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A Novice Instructional Scenario Writer's Principles for Internet Supported Learning: An Example from Testing and Evaluation Course

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INTRODUCTION

Distance English Language Teaching Program (DELT) was initiated in 2000-2001 Academic year in accordance with a protocol signed with Ministry of Education to meet the increasing demand for English language teachers in Turkey. This is a unique pre-service teacher training program which incorporates internet support materials which have been used in in-service teacher training for approximately three decades (Nielsen, Tatto, Djalil and Kularatne, 1991). This is a blended program (Özkul and Mutlu, 2005) as the courses offered in the first two years are face to face while the remaining two years are through distance education. The aim of the first two years' courses is to increase students' proficiency and fluency in four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in English. In the 3rd and 4th years, students are equipped with the theoretical and methodological knowledge essential in their profession. Through these courses, the ultimate goal of the program is to graduate qualified teachers of English. Beginning in 2004-2005 Academic Year, for the 3rd and 4th year courses Internet supported materials which are developed by a team of people from different disciplines are provided. Testing and Evaluation in English is one of these courses. One of the members of this team is subject area expert who works in the team as instructional scenario writer. This paper presents the guiding principles of the instructional scenario writing process of the Internet support materials of this course by providing examples of tasks extracted from these materials which can be reached at "http://www.iolp.aof.edu.tr" address.

BACKGROUND

In Distance English Language Teacher Training (DELTT) Program students are offered two reading courses, Reading Skills and Advanced Reading Skills, respectively, in the first two years. The goal of these courses is to teach students how to read in English and to develop students' reading fluency. Then, in the 3rd year of their education, they begin to read academic texts to learn new information related to the content courses such as Approaches in ELT, English language Teaching Methodology, and Introduction to Linguistics. Therefore, there is a shift from "learning to read" to "reading-to-learn" and this is not easy (Grabe, and Stoller, 2002) as "the transition to reading-to-learn is a strategic response to texts and tasks in academic settings while students are asked to read primarily informational texts with large amounts of new information that they are expected to understand and use" (Grabe, and Stoller, 2002, p.85). This is especially difficult in distance education as students are on their own to read and understand the information presented in the textbooks. To facilitate the shift from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn and help students learn the new information presented in their textbooks Internet support materials are developed for each course offered in the third and the fourth years.

Internet support materials of each course fallow the layout developed by the faculty of Computer Based Education Center (CBEC) of Open Education Faculty. Although the underlying principles of this layout are out of the scope of this article, to give a better insight on the structure of this Internet support material, the homepage of *Testing and Evaluation in English* course is introduced with a brief description. First of all, each course has the same components which are listed in the outline. Some examples of these are *Course info* which includes the course description and course outline, *units*, *discussions*, and *mail*. Secondly, each unit has the same subcomponents as listed in "Table of Contents" and these are *overview*, *tasks*, *quiz for this unit*, *and comments for this unit*. In Sample 1 given below, both The Outline and the Table of Contents can be seen.

Sample



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

THE INSTRUCTIONAL SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

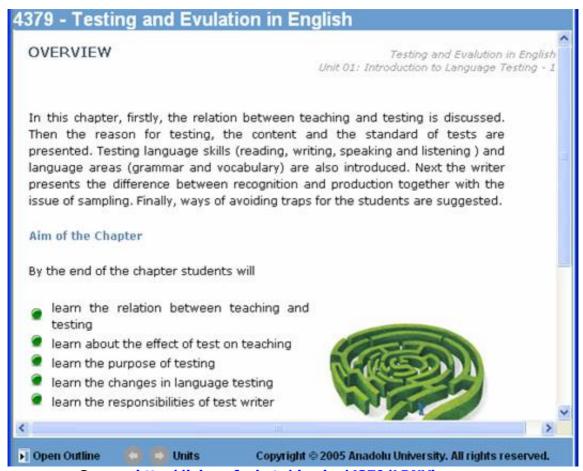
Like all other courses, the development of Internet support material for Testing and Evaluation in English course is a collaborative work of experts from different disciplines. First of all, Open Education Faculty, Computer Based Education Center is in the charge of the coordination of the experts involved in the development of Internet Support Materials and the conversion of the instructional scenarios into courseware. Graphic and animations are designed by the faculty of School of Fine Arts, Graphic/Animation Department. Finally, instructional scenario development is carried out by three instructors, two of whom are from Education Faculty, English Language Teaching Department and one from School of Foreign Languages. This group is leaded and coordinated and the instructional scenarios developed are monitored by the subject area expert who is an experienced teacher and pre-service teacher trainer. Instructional scenario development is a part of instructional design which is defined as "...the systematic process of translating general principles of learning and instruction into plans for instructional materials and learning" (McNeil, 2006). Although this is the definition of instructional design, instructional scenario development also reflected the features highlighted in this definition. First one is its being a systematic process which has the following steps: analyze, design, develop, evaluate, and revise (Lindeman, 2006). Instructional scenario development has also been a process and these steps are followed. To illustrate, it began with the analysis of the course material, the target learners and the education context. Based on the results of this analysis, the tasks are designed and developed. The second point highlighted in this definition is the use of general principles of learning and instruction which may be interpreted as transferring traditional classroom techniques and theories of teaching and learning to online materials as "[o]f the many instructional strategies available for use in the online learning environment, most have not been developed specifically for online instruction, but are currently used in traditional classrooms, and can be successfully adapted for facilitating online learning" (ION, 2006). In the rest of the article the instructional scenario development process is described.

