DigiEduHack Solution
Edinburgh - Edinhack: DigiEduHack at the University of Edinburgh
Challenge: Edinburgh - Edinhack: DigiEduHack at the University of Edinburgh Challenge 2020

Community building language practice education space

Building diverse community through language learning and cultural

Through the collaborative creation of a variety of end products, language learners will be able to practice their burgeoning skills in an authentic and interactive way, sharing
their diverse cultures, knowledge and experiences.

Team: Connected Linguists

Team members

Michael Wolfindale, Nuha Al Jabri, Sarah Austin, Jemima Collins and Vilius Slapelis,

Members roles and background

Michael Wolfindale, MSc Digital Education student

Nuha Al Jabri, PG Clinical Education student.

Sarah Austin, PhD Comparative and International Education

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Solution Details

Solution description

The final service we are proposing is broadly termed a 'community building language education space' - this will start small and begin as a set of open educational resources centred around a WordPress platform detailing how to create artefacts to facilitate multimodal interactions for language education. This might, for example, be audio, video or visual artefacts, such as a podcast. Meetings can be both synchronous and asynchronous. Participants of the project will be also highly involved in the creation of the community. Participants can come up with their own ideas and implement it. Over time this can grow into the building of learning spaces specifically built for and by language education students.

Building on concepts such as participatory design and platform corporativism, both the open educational resources and the platform itself will be co-designed and co-created – initially through interdisciplinary collaborations with language, computing and other students 'at' the University of Edinburgh, and later 'opened up' to other communities. This will be done with care, however, to critically consider questions of ethics (e.g. data protection and privacy) during the design and creation processes.

To guide these critical discussions, the principles collaboratively created by the Design Justice Network will be used. They are published in a variety of languages here: https://designjustice.org/read-the-principles

The beginning of these critical discussions is shown in our Miro board within the 'Design framework, principles and ethics' frame. The focus will be around barriers to access, be it technical or social factors. For, as Amy Collier and Jen Ross (2017: 9) put it, 'access is emphatically not enough unless it is seen in a very broad context of social inclusion and social justice'.

The success of the solution could be measured through a regular cycle of feedback from participants, and self-assessment, as well as light touch peer-assessment. Ethnographic research utilising a range of methods (with permission from participants) could be carried out to gain a sense of inclusivity, community and belonging in the spaces.

Solution context

We are facing and solving three key challenges. During COVID-19 crisis many students stay at home and do not feel connected to the university. They feel excluded because they cannot physically attend the campus and take part in various offline activities. Also, staying at home and interacting with others mostly online can make students feel lonely. Lastly, while students do most of their activities at home, they do not have many opportunities to interact with others from different cultures. Our project helps to connect people and make them feel part of the community which they build together by helping each other. Moreover, it connects cultures from across the world. It helps

to explore cultural and other differences.

Solution target group

Students with an interest in language learning and intercultural exchange, who could participate on a voluntary basis.

Solution impact

Our solution helps to connect university students from all cohorts, while at the same time giving an opportunity to practice their language skills. Students will be involved in the creation of the community, they will be able to meet others from different cultures. We will measure it by the amount of students involved in the project.

Solution tweet text

The 'community building language practice education space' is a space to practice languages with others and meet other students. Co-designed by language students 'at Edinburgh' and beyond, it consists of blogs, podcasts and informal communication spaces to practice language skill

Solution innovativeness

Our solution is unique because it allows students to practice their newly acquired skills through the action of authentic and interactive tasks by allowing students at the same time to meet and interact with others from different cultures. It is not just practicing the language, it is becoming a part of diverse community. Students will have a chance to work together, sharing their skills and their cultures in order to create finished products. These products will then go on to help other students to develop their skills. Not only is this an opportunity for face-to-face (virtual) time with other language learners, but it is also a more engaging and effective alternative to the memorization of words and grammar. Studies have demonstrated the need for students to use the language they are learning in such a way in order to aid in their acquisition of the language.

It is also a space that can be used mostly online while we are experiencing Covid and then can be used in a hybrid model when social distancing is reduced. Various meetups can be organized where can meet in person, practice their language skills and create meaningful connections. Also, it provides an opportunity for those students who wish for greater face-to-face educational opportunities, instead of being one among many in a virtual lecture. Another difference is that our plan for development involves speaking to and involving students in the creation of the space and the various project. Giving them a sense of ownership and creation and creating a space that fulfils their needs. Finally, it is a method of learning that helps to create a sense of community and learning about another person and other cultures. These are important tools in the development of students and in promoting a sense of inclusion and belonging to counter the loneliness that is such an issue during this time of Covid.

During our discussions, we were inspired by several pedagogies and technical platforms, such as the connectivism-informed ds106 (http://ds106.us/), CLMOOC (https://clmooc.com/), the 'audio space' High Fidelity (https://www.highfidelity.com/) and so on. However, none addressed the specific challenges of language education in a way that adequately takes a critical design approach and considers barriers to access. Our approach utilising co-design and co-creation – where the 'users' are transformed to 'designers' aims to address this.

Solution transferability

It could feasibly be transferred to language learning contexts outside HE, as well as other cultural contexts, including community education, language exchange programmes, and online language learning communities. The idea of fostering language development and intercultural exchange through learner-generated, co-created content, such as blogs, podcasts synchronous online meetings is highly applicable to non-HE contexts. This would also be a wonderful resource for primary and secondary language teachers, giving ideas to help students to connect, it could potentially be developed further allowing students from around the globe to connect and co-create together.

Solution sustainability

The project could initially be piloted with a cohort of students enrolled on language degrees and computer sciences at Edinburgh as a component of their degree programme. In the longer term, the goal would be to broaden access to and widen participation in the project by promoting and offering it to all Edinburgh students with an interest in language learning and intercultural exchange, who could participate on a voluntary basis. If the project became an established success within Edinburgh University, the longer-term aspiration might be to expand its scope to include other universities and community groups.

It will need some funding as well due to the labour costs and running various platforms. However, it will not be substantial because students will be involved in creating this community for everybody.

Solution team work

The team consists of different people from different backgrounds and fields within the university, which was helpful in building and refining our idea. We worked well together remotely, listening politely to each other's ideas and incorporating aspects of everyone's thoughts into our final project. Our diversity of experiences led to a richer idea, than what we originally began with. We did an equal share of the work, each person working around their other commitments. We believe that we could continue to work together as a team in the future. Especially as future work commitments will be virtual allowing us to remain a team even although we are not located in the same geographic location.