

PLE for language Learning: Sharing Expectations

Celine Restrepo Zea, Nadia Spang Bovey
University of Lausanne

Eduhub interactive session summary / 02.02.2009 / 16-17h

How to foster learner autonomy in language learning and language lifelong learning has always been considered an important issue for the Language Centre of the Université de Lausanne. Over the years, various learning environments have been implemented, trying to reflect a learner centered approach. We would like to share with you some of the issues resulting from our last shift: moving from a LMS to a PLE-like structure. Namely, our major concern is to identify how it will impact the teaching and learning processes.

Learning a language is specific in that it requires the stimulation of various operations simultaneously (lexical, phonological, grammatical...), it confronts people from the very beginning to high levels of expertise in the domain through unpredictable communicative situations and the knowledge acquired is rapidly obsolete and lost if not practiced on a regular basis. Additionally, according to the cultural experiences (background) and plurilingual profile, everyone's knowledge ASSETS are different. Just as learning goals and needs might diverge from people to people. Hence, how to foster learner autonomy in language learning and language lifelong learning have always been considered a major issue for the Language Centre of the Université de Lausanne.

The teaching structure at the Language Centre, constituted of 2 periods in group work and 1 or 2 periods at the multimedia room with access to an online platform has thus been conceived in such a way as to put the learner at the center of the learning, providing him not only with linguistic and communicative activities but also with learning strategies and support to help him manage his own learning.

Over the years, various learning environments have been implemented, trying to reflect a learner centered approach. The learning device should provide learners with access to reflexive tasks such as learning activities (online group activities, audio exercises, CD-Rom), resources on learning strategies, European Language Portfolio to document the learning process and self-assess it, and "just-in-time" tools that might be required when working on a language (listing vocabulary, setting objectives, searching for activities, contacting the tutor, personalized tools such as RSS feed, dictionaries, taking notes).

In a constant preoccupation to improve the adequacy between the device and the teaching philosophy, we have rethought the architecture of the online tools we offer the learners. Indeed, we intend to move from a rigid LMS structure to a dynamic PLE-like structure with the learner at the center of the system.

-> The question we would like to ask is: How would you react to such an environment? Do you think it would help you manage your learning or on the contrary, do you think it would disturb your learning process?

→ The new interface is demo-ed by a Flash animation showing the principle of a central working space surrounded by adaptable widgets.

The screenshot shows a language learning interface with a central workspace and several surrounding widgets. The central workspace contains a vocabulary table with columns for 'mot', 'usage grammatical', 'catégorie de communication', 'traduction : usage', 'traduction : mct', and 'statistiques'. The table lists words like 'abstrait', 'abstraire', 'accastillage', 'anchor', 'ancre', 'fittings', 'théorique', and 'un résumé' with their respective grammatical uses and communication categories. Below the table are buttons for 'Exercer tous les mots', 'Exercer les usages rouges + noirs', 'Exercer les traductions rouges + noires', and 'Exercer les mots sélectionnés'. A red arrow points to the 'Exercer les traductions rouges + noires' button with the text 'Drag and drop'.

Surrounding widgets include:

- Top Left:** UNIL | Université de Lausanne logo and navigation menu (Nouvelles, Machine de recherche, PEL, Activités, Outils, Ressources, Contacter, Personnel, Fr | Ang).
- Left Side:** 'Connecté sous:(déconnecter)', 'Choix du cours', 'Ajouter / Supprimer des widgets', 'Afficher un widget', 'Mémos' (New Item: high retravailler Comp. orale DA T05, med weekly voc test, low contact Cindy for theater, low watch NCIS in English!), 'Vocabulaire' (Nouveau mot: english, Usage grammatical, Catégorie grammaticale, Traduction, Usage, Mot), 'Recherche d'activité' (Langues: Allemand, Niveau: A2, Mots clés: Chercher).
- Bottom Left:** 'OU News' widget with links like 'How should ethics be built into our strategies for business, for government—and for life?' and 'The genius of evolution: The Open University Darwin celebrations begin'.
- Bottom Right:** 'Journal d'apprentissage' and 'Personnel - dictionnaire' widgets.

Answers and reactions of the participants:

1. One proposition: to provide a "current activity reminder" widget
2. Several participants would like to be able to display few or no widgets at all (single button, eg.)
3. Five or so participants say they are already used to this kind of interface but not for learning purposes; they probably would be curious and stimulated
4. Two middle-aged persons spotted out that they might need bigger display fonts; describing themselves as conservative learners, they think they would get disturbed by a PLE-like environment
5. Some people would not like to display widgets not necessary to their current activity
6. Personalisation: widgets could be colour-coded; stored configurations
7. A good introduction should be provided to reduce the anxiety of not knowing how to begin to learn/work
8. Someone reported that it would be better that our tools be usable in other (unstructured) PLE - nice to integrate external tools but ...