ActivELP Quality Assurance Report
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The purpose of this report is to review the ActivELP website and accompanying Moodle site and guide. The approach I have taken is to work my way through the content and analyse the tools in the following terms

- Do they achieve their aims and objectives?
- Are they easy to use and follow?
- Can I suggest ways of improving the content/organisation of the content?

There are 3 main components

- Mentoring Guidelines which is presented as a document
- A website that offers interactive training material
- An accompanying virtual learning environment in the form of Moodle

Background to the ActivELP
The ActivELP is basically a tool that helps teachers to introduce and use ELPs in their teaching. It proposes a mentoring approach and the idea is that teachers will use the tool in groups maximising opportunities to reflect and discuss the merits and limitations of the approach. It could be used individually too but to maximise its effectiveness and to gain the most from the tasks, a shared experience would seem much more appropriate.

The website introduces ActivELP in the following way

ActivELP project proposes 2 channels:

- **mentoring-** will ensure the access to the **European Language Portfolio** by groups and individual learners allowing to practice the **ELP** through interaction;
- **multimedia**- will enable us to reach teachers in different education sectors, and to pass on practical skills of using **European Language Portfolio** through **interactive whiteboard**.
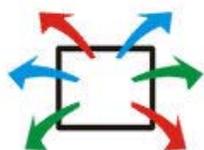
The specific aims of ActivELP project are:

- **to** develop a training program for language teachers **"**European Language Portfolio **in Language Teaching through Multimedia" and mentoring guidelines for implementation of this program**;
- **to** train a group of language teachers-mentors **from all EU countries**;
- **to** test the training program for use of the European Language Portfolio **by language teachers.**

The idea is that not only can teachers use this tool to get a greater understanding of ELPs and possibly be encouraged to use them in their teaching but in doing so , they can then become trainers themselves and use the tools to train other teachers

A-Mentoring Guidelines

The mentoring guidelines are therefore a set of guidelines that mentors can use to work through the ActivELP tools. In this way it was considered appropriate to read and review this document first and consider its effectiveness in preparing a possible teacher trainer (like myself) to use the tools and mentor a group of teachers.

Section 1 What is an ELP?

The document begins with a thorough and very clear explanation of what an ELP is. It reviews the objectives and functions of an ELP and gives a quick history of their development. It goes on to describe the categorisation of ELPs and provides examples of their forms which are very varied.

For a reader, who has little knowledge of ELPs this is a very informative document that immediately puts you in the picture and provides you with the necessary background information. It offers opportunities to drill down and gain further knowledge. It is clear, logical and well organised.

An ELP is made up of 3 components and the guidelines provide an interesting set of questions that could be used to develop the reader's knowledge of ELPs or be used by a trainer with the trainees.

The 3 key components are then clearly described and detailed. The explanations are informative and the reader is taken through in a step by step approach to understanding the Passport, Biography and Dossier.
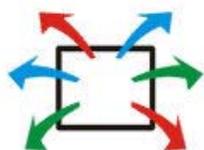
Section 2-Interactive Whiteboards and Moodle

A fairly comprehensive but perhaps over positive review of IWBs is presented to the reader. It includes details about the physical types as well information about the varying features that IWBs provide. It makes a good case for their use on this project and materials that are highly interactive are particularly appropriate for IWBs as they allow the trainer/mentor to stay at the board and not continually move to the keyboard.

The descriptions are quite comprehensive and cover the key elements of an IWB but perhaps we need to consider the following two points.

- The document makes claims about the effectiveness of IWBs in terms of their ability to facilitate different learning styles. The danger is that the effectiveness of IWBs is really dependent on the materials that are used on them. It can be very challenging to produce effective IWB content that really harnesses the power of the tool.
- Though I appreciate the choice of IWB as the platform of delivery and while I agree with your choice for this particular project, it might be better to describe the content as "Interactive" rather than specifically for IWBs since the material could also be used on a computer or projected onto a screen. There would be certain advantages to using an IWB but the material is not limited to this platform alone.

The Moodle tool is fine. It is a short summary of the tool and what it can be used for. It provides a useful background into the tool and details some of the attributes of such a tool. It is a good choice of tool for this type of programme as it offers a high degree of flexibility and is easy to set up and use.

Section 3 Mentor Do I want to be one?

