Blended learning for training interpreter trainers

CLASS, Barbara, MOSER-MERCER, Barbara, SEEBER, Kilian

Abstract
The Certificate program for interpreter trainers will embed one week of face-to-face teaching in a ten month distance learning program. The community portal will act both as learning environment supporting socio-constructivist pedagogical scenarios and as a platform for discussion of topics pertaining to the training of interpreters in general. This is designed to support changes in the profession necessary to facilitate a paradigmatic shift in training. The portal can be accessed from http://certificate.eti.unige.ch/training/.

Reference

Available at:
http://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:39604

Disclaimer: layout of this document may differ from the published version.
Blended learning for training interpreter trainers

Barbara Class
*TECFA-FPSE (Educational Technologies and Learning)*
University of Geneva
54 rte des Acacias, CH-1227 Genève-Acacias, Switzerland
Barbara.Class@tecfa.unige.ch

Barbara Moser-Mercer
*Ecole de Traduction et d'Interprétation*
University of Geneva
40, boulevard du Pont-d'Arve, CH-1211 Genève 4, Switzerland
Barbara.Moser@eti.unige.ch

Kilian G. Seeber
*Ecole de Traduction et d'Interprétation*
University of Geneva
40, boulevard du Pont-d'Arve, CH-1211 Genève 4, Switzerland
Kilian.Seeber@eti.unige.ch

Abstract
The Certificate program for interpreter trainers will embed one week of face-to-face teaching in a ten month distance learning program. The community portal will act both as learning environment supporting socio-constructivist pedagogical scenarios and as a platform for discussion of topics pertaining to the training of interpreters in general. This is designed to support changes in the profession necessary to facilitate a paradigmatic shift in training. The portal can be accessed from http://certificate.eti.unige.ch/training/.

Keywords: training of interpreter trainers, blended learning, e-learning, community portal.

1 Simultaneous interpreting: the beginnings

While the demand for conference interpreters in traditional language combinations (the more widely used languages) is decreasing, the need for experts in less widely used languages is increasing rapidly as the European Union enlarges and the number of official languages increased from 11 to 20 on May 1, 2004. Post-war peace-keeping operations as well as war-crime tribunals have also increased the need for high-level interpreters in languages hitherto not used in the international arena.

Accountability in education has become de rigueur across the educational establishment and interpreter training programs which are now usually affiliated with universities cannot escape this trend. The world’s first interpreters were certainly not trained, but as far back as the XIIth century a French lawyer advised his King to set up a school for interpreters for use in the Middle East and more particularly in the Holy Land during the crusades. Yet, this is different from what is known today as a school of interpreting, or an interpreter training program, the first of its kind was founded in Geneva in 1941 as *L'Ecole d'interprètes.* It was there that modern conference interpreting was first taught, in part by self-trained
interpreters who had gained considerable professional experience in the League of Nations and the International Labor Organization. The use of simultaneous interpretation at the Nuremberg Trials required extensive selection and training. Simultaneous interpreting, in the form it was to be used at Nuremberg, had not existed before. What Léon Dostert, who passes as the inventor of simultaneous interpreting, often called “spontaneous, immediate interpretation” (Uiberall, quoted in Gaiba 1998) was to be a revolutionary new system that would allow, for the first time, for extemporaneous speech to be interpreted on-line. Until then the only form of interpreting known was consecutive. Alfred Steer who tested more than 400 people in a year for the Nuremberg Trials concluded that only 5% had the ability to interpret simultaneously (Gaiba 1998). In addition to language proficiency, resilience to stress, and the ability to concentrate, mental agility to find equivalents under pressure, physical stamina to keep up high-level performance over time, as well as good voice quality and clear enunciation were required.

While we know of the difficulties encountered by the Translation Division to recruit a sufficient number of interpreters for the Trials (Gaiba 1998), very little is known about the training received by those who were recruited. Interpreters selected to work in the courtroom were given training sessions in the form of mock trials; they would read documents to each other and improvise speeches with their colleagues interpreting simultaneously. With the speed of speeches increasing gradually, feedback was provided on the interpreters’ accuracy, voice quality and overall performance.