1st Step: Setting and Articulating Goals and Objectives

Identification of the major learning goals and objectives for any course and clearly stating them is the first steps to an efficient instructional design (ION, 2006), therefore, instructional scenario writing. Considering these clearly stated goals and objectives and the instructional choices, the instructional scenario writer can make informed decisions about the best practices to achieve these goals and

objectives. Students should also have access to these objectives as they may form their plan for learning the course material according to these explicitly stated objectives (Hedge, 2000).

Sample 2



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

In this course, the overall aim is stated in the "course info" which can be reached in the courseware, and the objectives of each unit are stated explicitly in the Overview of the unit as the purpose of the overview is to introduce main points and the objectives of the unit (Ozkul, and Mutlu, 2005). As an illustration, the overview of *Unit 1 Introduction to Language Testing* is selected and presented in Sample 2. In this overview, firstly the content of the chapter is described by highlighting the main points of the unit. This helps orienting the students to the content of the unit. Then, the objectives of the unit are stated explicitly.

2nd step: Development of the Tasks

Identification of the goals and objectives is followed by the development of the instructional scenarios, that is to say, the development of the tasks, and this process is governed by two principles:

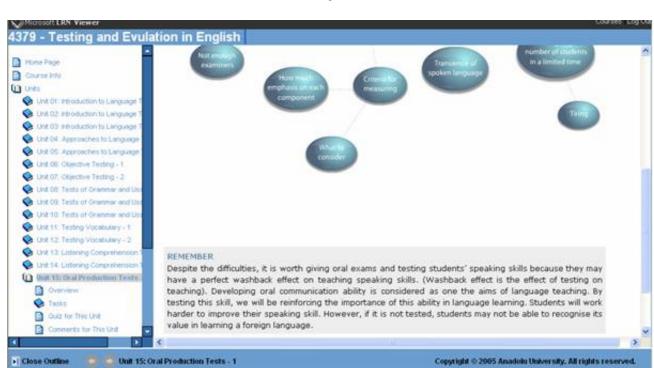
- traditional classroom techniques can be used while developing the task
- > as there will be intensive "reading-to-learn", metaphorical models of reading would play an important role in the development of the tasks.

Reflections of the Traditional Instructional Strategies

As stated earlier in this article, instructional strategies of the traditional classroom are used in online learning environment. Learning contracts, small group work, discussion, project, lecture, collaborative learning, self-directed learning, case study, mentorship, and forum are among these instructional strategies (ION, 2006). In this part of the article, the examples of instructional strategies of the traditional classroom used for online learning will be presented and discussed.

Lecture In the traditional classroom, the teacher is the expert of the topic and source of information

and one of his responsibilities is to transmit this information to the students. He achieves this through lectures. Despite the nature of the educational context—absence of the teacher—lectures are also used in the instructional scenarios of this specific course. However, they are different from the traditional lectures as "[o]nline lectures are likely to be shorter and more to the pointShort lectures provide enough information to serve as a basis for further reading, research, or other learning activities....they are readily available for students to revisit" (ION, 2006). The following is an example of an online lecture taken from *Unit 15 Oral Production Tests*. In this example, by clicking on the flashing buttons each of which include a key point about the difficulties of testing oral skills, students reach the information and upon completing clicking on the flashing buttons, another key point related to assessment of oral skills appears at the bottom in "remember" box.



Sample 3

Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

Discussion Student-student interaction and discussion are inevitable components of traditional classroom as "[t]he discussion format encourages learners to analyze alternative ways of thinking and acting and assists learners in exploring their own experiences so they can become better critical thinkers" (ION, 2006).

This feature of the face-to-face interaction is reflected in this online course and students are guided on how to participate in the discussion. In Sample 4 taken from *Unit 1 Introduction to Language Testing* there are two examples of discussion through which students would integrate what they learn in the textbook with what they bring from real world.

