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Talking My Language

Charles Darwin University / isee-ilearn

Background

Charles Darwin University (CDU) offers a range of [Higher Education](#) degrees and [Vocational Education](#) and Training courses. This project engaged staff and students from the Retail training department for Vocational Education and Training courses.

isee-ilearn produces international information systems that go beyond the written text. This makes the information accessible to all users regardless of literacy levels.

The project team comprised the following people:

CDU

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Paul Fitzsimons | Project Manager |
| Jo Carlesso | Finance |
| Helen Parer | Lecturer Cert 1 Retail (left the project in May) |
| Judy Bell | Team Leader, Lecturer Retail |
| Jennifer Banks | Team Leader, Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Central |
| Richard Waring | Tech Compliance |

isee-ilearn

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|-------------------------|--|
| Christopher Brocklebank | Project Facilitator |
| Louise Cavanagh | Arrernte Materials Production |
| Marion Braun | Project Management Support (left the project in April) |
| Nicky Schonkala | Project Management and Materials Production (July – Nov) |
| MK Turner | Arrernte Materials Production |

Ltyentye Apurte school / community liaison

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|---------------|--|
| Greg Crowe | Principal, Ltyentye Apurte School |
| Imelda Palmer | Ltyentye Apurte Community Education Centre |
| Anna Cavanagh | Ltyentye Apurte Community Education Centre |

The Talking My Language project addresses English literacy barriers for Indigenous students in Central Australia in particular those studying Certificate 1 in Retail Operations. This qualification supports realistic employment opportunities in Aboriginal communities across Central Australia. Trainers and employers in the Retail sector supported this decision to customise learning materials for Retail to be more appropriate for Indigenous students.

The Unit of Competency 'SIRXCOM001A Communicate in the Workplace' was chosen from this Training Package as it could develop skills and knowledge that would be transferable to a range of employment options.



What was done

Stage 1 – April - June 2009

isee-ilearn developed e-learning materials using 'italk' software to customise 'Learning Objects' from the 'Toolbox Learning Objects Repository' for Certificate 1 in Retail Operations. These supported the following units of competency:

- a) Work effectively in a retail environment Toolbox code: 212, Training package: WRR
- b) Retail equipment Toolbox program: 10_01, Training package: SIR

Trialling the materials

Helen Parer, Lecturer, Certificate 1 Retail Operations at CDU trialled the materials with Indigenous adult Certificate 1 Retail students. These students are first speakers of Arrernte and live in the remote Indigenous community Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa).

Outcomes of the trials

The initial use of draft materials was well received by three young Arrernte students. All three students answered the questions in the material (verbal responses in Arrernte and English). This was engaging and was undertaken with a fair bit of laughter, as is often the initial response to hearing one's own voice. In this case added to by hearing one's own voice and own language. The students also worked together to produce additional draft materials on retail communication issues.

The lecturer Helen commented that "the material held the students' attention" and that they "obviously enjoyed using it". However, Helen Parer went on 6 months leave and she and this group of students were therefore unable to continue with the project.

Stage 2 – July - November 2009

Further materials were developed by isee-ilearn using 'italk' software. These were for the Unit of Competency 'SIRXCOM001A Communicate in the Workplace', Element 1 (Establish contact with customers), Performance Criteria 1.1, 1.2 and 1.4.

Content for each Performance Criteria was developed from particular Learning Objects from the 'Toolbox Learning Objects Repository'. See matrix below.

| Performance Criteria | Learning Object |
|--|---|
| 1.1 Maintain a welcoming customer environment | - Communicate in the retail workplace - How do I look? – Customer service - Working effectively in retail |
| 1.2 Greet customer warmly according to store policy and procedures | - Communicate in the retail workplace |
| 1.4 Use questioning and active listening to determine customer needs | - Communicate in the retail workplace - Communication |

Content was also sourced from resource materials used by CDU from Aspire Training and Consulting.

Customising the materials involved:

- modifying the language used to suit the English literacy levels of the targeted learners

Jennifer Banks (Team Leader, Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Central, CDU) advised on the use of appropriate language for Certificate 1 level, and suggested limiting the language wherever possible to 'Dolch' words (a list of high frequency words used in beginning reading programs).

- using images relevant to the learners

Images of local (Alice Springs) retail outlets were used in the resources to encourage learners to identify with the materials and relate to the idea of gaining employment in the local retail industry. Likewise images of a Community Store (from the remote Indigenous community Ltyentye Apurte) were featured, to allow Indigenous retail students to recognise this as a place of employment in a remote setting. It is also a setting that students from remote communities could relate to and understand.

Images of Indigenous people as Retail staff and as customers were used, to give Indigenous students examples they were more able to relate to.



- providing translations of the content in spoken Arrernte

The resources created were made up of digital pages with images and English text. Translations of the text were recorded in spoken Arrernte - the Indigenous language of Alice Springs and some surrounding communities.