At about the same time as simultaneous interpreting was first used (even before the Nuremberg Trials) at the International Labor Organization Conference in 1928, Russian interpreters experimented with the technique at the VIth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in 1928. In 1928 the Krasnaya Niva magazine published a picture showing interpreters sitting in chairs in front of the podium. Around their necks they had saddle-like gadgets supporting the microphones. They had no telephones and the sound was reaching them directly from the rostrum… (Gofmann 1963:20).

Nothing is known, however, about the training of the first Russian interpreters. Records about training interpreters in the USSR begin with the return of interpreters from the Nuremberg Trials.

Dostert remembered how he had to scour the world for qualified interpreters when he wanted to succeed with the introduction of simultaneous interpretation at the United Nations in 1946/47. There were two sides to the training: on the one hand the interpreters had to acquire simultaneous interpreting skills and on the other they had to prepare the topics of the speeches they would have to interpret during the test period. Priceman remembers these training sessions as follows:

…we had daily training sessions, which consisted of usually reading verbatim records of actual meetings and kicking them back and forth and critiquing them and substituting them. (Priceman quoted in Baigorri 2004:64)

Apparently the thematic training was very hard for the interpreters involving hours and hours of intense study and rote memorization of
documents such as the UN Charter. When the 1947 UN General Assembly opened visitors sat in awe as they were able to receive the speeches in five languages on their little sets.

1.1 First manuals on teaching simultaneous interpreting
In 1952, Jean Herbert published his ground-breaking book “Le manuel de l’interprète” in Geneva (Herbert 1952). As far as strategies for simultaneous interpreting are concerned he covers them on about four pages in thirteen points (Herbert 1952:29ff) and recommends that the best option would be to attend an interpreters’ school; but concedes that self-coaching is entirely feasible. He identifies three kinds of difficulties: (1) producing a sentence or an idea while listening to another sentence or idea, thus having to understand and retain at the same time; (2) having to interpret simultaneously into another language despite the fact that some words won’t come to mind easily; (3) disposing of considerable lexical resources in a large number of subject fields. His writings continue to be received wisdom. It was not until 1958 that the next “manual” appeared. Gérard Ilg published three articles in successive issues of L’Interprète (1958:3 Consecutive interpreting, 1959:1 Simultaneous interpreting, 1959:2/3 Voice training) which in 1959 were republished as a single offprint under the title: “L’enseignement de l’interprétation à l’Ecole d’Interprètes de l’Université de Genève”. He provided more detailed recommendations on how to acquire the skill of simultaneous interpreting. In 1989 Seleskovitch and Lederer published their Pédagogie raisonnée de l’interprétation which translated into didactic recommendations the essentials of their théorie du sens: for the first time an approach to teaching simultaneous interpreting rested on a theoretical foundation.

1.2 First colloquia and short training modules
In 1965 AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence) organized its first colloquium on the teaching of interpreting (AIIC 1965) which brought together interpreter trainers from the leading schools at the time, Paris-ESIT, Geneva-ETI, Paris HEC, and Heidelberg. This was a time of stock-taking and more detailed descriptions of “how to teach” simultaneous interpreting, but no structured approach had yet emerged for the training of interpreter trainers. With another colloquium on interpreter training in Trieste in 1989 and one in Brussels organized by AIIC in 1991 it became clear that certain pedagogical principles and a more theoretical approach to interpreter training were emerging to replace the intuitive approach of the early beginnings. With the fall of the Berlin wall AIIC organized a large number of visits to countries in central and eastern Europe where interpreting had not been practiced the same way as in the West. Each of these visits featured a training component, with the exception of a visit to Poland that was entirely devoted to training interpreter trainers in 1994. It was this experience of training interpreter trainers in short modules to an audience that was not very receptive to student-centered learning as well as the apparent dearth of training opportunities for trainers that ultimately inspired the creation of the Certificate course for interpreter trainers at the Ecole de traduction et d’interprétation (ETI) in 1996.
1.3. The Certificate for interpreter trainers