Sample 4



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

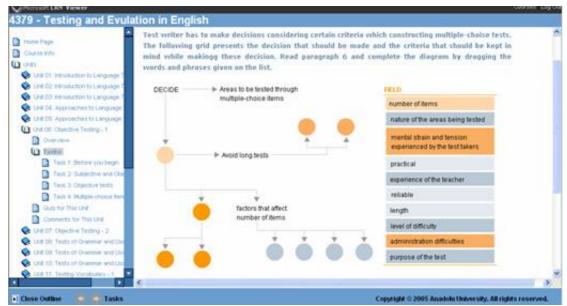
Feedback Another example of the reflection of traditional classroom characteristics is feedback. One of responsibilities of the teacher in the traditional classroom is to provide feedback. This is important as it indicates how well the students are doing. However, in online courses "the learner is frequently insecure in the absence of the teacher and apprehensive regarding his/her progress in the absence of close feedback" (Worldbank, 2006). Therefore, to help students feel more secure, they are provided with the answers to all the questions and tasks given in the chapters.

As they complete the task, they can hit on the "show the answers" or "look" button to compare their answers to the ones provided by the teacher online and encouraged by their correct answers and guided for the answers they get wrong. "Show the answers" or "look" button does not function unless students complete the task. In some of the tasks there is immediate feedback. Sample 5, taken from *Unit 6 Objective Testing*, is an example of receiving immediate feedback.

In this task, students need to drag the words or phrases given on the list and as they answer correctly, both the circle and the phrase change colors and have matching colors.

Sample 5

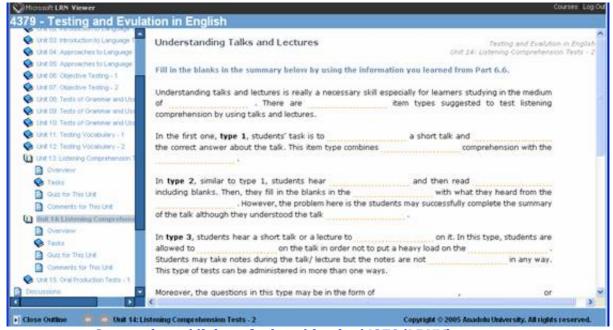
Variety in the instructional strategies employed in a lesson and throughout the term is an essential characteristic of the traditional classroom. It is one of the ways of keeping students' motivation high as the lesson is not monotonous and predictable. Another advantage of using various instructional strategies is addressing different learner styles and intelligence types. The samples provided in this article may be considered as an indicator of diversity in the instructional strategies employed. To be more specific, the strategies and the intelligence type addressed can be listed as follows.



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

Intelligence Type	Sample
Visual/Spatial Intelligence	Sample 10
Verbal Intelligence	Sample 6
Logical/Mathematical Intelligence	Sample 9
Interpersonal Intelligence	Sample 4

Sample 6



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

Reflections of the Reading Models

It is observed that in the content courses students have a tendency to read and understand every single word in the text and this makes reading difficult and boring. This approach to reading is defined as bottom-up model in which reading is perceived independent of reader's background knowledge and linear as reader's perception of the text begins with letters, which become words, then words which become sentences and finally, sentences which become texts (Grabe and Stoller, 2002, p. 32). However, reading a text is related to the background knowledge of the reader and it "is primarily directed by reader goals and expectations" (Grabe and Stoller, 2002, p. 32). This is defined as top-down model of

reading and in this model reading is perceived as hypothesis testing. That means, as readers read the text, their expectations are confirmed or rejected. This model is questioned as "[i]n extreme interpretations, there is a question about what a reader could learn from a text if the reader must first have expectations about all the information in the text" (Grabe and Stoller, 2002, p. 32).

This argument is valid especially in a content course in which students read-to-learn new information. Both of these metaphorical models of reading—bottom-up model and top-down model—are insufficient in explaining the reading process. As a response to the weaknesses of these two models, interactive model is proposed. According to this model, reading is a result of the interaction between top-down and bottom-up models. That is to say "one can take useful ideas from a bottom-up model and combine them with key ideas from a top-down view" (Grabe and Stoller, 2002, p. 33). Therefore, in the development of the tasks top-down model and interactive model of reading has been influential. In the remaining part of the article, the reflections of reading models will be discussed and exemplified by using sample tasks selected from the materials.

