12 Empowering teachers and learners in and beyond classrooms: focus on OEPs in reading activities

Fanny Meunier[1], Alice Meurice[2], and Julie Van de Vyver[3]

Abstract

The present contribution is situated in the framework of a broad government project (entitled Pacte pour un Enseignement d'Excellence) and is specifically devoted to the learning and teaching of modern languages. Our group has been working on the collection, selection, and validation of innovative tools for foreign language learning targeting all levels of proficiency in compulsory education. The present paper reports on a case study that addresses reading strategies outside the classroom for Dutch as a foreign language at A1 level and using a mobile hunt in the Hergé Museum[4] (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium). The intended outcomes of our case study include (1) the promotion of mobile and classroom Open Educational Practices (OEPs) for L2 reading, (2) the development of in-service teachers' and learners' digital literacy skills (including among others the co-construction of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and reflective practices on image rights), and (3) the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and communities of practice. The Actionbound mobile app was used for the mobile hunt. The participants involved in

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4. See http://www.museeherge.com/en

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the case study include three researchers, one teacher trainer, 11 pre-service Teachers (psTs) and two classroom groups of Dutch learners (fifth year of primary school). The study setup (including both the teacher training aspects and the activities) is detailed and illustrated, together with the suggestions that emerged from the questionnaires and follow-up focus group discussions.

Keywords: teacher training, professional learning communities, technology integration, open educational practices, communities of practice, language learning.

1. Context of the project

Our work is part of a government project (in the French-speaking part of Belgium) focusing on quality education and entitled Pacte pour un Enseignement d'Excellence[5]. Within that project, a number of disciplinary consortia have been created. Their aim is to collect, select, test *in situ*, and validate innovative tools for foreign language learning, targeting all levels of proficiency in compulsory education. The present paper reports on a case study carried out in the framework of our involvement in the modern languages consortium which includes researchers and teacher trainers from universities and higher education institutes. The focus of the study is on the practice of L2 reading strategies outside the classroom for Dutch as a foreign language and using a mobile hunt organized in the Hergé Museum in Louvain-la-Neuve.

The participants involved in the case study include three researchers, one teacher trainer, 11 psTs, and two classroom groups of Dutch learners (fifth year of primary school). The data collected in the project relate to two potential target populations: future teachers and young language learners. The study reported here focuses on the first target population, viz. future teachers, and addresses issues related to the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools by teachers.

5. See http://www.pactedexcellence.be/

2. Intended outcomes

OERs have been promoted by the EU and UNESCO (n.d.) since the early 2000s. As mentioned by Meurice, Van de Vyver, Meunier, and Delforge (2018), OERs enable international collaboration, facilitate knowledge sharing and policy dialogue between institutions and states (Sabadie et al., 2014), and stimulate learners' interest, satisfaction, and confidence in a task (Bliss, Robinson, Hilton, & Wiley, 2013). However, despite their interest in the potential of OERs, educators to date still have little awareness or knowledge of such resources (Pérez-Paredes, Ordoñana Guillamón, & Aguado Jiménez, 2018). In addition, a lack of digital literacy and media training has been found in pre- and in-service teacher training in French-speaking Belgium (Meurice, 2018), including a lack of sufficient knowledge in copyright licensing (Mishra et al., 2016; Rolfe, 2012).

As the Digital Competence framework for citizens considers copyright and licensing as part of a 'digital creation' competence (Carretero, Vuorikari, & Punie, 2017), our initial aims for the group of psTs involved in the case study were threefold:

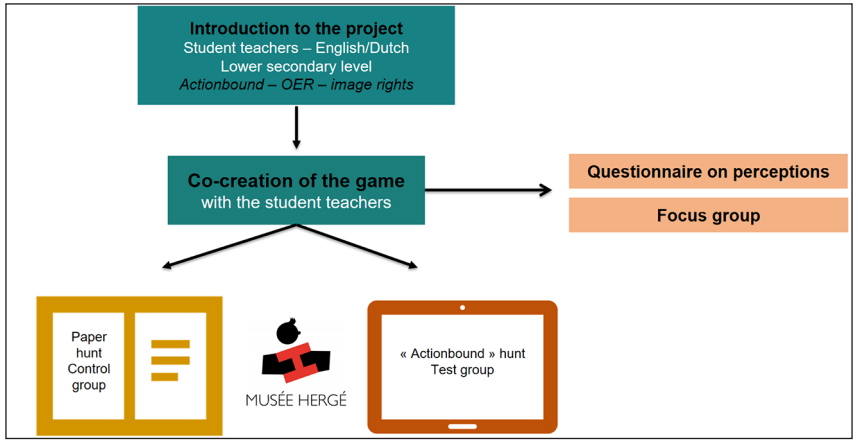
- promoting the use of mobile OEPs for L2 reading;
- fostering the development of pre- and in-service teachers' and learners' digital literacy skills, including among others the co-construction of OERs and reflective practices on image rights; and
- creating a local professional learning community and community of practice.