The Certificate was supposed to be a post-graduate degree course for experienced conference interpreters interested in teaching interpreting at university level. However, post-graduate course admission at the University of Geneva cannot depend on prior professional experience; thus the course was offered as a continuing education course. This facilitated admission of candidates from around the world who did not need to apply for residence permits in Switzerland. The course curriculum was approved by the highest authorities of the University and was binding on the first and each successive edition of the course. It featured 20 ECTS which included 80 hours of face-to-face instruction at ETI, 20 hours of class-room observation at ETI, a written seminar paper (completed via e-mail) and teaching exams at ETI. The course had an international faculty. It quickly became well-known for its structured, comprehensive and intensive approach to teacher training and was regularly oversubscribed as the face-to-face nature of the course meant that we could not admit more than 16 students each time. Course evaluations were consistently excellent; however, interpreters are an extremely mobile group of professionals, often working in two or three different countries a week, European enlargement with its attendant need for professional interpreters in an array of new languages was looming and it was clear that the Certificate, while by no means broke, needed to be fixed.

2 Evolution of the Certificate

With Internet becoming increasingly available around the world and with information on experiences in distance teaching and learning being published more widely, offering the Certificate in a new format became a tangible reality supported generously by a special development grant from the Rectorate of the University of Geneva. The new format meets the needs of a highly mobile group of professionals without sacrificing the privileged small group pedagogical approach that was practiced in previous face-to-face editions of the Certificate.

2.1 Blended learning

Blended learning was developed by the second e-learning generation dissatisfied with the first generation’s “page-turner” approach and keen on experimenting with various strategies for course planning. Today blended learning refers not only to the delivery modality - face-to-face and on-line sessions - but to a whole set of didactic concepts such as self-paced and collaborative learning, structured and unstructured learning, custom and off-the-shelf content, supplementing learning with practice and just-in-time performance.

Since blended learning is conceptually related to the constructivist approach that considers learning as an anchored continuous process, the choice of blending can be rooted in the attempt to go beyond the media’s limits. Facilitating learners’ knowledge transfer skills during the learning process is the key objective of blended learning. There is very little formal research on the actual benefit of blending on the learning process but it
appears to render learning more effective. (Singh 2003; Dean et al. 2001; Khan Badrul 2001).

In terms of the aforementioned conceptual approach the Certificate is the result of rich blending. Regarding modalities, one week of face-to-face teaching at ETI will be embedded in a ten-month distance learning program. The first five months of the distance learning component will allow learners to work on projects and prepare the intensive one-week face-to-face learning component. The latter will provide learners with the opportunity to lay the foundation for researching and writing their individual seminar papers to be completed during the second distance learning component. Learners will ultimately come back to Geneva for their teaching exams: teaching three classes at ETI to students enrolled in the graduate program for conference interpreters. This might be an occasion to have all learners meet face-to-face again for a one year Certificate debriefing. In addition learners will be engaged in explicit collaborative learning such as writing joint reports, as well as in implicit collaborative activities such as participating in forums or engaging in peer-tutoring. Planned learning activities are thus complementary, self-paced and collaborative. In order to supplement learning with practice and just-in-time performance, project based learning will force learners to deal with cases taken from real interpreters’ training for which they will need to provide well reasoned and realistic solutions. Exams, as mentioned above, are also practice driven since learners will prepare and teach real face-to-face classes to regular ETI students.

2.2 Pedagogical framework

Certificate courses can be considered part of second generation e-learning in that they engage learners in rich activities and are learner centered. Courses are clearly embedded in the constructivist approach to learning: learning is an ongoing process of interaction between the learner’s own cognitive structures and his or her environment and the feedback received from this environment. Each action on the environment – i.e. any learning experience - produces a cognitive change which will in turn initiate a new action on the environment. In this learning paradigm, the teacher’s role is to provide the learner with rich experiences in a given environment, which in turn allow him to develop appropriate interactions conducive to cognitive change.