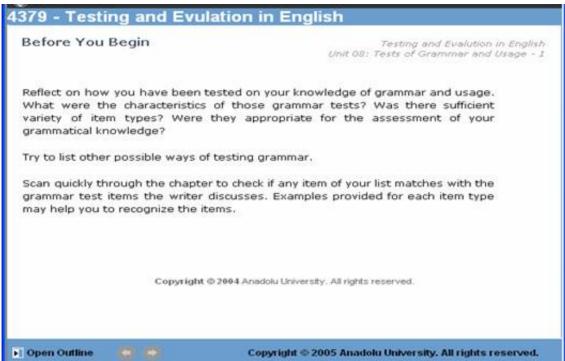
Top-down Model

Before you begin part is shaped by the top-down model of reading. This stage is important as by the help of the activities employed prior to reading the text, students' background knowledge is activated, some information that will help comprehension of the text is provided, their expectations are built and/or they are motivated to read. The first example of Before you Begin aims at activating students' background knowledge about the topic. Activating background knowledge is perceived as an important factor that affects text comprehension (Grabe and Stoller, 2002).

Therefore, before students read the chapter, their background knowledge is activated. Related sample (Sample 7) is taken from *Unit 8 Test of Grammar and Usage*. In this example, students are asked to reflect on their experiences as language learners. Because they have taken "grammar and usage" tests many times, they are directed to recall these experiences and remember the types of items used by their teachers in the tests and evaluate the appropriateness of these items critically.

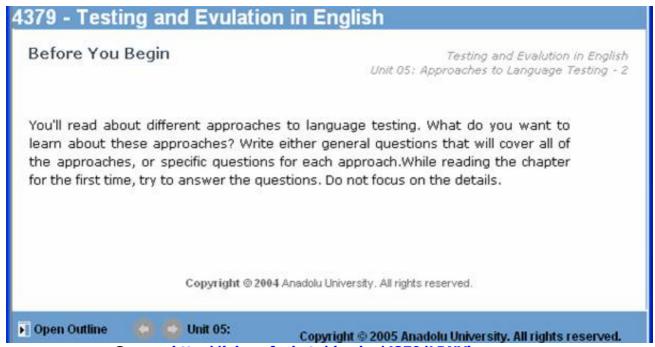
Sample 7

Another task designed according to the top-down model of reading is presented in Sample 8 taken from *Unit 5 Approaches to Language Testing*. This task aims at helping students to built expectations as due to the nature of the content of this chapter; students are not expected to have any background knowledge about the topic. Therefore, to lead them to the chapter, a brief description of the chapter is given, and they are asked to form questions of their own. According to this model, "reading is primarily directed by reader goals and expectations" (Grabe, and Stoller, 2002, p.32), and these questions turn to goals because they are asked to read the chapter to answer these questions.



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Sample 8



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

Both of the activities described above are followed by reading the text. In the first one, activation of background knowledge is followed by prediction and then students are asked to read the text to check their predictions. In the second example, students are asked to read the text to answer the questions they prepared. In these readings detailed comprehension of the text is not expected.

Interactive Approach

After the first reading, students read for detailed comprehension or for specific information. This is generally difficult although the texts which contain intensive and complicated information (Grabe, 1997) are lexically and syntactically at their level. The main reason to this problem is students' reading habits. They generally have a tendency to try to understand every single word in the text either because

they have difficulty in judging the relative importance of the information given in the text or they fail in setting goals for reading. Therefore, the tasks that follow *Before you Begin* aim at helping students to read these texts. This is tried to be achieved by giving them a purpose for reading and by designing tasks that would prevent students' focusing on every word in the text, but lead them to the important information. At this point interactive approach guides the design of the tasks. Students combine the information they get from the text (bottom-up model) with what they bring to the text, that is, their expectations shaped by the task (top-down model). As a result graphic representations of the texts which help them understand the text structure (Grabe, 1997; Grabe and Stoller, 2002) are used. These are important as they are visual representations of the information given in the text and students are required not only to focus on the relevant information, but also to restructure the information according to the logical connections between the ideas. There are three main types used in these tasks as explained and exemplified below.

1- Parts of the visual representation are filled and other parts left blank. In this type of visual representation, as illustrated in Sample 9 taken from *Unit 9 Test of Grammar and Usage* only the main headings are given and reading the related part, students are asked to fill in the missing parts. Therefore, they will classify the information presented in this part of the unit according to the headings which are *strength/s*), *Weaknes(es) and Measures to be taken to overcome the(se) weakness(es)*. They will also understand the logical relation between ideas.

4379 - Testing and Evulation in English Constructing completion items Testing and Evalution in English Unit 09: Tests of Grammar and Usage - 2 Read the part and complete the following grid. After you fill in the grid, click on "look" button. Compare your answers with the suggeste answers. Measures to be taken to Strength (s) Weakness(es) overcome the(se) weakness (es) Complete the following diagram. After you fill in the grid, click on "look" button. Compare your answers with the suggeste answers. > Open Outline Unit 09: Tests of Copyright @ 2005 Anadolu University. All rights reserved.

