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I. CONTINUATION IN INTERNATIONAL COURSE COLLABORATION

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Abstract

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION IN education is an important way of offering students authentic learning situations. Organizing courses together with an international partner is one of the easiest ways to ensure that authenticity, but what happens if the international partner is no longer able to continue offering joint courses?

Two TAMK teachers encountered this problem with their on-line course English Speaking and Listening. The partner the course had originally been created and taught with could no longer participate, and TAMK teachers still wished to offer the course in their curriculum. A new international partner had to be found, quickly, and they needed to be ready to start facilitating the course on quite a short notice. Where did the new partner come from and how were they instructed to pick up the course contents, structure and pedagogy within just a few months?

Now, within the four years of being offered at TAMK, the course in question has been taught with four different international partner teachers from three different countries

Finding new partners

Internationality in education is an important matter: the students benefit greatly from being able to collaborate in diverse, cross-cultural teams operating in environments that reflect the working life reality of the 21st century. In addition, especially for English

courses, creating a setting where students are faced with an authentic situation where the only shared language is English is always a good thing in terms of motivation and authenticity. Being able to offer this chance to students every year is important from the perspective of equality and continuity, but it is certainly not always easy, as curricula in different partner schools change, people switch jobs, and occasionally previous teaching partners need to discontinue collaboration for other numerous reasons.

English Speaking and Listening is an on-line course created and taught by two TAMK teachers and one international partner teacher. The process of constructing the course is described in more detail in the article *Creating an On-line Course with a Foreign Partner* (Annala & Leikomaa, 2017) and the student experience is outlined in the article *English Speaking & Listening – International On-Line Course & Student Experience* (Leikomaa & Annala, 2018). The first time the need for a new partner came up for that course, the TAMK teachers were not entirely prepared for it. Luckily, TAMK Language Centre was organising an international week at the same time, and during one of the networking sessions in the week, a new partner was found – just a few weeks before the course was about to begin. In another case, an implementation with a new partner had already begun, when the teacher who had originally agreed to the collaboration had to drop out. In this case, he found a replacement himself, but the new teacher had to be introduced to the course and the materials after the course had already begun. This, too, proved to be possible, but required a bit more time from the TAMK teachers in terms of orientation and guidance.

Later, as the need for new teaching partners has repeatedly arisen, the networks created during language teachers' own international

weeks have proven to be invaluable. For the spring semester 2019, the TAMK teachers were again faced with a situation where none of the partners they had taught the course with previously could offer it in their curricula. To address this problem, they contacted their networks and sent out a short email describing the course idea and asking for interest in teaching collaboration, and almost immediately they received more than a dozen positive answers from international partners in Europe and Brazil, which meant that they were now in a position to choose from a number of interested partners. Thus, it is safe to say that having regular international weeks for the teachers, where the main focus has been on learning from one another and on networking, has indeed proven to be a useful practice in view of situations like this.

Course structure

The course was structured into three sections, each lasting three weeks. The idea was to have a separate teacher for each section – this also meant that the workload for the teachers was fairly manageable. Each section contained materials created by the teachers, on-line tasks for the students to do together in small, multinational groups, and one on-line meeting with a teacher. The first section also concentrated on forming the small groups.

All three sections followed the same format and, the dead-lines for the student tasks – and, consequently, teacher feedback – were distributed evenly over the 3-week periods. This made the course very accessible to teachers who had never seen it before, and they were able to quickly grasp the structure and format of the course. In addition, the spread-out deadlines given already at the start of the course meant they could plan their own schedule more efficiently.



As each teacher was in charge of their own section, the TAMK teachers who had already taught the course before could be in charge of sections one and two, which enabled the new teacher to observe for six weeks what kind of feedback the students were given and how the TAMK teachers communicated with them, in anticipation for their own section. All new teachers were, naturally, offered the chance to include their own materials and have an impact on the details on what the course included, even though the main structure had already been established.

Sharing on-line

One of the key elements of success has been sharing all the materials with the new teachers right from the beginning. In addition to having the course structured in Eliademy (a free learning management system built on Moodle) that naturally included all the materials created for students, the teachers have used a shared Google Drive folder containing all the administrative documents, such as templates for e-mailing the course information to the students, Eliademy discussion thread starters for different tasks, the grading sheet, students' email addresses, and even feedback given on previous implementations, which was anonymised (students' names had been removed) but still gave the new teachers an indication on what the feedback had been like and should be like.

Sharing materials on-line was made especially easy and organized by having a separate folder on Google Drive for each new implementation of the course. The old materials, which were still relevant, could easily be copied into the new one and then shared with the new teachers, while the previous implementations

materials stayed untouched, just in case they were required later. The same approach was done with the Eliademy learning platform, where a new implementation in Eliademy was created for each new implementation of the course.

Conclusion

The future of the English Speaking and Listening course looks bright from the international collaboration viewpoint. There seems to be great interest all over Europe to participate in it, and the students who have completed the course seem to have gained a lot from it. Introducing new teachers does take a bit of time and effort, but much of it can be done in advance if the course is planned properly and everything is documented in enough detail in a shareable format. Based on the authors' experience, having existing professional networks will be invaluable for teachers willing to have courses where international collaboration is done, as it will greatly facilitate the process of finding new partners, when the need eventually arises.

Sources

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