This constructivist perspective on learning also features an explicitly social dimension. It has been shown (Perret-Clermont 2000) that interacting with peer learners influences the learner’s cognitive development. Socio-cognitive conflict occurs, for instance, whenever individual representations clash as a result of reality resisting pre-established mental schemes. For the cognitive conflict to benefit the learner’s cognitive development it is nevertheless important that the cognitive differential between two peers is not too significant (Perret-Clermont 2000). Much research in collaborative learning (Dillenbourg et al. 1996) also focuses on the cognitive distance between two peer learners. Vygotsky (1978) uses the term zone of proximal development to characterize the difference between a learner’s capacity to solve a problem on his own as opposed to working on it with a peer.
2.3 Project based learning (PBL)

We also engage learners in project-based learning. In order to reap the benefits from this learning paradigm, we created activities demanding production, commentary on peer productions and tutor feedback. This is in keeping with the intended objective of project-based learning (PBL) which Synteta defines as “a teaching and learning model (curriculum development and instructional approach) that focuses on the central concepts of a discipline, engages students in complex activities based on challenging questions, includes a community of inquiry, shifts away from traditional teacher-centered teaching and emphasizes student-centered instruction. It allows students to work autonomously to construct their own learning, and culminates in realistic, student-generated products” (Synteta 2002:1). Rooted both in constructivist and collaborative approaches, project based learning allows learners to develop high level learning skills.

2.4 The support structure

The concept of networked learning emerged a few years ago in the field of distance education. Learners, teachers, tutors, experts and all other actors that may be involved in the teaching and learning process, are distributed but in close interaction; it is “learning in which information and communications technology is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources” (Goodyear 2001). In the Certificate, networked learning will support project based learning, course tutoring or simply the learning community. As a matter of fact a Tutoring Support Structure (TSS) is set up both to develop and support learners’ autonomy and to provide appropriate collaborative and individual coaching.

The support structure acts on three levels as shown below in table 1 (Class 2003): institutional, material and cognitive. Having discussed the Certificate’s pedagogical framework, we will now take a closer look at support in terms of actors and technology involved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support level</th>
<th>Modules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Human Resources Training Tutor roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>Choice of learning environment Support tools for tutors Knowledge management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Activity scaffolding tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Tutoring Support Structure

Regarding human resources, seven teachers-designers are involved in designing course modules. In this first blended edition of the Certificate, they will also act as tutors for their respective course modules. Before becoming active in the field though, tutors will be trained; one aspect of the training will consist in placing the tutor in the same learning conditions as
learners. Tutors are often requested to act in a learning environment they have never experienced as a learner and thus develop inappropriate feedback. By offering them the opportunity to experience the learner’s environment first-hand allows them to grasp the various learning elements and to understand all facets of the learning environment. Learners will benefit from two types of tutors: a referential tutor, the one who will direct their individual seminar papers, and regular coaching tutors who will coach them in the different Certificate course modules. Regular tutors will organize virtual seminars, coach learners in their learning activities, provide learners with feedback, social support and encouragement. This should create both a confidence-based learner-tutor relationship and a stimulating learning atmosphere. In addressing the material level we arrived at technological choices that fit the pedagogical orientation adopted for the Certificate: a community portal as learning environment.

2.5 Learning environment: a portal
Technically speaking, “systems such as PostNuke offer a good set of core portal functionalities: a good user administration system, a news/journal system, web links sharing, search, FAQs, polls and more. In addition, an impressive number of extra modules like collaborative hypertexts, picture galleries, simple content management systems, event calendars, chats, project managers, file-upload, and glossary management are available. Many web-applications that existed beforehand as stand-alone applications are adapted for integration into portal systems like PostNuke” (Schneider et al. 2002:6). We considered this system the most appropriate to support the Certificate, especially since it has been used in education under the label of C3MS (Community, Collaboration and Content Management Systems). This interactive modular system that can be adapted and configured to host and support the development of a community, sounded particularly attractive both as learning environment for the Certificate and as community portal for the entire community of interpreters trainers.

2.6 The Certificate portal
Three main profiles with related interfaces of the portal are implemented: 1) the anonymous profile that targets any interpreter concerned with interpreter training issues; 2) the learner profile offering specific learning spaces; and 3) the teacher profile with added management tools for evaluation.