A history of the word "mentor" is provided and this is followed by some quite detailed information about what a mentor is and how the word is interpreted in many different ways. The information provides a backdrop to the main function of this section, which is to allow the reader to decide if they could be an effective mentor. A questionnaire is provided that takes the reader through the key roles involved in being a mentor and their suitability to be one. I worked my way through the questions and encouraged reflection and consideration of the key issues. This would be an especially interesting tool to use as a basis for a discussion.
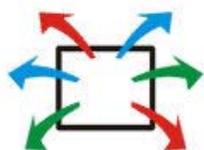
Part 2 Mentor Training Guidelines and activities

This section offers a description of a variety of different training programmes that anyone proposing to be a mentor can take. It also proposes some examples of basic "mentor training activities". These are well constructed and clearly explained and provide a "taster" as to the range of activities that can be undertaken to develop the mentor/mentee relationship.

It then goes on to describe the differences between a trainer and a mentor. This section is especially informative and again will help an individual to decide if they would be suitable for such a role.

Conclusions about the guidelines

The document is well written and provides a good guide as to the role of a mentor and the qualities required to be one. It provides a comprehensive case for mentoring, and clearly details the way it differs from training. It could be a useful document for anyone who doesn't have experience as a mentor and who needs to know more information about the role.

The earlier sections give a good background to ELP and clear descriptions of the components included in it. I found this very informative, easy to read and I completed the documents feeling I had achieved my aim of learning about ELPs and understand what they are.

ActiveHelp IWB activities

The ActivELP site provides a serious of activities that a trainer/mentor can use with a group of trainers/mentees. The tool could therefore be used to give trainers a solid understanding of what an ELPs are and how to implement them.

My own view is that we need to be slightly clearer about the relationship between the mentoring guidelines and how they fit in with the ActivELP. I understand that the mentoring guidelines are there to help a mentor take a group of mentees through the ActivELP site. However it could be also understood that the mentoring guidelines could also be used by "trained teachers" once they begin to implement ELPs and therefore mentor their own students. The Mentoring Guidelines have much use than simply being used for mentors working through the training/mentoring programme. The guidelines could just as easily be used with the teachers once they are trained up and ready to use ELPs with their students.
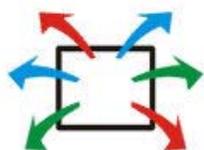
ELP

The first section deals with ELPs and what they are and provides similar information to that in the mentoring guidelines, though in a much more interactive manor. The reflective questions provide a useful "check" as to ones knowledge and the way the table is organised makes for easy access to the relevant information. The table is interactive allowing the user to click on the "no" answers and be provided with the necessary information to "fill" the gaps in your own knowledge. There is also lots of additional content including links for further reading, PDFs, glossaries etc. The information is very complete and easily accessible and would give potential users/teachers of ELPs all the key information they required. It allows you to drill down where necessary.

The material is excellent but with one caveat, the format of the page includes a whole variety of different fonts and this gives the impression that the content has been "cut and pasted." This is a common problem in material that has been produced collaboratively. It takes the professional shine of some well developed and well produced content.

This short video highlights my point
http://screencast.com/t/ZTZkOTRjMDkt

Sometimes the text is bordering on heavy. It is unusual to read a large amount of text on the screen. In designing IWB content this needs to be considered as screen size is often limited. IWBs do not offer the screen sizes of normally projected content and if the text is too small this could be a problem. The error is not committed and I worked through all the screen information and found it readable but it does border on what I would consider to be a maximum amount of text content for one display
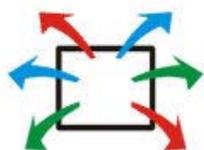
I would go for a more bullet point approach to the main content and allow teachers to print out the additional content. This is no reflection on the quality and information provided but rather on the way the information is being displayed. When mentors are training with the material it is important for them to realise that a lot of the additional material would not normally be displayed on a IWB but rather printed out and provided to the mentees to read in their own time.

This short videos highlights my point http://screencast.com/t/MmZhMGQ3MG

The ELP also includes lot of additional content regarding the 3 components of an ELP including examples, pdfs and links. Again this material is very informative and has been carefully chosen to allow the mentees to drill down and develop their knowledge.

2-Skills

Listening
This section includes a lot of content. The opening section lists a series of strategies. Problems are identified and explained and then teacher are presented with some very varied content that allows the development of various strategies to develop listening skills.