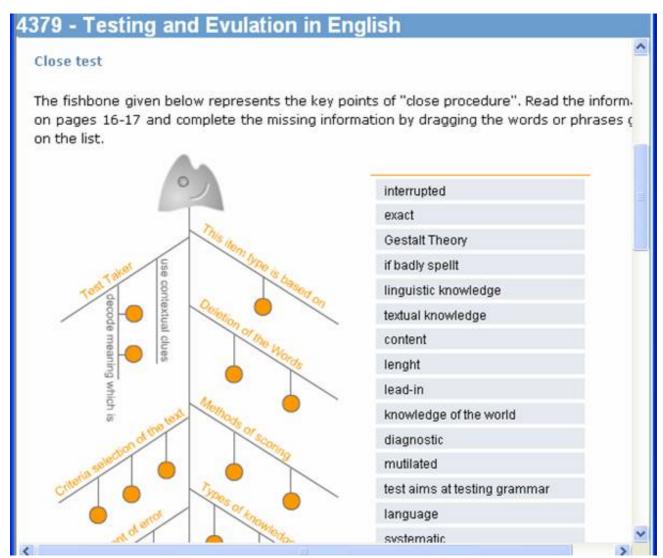
Sample 9

Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

Major units of the outline are moved around out of sequence, and students need to reassemble the

<u>outline</u>: In this type, as a visual representation, fishbone is used, but any other relevant visual representation can also be used. Main points are given in the fishbone and the minor points are listed as an outline. Students are asked to complete this visual representation by dragging the words and phrases given as a list on the right-hand side of the figure. Without reading the related part, students cannot accomplish this task. (Sample 10 is taken from *Unit 5 Approaches to Language Testing*)

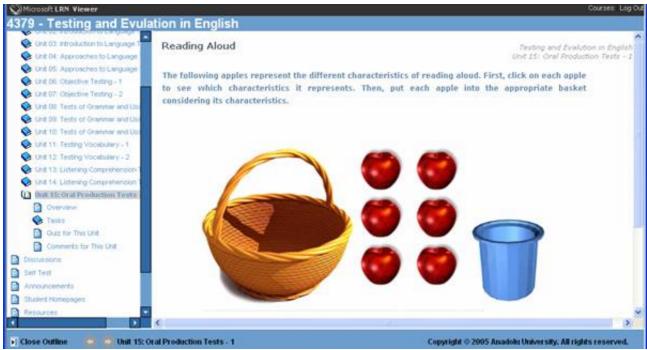
Sample 10



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

A list of the phrases is given and students are asked to reorganize the visual representation: As illustrated in Sample 11 taken from *Unit 15 Oral Production Tests*, students are given the main points to categorize. In this sample they categorize characteristics of reading aloud represented by apples as advantages and disadvantages. They should put the advantages into the basket and put the disadvantages into the dustbin. They should read the related part of the unit to complete this task.

Sample 11



Source: http://iolp.aof.edu.tr/dersler/4379/LRNViewer.aspx

These visual representations of the texts are expected to motivate students to read the academic texts which are difficult to grasp and help them see the logical relation between ideas.

CONCLUSION

Developing Internet support materials and being an instructional scenario writer is a real challenge for someone coming from face-to-face education culture. This definitely requires a new interpretation of teaching and a change in culture and expectation. However, both in face-to-face education and distance education the teachers' responsibility is the same: facilitating students' learning. This similarity opens the door to the transfer of classroom experience—knowing student nature and teaching the same course in face-to face education— and theoretical knowledge. These two played important roles in the development of educational scenarios.

By stating the objectives explicitly, students are guided to set their own agenda for learning. To help students to read-to-learn, reading models are used. Different types of pre-reading activities aimed at tuning students in the reading so that they would not start reading with an empty mind. By the help of these activities either their background knowledge is activated or they are leaded to set expectations. The during reading tasks, on the other hand, aimed at helping them to shift from "learning-to-read" to "reading-to-learn" by highlighting the important information in the texts and the text organization. Highlighting the important information is essential as students have a tendency to read and to try to understand every detail in the text. By the help of these activities, students learn the major points and minor points. Knowledge of text structure plays an important role in learning content (Grabe, 1997) and via visual representations students' awareness of text structure can be raised.

Although the primary aim is facilitate understanding and using the content of the course, the principles of this design are hoped to be a model for teaching reading for the prospective English teachers.

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