2.6.1 Anonymous interface
The screenshot below gives the reader an idea of the kind of information the anonymous user will be able to find on this portal and how he or she will be able to participate. The center column contains institutional information about the certificate. The left column groups information concerning the home institution. It features a forum on interpreter training issues and a gallery of past seminar papers by learners who completed the Certificate in the past. The right column is dedicated to information relevant to all professional interpreters: links to the AIIC website, to important on-line journals on interpretation, to a bibliography on
interpreting pedagogy and to international conference calendars in the field of interpreting research.

![Figure 1: Screenshot of the Certificate portal: the anonymous interface](image)

2.6.2 Learner interface

As for the learner profile, information is structured according to course organization and activities. The screenshot below shows the different items available: faculty provides biographies of teachers; modules gives access to detailed activities of each course module of the Certificate; in the library learners will find articles that are required reading for the different course modules; learners will engage actively in forum discussions available from the forum item; chat is available to support either virtual seminars or informal chat sessions; the activity folders constitute the learners’ space do upload their course work and receive tutor feedback; the latter will be complemented by the journal where learners are invited to write regularly on their learning process in the Certificate course; any collaborative report writing can be facilitated in the wiki which is a collaborative hypertext; and finally, at the end of each course module, learners will be able to put together their own portfolio. Learners and teaching staff can always refer to the calendar where all the relevant deadlines are posted. Additional items, such as polls can be added from time to time for extra animation.
2.7 The Certificate modules and their adaptation

In this last section, we shall present the Certificate program and give some examples of blended activities that provide for the rich environment both learners and teachers can benefit from. Modules are presented in their chronological order of presentation during the Certificate course.

2.7.1 Fundamentals of distance learning

Following a learning-by-doing approach, this first module is administered entirely at distance, gradually introducing learners to the new medium and allowing them to explore the potential of the various tools available on the portal. Beside becoming familiar to the portal and its tools, both pedagogically and technologically speaking (i.e. learn where to find a guide and use it and learn to post a message in a forum), learners will receive a conceptual introduction to teaching and learning with community portals. Furthermore, they will be provided with a conceptual framework to analyze media used for educational purposes. Finally they will get involved in a collaborative activity where they will have to write a pedagogical scenario for a tailored web based activity addressed to interpreters.

2.7.2 The interpreting process

This introductory module elucidates some of the most prominent cognitive processes pertaining to interpreting, describing specific demands on the interpreter in a variety of workplace settings. The aim of the module is to provide learners with a thorough understanding of the skills and sub-skills involved in the task at hand. Furthermore, learners learn how resources can be allocated, shifted and economized to meet specific demands.

Turning this module into a distance module gives learners ample time to complete their reading assignments and carry out a more thorough and structured analysis of particular issues by means of short written essays (to be uploaded and corrected). An online forum provides learners with a platform for discussion of the issues at hand with less rigorous time constraints. Finally, the visual aids used for this module in the past i.e.
diagrams and flow charts, lend themselves to be integrated in interactive online exercises. As this is an introductory module and in order to avoid alienating learners, the theoretical basis required to complete the module is conveyed in the form of a web-streamed video nugget.

2.7.3 Developing expertise in interpreting
The primary focus of this module is on skill development. Starting from the general notion of expertise as used in the cognitive psychology paradigm, learners acquire a more thorough understanding of the notions of learning, ergonomics, memory, reasoning and knowledge representation. They then go on to identify the factors and skills that distinguish a novice from an expert and apply them to the interpreting paradigm. This module will also feature a web-streamed nugget recorded by the instructor for the Consortium European Masters in Conference Interpreting (www.emcinterpreting.net).

2.7.4 Teaching consecutive interpreting
The module on teaching consecutive interpreting draws on what learners have learned about the interpreting process and the development of expertise to perform a detailed component analysis of the consecutive interpreting process. After the skills required for consecutive interpreting have been identified, the focus shifts onto how they can be acquired. Other major topics of this module include note taking systems, the students’ progression as well as the sequencing of materials. Learners will have to choose or draft a short text (amounting to 2-3 minutes of improvised speech) considered appropriate as a note-taking exercise for beginners. Learners will then be engaged in commenting each other’s choices providing constructive feedback. Finally learners will vote for the five most appropriate texts and this choice will be discussed in Geneva in terms of why the texts are suited for this particular stage in the learning process.