The content is very good and varied. The material highlights good practice and a variety of useful activities, clearly indicating what skills they develop. The material would work especially well in a group based situation where teachers could discuss the topics and share ideas.

I found myself wanting some sort of "help" section or guidelines on how to use this material effectively. There were a couple of sections where it wasn't immediately obvious how to use the material. I needed to work through the whole section to get a clear picture of the best approach.

This example video highlights my point http://screencast.com/t/MzkxZDY2N

The listening material includes a variety of recorded formats to deal with different browsers. It was clearly laid out and the quality of the recordings was excellent. The controls allowed the teacher easy access to the material and the ability to pause, stop and drill down if required.

Spoken production
I like the way this section opens with a task. The trainees are encouraged to come to the board and write in their answers. This would be better done via the keyboard connected to the IWB rather than using the "on screen" keyboards which are slow and difficult to use. This activity offers excellent opportunities for discussion and I like the interactive format. After a group discussion the trainer/mentor can reveal the answers
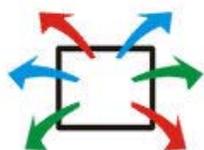
allowing for further discussion and comparison. This is a well produced activity and is really suited to a group/interactive type approach.

The approach of the rest of the section is quite similar. Allowing trainers to highlight the strategies that each "skill" requires and identifying a series of activities that might facilitate this. Again we are provided with a broad variety of activities, which are well produced and well thought through.

Other sections
I like the material and it is clearly written by people that understand the skills and strategies that can help students to develop their learning. There is some nice content here, especially when the content is interactive and gets the user thinking about the issues. There are ample opportunities for discussion and interaction. I found the material easier to use as I worked through the section and became familiar with the format. Materials have been developed at a variety of levels and have been carefully chosen to highlight the strategies related to each skill.

I really only have one concern here. I just feel that at times it would have been useful to have provided the trainer with some quick guidelines on how to use the material. In most cases it is very easy to work through as once a trainer has worked through one section, it becomes easier. However there were a few points when a set of guidelines or even a "help section" may have made familiarisation with the content easier

The Moodle Site

The Moodle site offers and opportunity for teachers in a variety of EEC countries to share their experiences of using the ActivELP site. It offers chances for participants to meet, discuss and share their materials and experiences. It includes a discussion board and a number of tasks like creating a profile, talking about their expectations etc.

The use of Moodle makes total sense as it offers a quick and production way of getting participants to engage and collaborate from different locations and it is generally easy to use and to set up.

There is some content on here. The members have added their profiles and engaged with each other sharing things they have a common. They have also spoken and shared some of their ideas of what they hope to achieve on the course.

There are several activities that were not really completed by the participants so it is hard to really evaluate the tool. I believe that circumstances make the use of the site very limited in the end However, the site is still open, the tasks are all set up and hence the course content can be used by teachers who are running courses online.
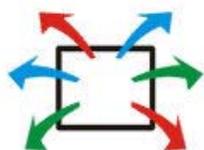
What I can say is that I can clearly see the potential of the VLE and it would have been a useful tool in evaluating the effectiveness of the ActivELP website. I would have been especially interested to have seen the participants reflections on the ActivELP content.

Final Conclusions

My recommendation is that the ActivELP is awarded the ICC Certificate of Quality and Best practice.

The product offers a solid programme that mentors could work through with their mentees and provide them with the necessary tools to introduce ELPs into their own teaching and mentor their own students. The use of the Internet and Moodle allow for global access to the content and the mentoring guidelines are an excellent starting point for potential mentors/trainers to assess their own suitability.

The quality of the content is very high and has been carefully chosen to highlight the points being made throughout the ActivELP site. The activities provided in each of the skills section and the introduction to ELPs encourage interactivity and discussion and would work especially well in a group based situation.

In my opinion it is not necessary to emphasize that the ActivELP content is for an IWB. Though I recognise that it would work well on such a platform and indeed there are good arguments to use such a tool, the material is also suitable for use on a project screen on simple computer screen. This may have been a lost opportunity as anyone using the content from outside the project may think the material is only suitable for use on an IWB. This may be a lost opportunity.

I found the materials easy to use and follow. There were times when I needed to look through a whole section before clearly understanding what was required or how the materials might be used. I do feel that a set of guidelines about how to use the ActivELP might have been useful and may have saved me time. However my overall conclusion is that the material is of an excellent quality and clearly achieves its objectives.

London, 30 December 2009