- using Indigenous voices for the spoken English

Recordings in English of the written text were made by Arrernte people. This helped to make the material more accessible for the targeted learners, providing a familiar voice and accent.

Trialling the materials

Judy Bell, Lecturer Retail at CDU trialled the materials with Year 10 and Year 12 students at Centralian Senior Secondary College (Alice Springs) who were studying Certificate 1 in Retail Operations at CDU. The students were part of the Gateways program and 95% of the class were Indigenous students, with experience of Indigenous languages.

The italk Elements 1.2 and 1.4 were also trialled with Arrernte speaking Retail workers at Ltyentye Apurte Community Store, and workers at the Ltyentye Apurte Community Education Centre. Feedback was also gained from Arrernte speakers at the Indigenous community Amoonguna.

Outcomes of the trials:

Feedback from users of italk Element 1.1 helped to shape the creation of the italk Elements 1.2 and 1.4. Students responded well to the use of local images featuring Indigenous people and suggested that more Indigenous men be represented in future materials.

Students and staff enjoyed the self-paced learning possible with the resource. Not all of the students were fluent in Arrernte but they did all listen to the spoken Arrernte featured in the materials.

Staff confirmed that the content was appropriate and students enjoyed accessing it via this interactive digital form.

Challenges

Some challenges experienced during the project were:

- Lack of documentation of Stage 1 of the project by isee-ilearn

Little evidence of the materials completed in Stage 1 and documentation of feedback from trial participants meant that Stage 2 did not build on any lessons learnt in Stage 1.

- Changes to the project team

When Helen Parer (Lecturer, Certificate 1 Retail Operations at CDU) went on leave, the target audience for whom the materials were being developed was no longer accessible. Contact was made with Judy Bell (Lecturer, Retail at CDU) to engage her in the project. Judy was required to provide advice on content development and for access to her VET students at Centralian Senior Secondary College (SSSC) to trial the materials. Thankfully Judy agreed to take part in the project.

- Lack of Arrernte speaking people studying Retail

It was difficult to find significant numbers of appropriate people to trial the materials on. The Indigenous retail students at SSSC were not fluent Arrernte speakers. Fluent Arrernte speakers at Ltyentye Apurte were not necessarily studying Retail. Feedback from Arrernte speakers at Ltyentye Apurte and Amoonguna indicated that they liked the

look of the materials and liked having the information presented in spoken Arrernte, however few could comment on whether the resources were useful for their work or training in Retail.

- Community access issues

Cultural business in Ltyentye Apurte sometimes meant that access to the community (and thus work on the project) was restricted.

- Large text component in the materials

The amount of information included in the materials created a challenge for MK Turner the Arrernte translator.

Next time....

- clearly identify a larger target audience to trial the materials with and ensure a reliable and committed group able to participate for the duration of the project
- work more with the trainers (content specialists) involved in the project to identify areas of content most suitable for adaptation to the italk format, and determine how the completed resources could best fit in with the program of delivery
- with further input from the trainers (content specialists) try to reduce the heavy text emphasis of the materials created

Benefits experienced by isee-ilearn

Through this project isee-ilearn has developed the italk software from the initial version (used for Element 1.1) to the new version of italk (used for Element 1.2 and 1.4). This provided an opportunity to trial and modify the new version as it was being used to create materials for the Talking My Language project. The new version of italk suits both PC and Mac computers and gives a more attractive visual appearance for finished materials.

The Talking My Language project has allowed isee-ilearn to continue and enhance its working relationship with the people of Ltyentye Apurte community – to the mutual benefit of both parties. This has created employment opportunities for some members of the community, and the finished materials add to the positive promotion of Ltyentye Apurte. By furthering these relationships isee-ilearn can continue to work with this community on future projects.

isee-ilearn has made contact with trainers through the Flexible Learning network, who may be potential users of the italk software. This networking and participation in the Australian Flexible Learning Framework initiative has increased the profile of isee-ilearn by:

- encouraging isee-ilearn to host the project outcomes on their website
- participation in the National e-Conference 'Exploring e-Innovations' 4 – 5 Nov
- participation in Australian Flexible Learning Framework E-learning Xposed, 2009 Showcase 10 Nov

Lessons learnt

This project has helped isee-ilearn to consider the most suitable applications of the italk software. It is more suited to the creation of resources with less need for large amounts of text. The main benefit of the software is its use for visual and aural effects. For this reason, in applying this tool to develop e-learning resources, more consultation with trainers would be beneficial to identify components of a Training Package or Unit of Competency that can best make use of italk's strengths. With Retail training, for example, italk is ideally suited to customising activities for learners to practice interactions with customers as a simulation of a workplace scenario. In this way it could be used as a self paced activity for students to practice what they have learnt through any other mode of delivery – rather than as the means to convey all of the content for a particular subject.

This project could have benefitted from more input from content specialists and instructional designers. A team incorporating this expertise would have helped to ensure that the materials were suitably structured for best learning outcomes.

