open learning environment, facilitating a mixture of Face to face Blended and online learning.

Fourthly the project is seeking to facilitate the development of wiki based learning materials by trainers themselves.

Fifthly the project is seeking to develop an approach to developing organisational knowledge resources for communities of practice though training activities.

The evaluation of the initial workshops are extremely positive. The paper will be based on a full evaluation of the project activities and will explore the success or otherwise of our initial hypotheses.

References


Perifanou M. (2011) Web 2.0 - New era of Internet tools in learning and teaching Italian as a foreign language - WebQuest

This proposal is part of a master or doctoral thesis.

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