2.7.5 Teaching simultaneous interpreting
The module on teaching simultaneous interpreting builds and expands on what learners have learned about consecutive interpreting and compares and contrasts it with the characteristics of simultaneous interpreting. Skill analysis, progression and sequencing of materials are important components of this module, which also touches upon the notion of stress and identifies coping mechanisms.

2.7.6 Curriculum and syllabus design and lesson planning
This module provides learners with in depth knowledge on how to draft a curriculum, a syllabus and a lesson plan and how the three relate to one another. Moreover, learners learn about the advantages of a structured approach and explore and implement features to enhance their curricula, syllabi and lesson plans. Searching the Internet, learners will have to identify a number of interpretation programs at different levels, find their curricula and post the links and their description in an appropriate tool on the portal. Groups of four learners will then choose two programs and describe in which way
they differ from each other (graduate/undergraduate/short course; graduate/graduate; graduate/short course, or undergraduate/short course). In a third phase, the same groups will be involved in designing a curriculum according to appropriate scaffolding tools offered. The first phases are more discursive and will be held in the forum, the third one will be more reflexive and constructed. Throughout the activity, a tutor will coach learners, provide them with formative feedback and the teacher will follow and participate in forum discussions.

2.7.7 Evaluating classroom performance: feedback
In this module learners learn about the importance of feedback, explore different evaluation systems and draw up a common nomenclature with the aim of providing and receiving effective feedback in class. Several feedback instruments are discussed and used in practical exercises. Learners will be provided with four questions about how feedback is offered and received. In the forum, each of them shall remember a learning experience and answer these four questions. In groups of four, they will discuss their ways of providing and receiving feedback in reference to that learning experience, and look for points of overlap and disagreement. A tutor will coach the group to help learners build an increasingly professional approach to feedback. One learner will then report to the community how this group experienced feedback both theoretically and practically. Once in Geneva, learners, teacher and tutor will review and develop the findings obtained at distance, and discuss different ways of keeping records. Learners will have a chance to observe and experiment with different approaches to offering face-to-face feedback after having experienced approaches to offering Internet mediated feedback.

2.7.8 Court interpreting
In this module learners gain insight into the field of legal interpreting. Legal interpreting is compared and contrasted to conference interpreting, with the primary focus on the notions of ethics and accuracy. Learners are provided with a list of websites (National and Local Courts, International Courts, Professional Associations). They are asked a number of questions, i.e., compare and contrast the treatment of language issues in the courts’ procedures, to the extent that this can be determined from the website. They will then engage in peer tutoring and comment on each other's productions. The tutor will provide feedback for a second time and the teacher will animate a debriefing session at the end of the activity with global formative feedback.

2.7.9 The interpreter’s voice
This module focuses on the interpreter’s voice as a tool and teaches learners how to use this tool to their advantage. Breathing techniques, relaxation- and voice-building exercises are some of the issues touched upon in this module. Due to the very practical nature of this module, it will be administered entirely using traditional face-to-face teaching.
2.7.10 Research Methodology

This final module is an introduction to the scientific perspective on conference interpreting. It provides learners with an overview of different research paradigms from the pre-research period in the 50s and 60s to the interdisciplinary period in the 90s and constitutes the scaffolding for their individual research projects, i.e., their seminar papers. The aim of this module is to give learners a better understanding of the interpreting process as seen through the eyes of researchers and practitioners throughout the past 50 years. What is more, learners familiarize themselves with scientific language and with the terminology inherent to the paradigm. The goal is for them to learn how to critically read and write a scientific paper.

3 Conclusion

With this portal we hope to offer a fresh perspective to interpreter training involving professional interpreter trainers from around the world discussing the paradigmatic shift; this objective is supported and facilitated by the community portal. As Wenger puts it, this community of interpreter trainers may develop with the help of those being actively engaged in the field of interpreter training as well as through the input of individuals interested in developing an identity in this community. Active engagement may be experienced as a negotiation of meaning within the community as well as a shared history of learning, whereas identity may give the individual a chance to adopt a position in a growing social system (Wenger 1998).

4 Bibliography