It became evident during trialling of the materials that the computer is a popular way to make information available. Students responded well to having learning materials accessible via computer. One trainer commented that it was good for “hard to motivate students”. The trials also reinforced the ease of use of the italk software and its suitability for self paced learning activities.

The results

The Talking My Language project had the following outcomes:

- first experience with e-learning for isee-ilearn
- creation of three interactive digital learning resources for Certificate 1 in Retail Operations customised for Arrernte speakers
- hosting of two of the digital learning resources on the isee-ilearn website
- examples created for translation of Retail training materials into other Indigenous languages and contacts with organisations who may wish to do this (eg Arnhem Land Progress Association has shown interest in translating the materials into Yolgnu Matha)
- greater exposure for isee-ilearn

The experiences of learners trialling the italk resources were captured by giving a survey at the end of the italk resource. Survey questions were presented as written English text / spoken English / spoken Arrernte. Responses to the survey could be recorded orally by the learner directly into the electronic document (spoken in a chosen language), or were recorded via an interview process conducted by a member of the isee-ilearn team.

The survey questions were:

Tell us what you think

1. Did you find this program easy to use?
2. Did you listen to the spoken Arrernte?
3. Did you understand the Arrernte?
4. Did you listen to the spoken English?
5. Did you understand the English?
6. Did you understand the English text?
7. Did you like the pictures?
8. Why / why not?
9. Have you learnt something to help you work in Retail?
10. Would you use other materials like this, spoken in your language?

Retail training staff members gave feedback in discussions with isee-ilearn and via email.

Summary of feedback from participants in the trials:

- all users found the materials easy to use
- all users at Ltyentye Apurte understood the Arrernte
- all users listened to the Arrernte recordings
- all users understood the English written text
- some users also listened to the recorded English and those that did understood the English
- all users liked the pictures because:
 - they showed people working in Retail
 - they were locally based so made it more relevant
 - the colours were bright
 - they showed the Community Store
- all users responded that they would like to see more materials like this, spoken in their language
- images featuring local and well known sporting heroes would have great appeal for the students, both male and female
- one user commented: "This is the best way to educate our kids, using their own language and the pictures from the community".

Reflections and suggestions

The project could have benefitted from more rigorous trialling of the materials, during their development and at completion. In addition to larger numbers of Arrernte speakers – including those studying Retail – the project could have also invited feedback from:

- more Retail trainers (content specialists)
- instructional designers
- people with experience in e-learning
- non-Arrernte speaking Retail workers and Retail students

This may have given more constructive feedback about the design of the resources to ensure that they would be a truly valuable and useful tool to be used after completion of the project. For example, no consideration was made for the relationship of these resources to the 40 Nominal hours allocated for Unit of Competency ‘SIRXCOM001A Communicate in the Workplace’ – and how these italk resources addressing only three Performance Criteria within Element 1 of the unit would realistically fit into a schedule for its delivery. Greater consultation with Retail trainers at the beginning of the project may have identified this and other important considerations to be made.

The target audience for the materials made (Arrernte speaking Retail training students) is very limited. While the project has demonstrated that trial participants appreciate resources made in their language, it seems unfortunate that use of the materials may be limited to such a small and specific group. Hopefully English speaking Retail training students and their trainers would choose to use the resources, benefitting from the English text and audio. Ideally if these examples could act as templates to be translated into other languages, the reach and use of these learning resources would be greater.

In hindsight, perhaps the appeal of the finished products and their adaptation for other audiences could have been considered and factored into the project, to broaden the use of the resources made.

More contact throughout the project with people working on similar projects within the Innovations Program may have been beneficial. The October 1 NT Innovations online catch-up gave valuable awareness that other groups were also sometimes faced with challenges, such as difficulty with access to communities.

Framework connection

The national training system’s e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework¹) funds and supports [E-learning Innovations](#) projects which aim to embed e-learning into the national training system by supporting and enabling innovation in training design and delivery, at the state and territory level.

¹ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>

The Talking My Language project has focussed on training for the Services industry sector by creating e-learning resources for the national Training Package for Certificate 1 in Retail Operations. Learning Objects from the 'Toolbox Learning Objects Repository' relevant to the Unit of Competency 'SIRXCOM001A Communicate in the Workplace', Element 1 (Establish contact with customers), Performance Criteria 1.1, 1.2 and 1.4. were customised to be more suitable for Indigenous students.

In engaging in this E-learning Innovations project, the following Framework products and resources were used:

Learning Objects

- Communicate in the retail workplace
- How do I look? – Customer service
- Working effectively in retail
- Communication

Acknowledgement

This is a Northern Territory [E-learning Innovations](#) project output, developed by Charles Darwin University and isee-ilearn, with seed funding from the Framework.



For more information on the Australian Flexible Learning Framework:

Phone: (07) 3307 4700

Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au

Website: flexiblelearning.net.au