For this experiment, the researchers on the team provided techno-pedagogical support (Lebrun, Lison, & Batier, 2016) to future language teachers (primary and lower secondary school levels) during the creation of a mobile hunt aiming to train L2 learners on reading strategies in the Hergé Museum. The focus on reading strategies and the choice of topics to cover for the game were selected in accordance with one of the official curricular documents, namely the Référentiel

de langues modernes – Socles de compétences, 2017[6]. The hunt was created for fifth graders in primary school education who are studying Dutch as a foreign language. It was created in two different versions: a traditional paper version and a mobile one created thanks to the Actionbound[7] application. Actionbound can be considered as an OER as it is a freely downloadable app that can be used by teachers to create digitally interactive scavenger hunts (also called 'bounds'). The specific hunt/bound created for the Hergé Museum is also an OER as it can be reused by other teachers and/or learners.

The overall study setup is summarized in Figure 1 below. After an introduction to the project and its various dimensions (see Section 3), two versions of a hunt were co-constructed by the psTs, their teacher trainer, and the research team. There was a paper version (for the control group of pupils) and a mobile one (for the test group of pupils). The psTs filled in a questionnaire at the end of the activity (to collect their opinions on the activity and on the use of digital technology) and also took part in follow-up focus group discussions.

Figure 1. Overall setup of the project



6. The document is available (in French only) online at http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=24737&navi=295

7. See https://en.actionbound.com

3. Nuts and bolts

During the first encounter with the psTs, one of the researchers introduced the project, together with some theoretical frameworks such as the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model (Puentedura, 2013), which presents four different degrees of classroom technology integration (from the lowest to the highest level). Concrete illustrations of pedagogical and technological integration in the language classroom were presented for each level. The various types of licenses and image rights, as well as the different types of OERs, were also discussed (see document link in the supplementary materials section) and the Actionbound app[8] and its features were presented. The app was then concretely tested by the psTs in a practical discovery session via a short hunt that the researchers had prepared. The game was then followed by a visit of the eight rooms of the museum during which the psTs had to identify the reading elements that could be used for the game to be created for the pupils.

In a follow-up session with their teacher trainer, the psTs were divided into groups of two or three, each responsible for two rooms in the museum. They then created questions based on different reading strategies that had been covered in class. To enable effective collaboration and document sharing between the psTs and the researchers, a Google Drive folder was created and the collaboration continued beyond face-to-face meetings via the online platform. Techno-pedagogical support was provided to the psTs to finalize the creation of the game synchronously and asynchronously via the drive. The two versions of the game (see Section 2) were then pre-tested by peers and colleagues and validated by the director of the Hergé Museum with specific attention paid to image rights.

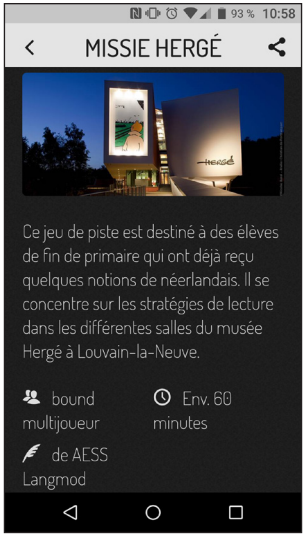
The game, called *Objectif Hergé* (in reference to Hergé's comicstrip *Objectif Lune* [*Explorers on the Moon*]), had to meet different criteria and had to focus on reading strategies. As the pupils' proficiency level (A1) would not allow them to analyze difficult texts and/or rely on complex lexical or grammatical knowledge, the reading strategies practiced had to help them find basic and

8. See https://en.actionbound.com/

relevant information autonomously, anticipating, relying on textual and visual elements present in the museum's rooms (i.e. short descriptive texts (available in French, Dutch, and English), pictures, objects, etc.).

The guidelines were provided partly in the learners' mother tongue, i.e. French (see Figure 2 and Figure 3 for illustration). The questions in the game tackled the following themes which correspond to curricular requirements: personal characteristics (name, age, address, telephone, close family, clothing, pets, etc.), daily life, school (understanding classroom instructions, school materials, transportation), home, relations with others (greetings, thanks), and food and beverages (meals and tastes). The game was built for a one-hour visit to the museum and the activity was designed to be 'self-contained' i.e. be doable without prior introduction and easily reusable as an OER by any Dutch teacher and learner. In addition, the game had to respect strict copyright rules. Some features from the app were therefore not exploited to ensure more sustainability (viz. QR codes and geolocation). The two versions of the game (paper and mobile) had to target the same strategies and use the same information within the museum.

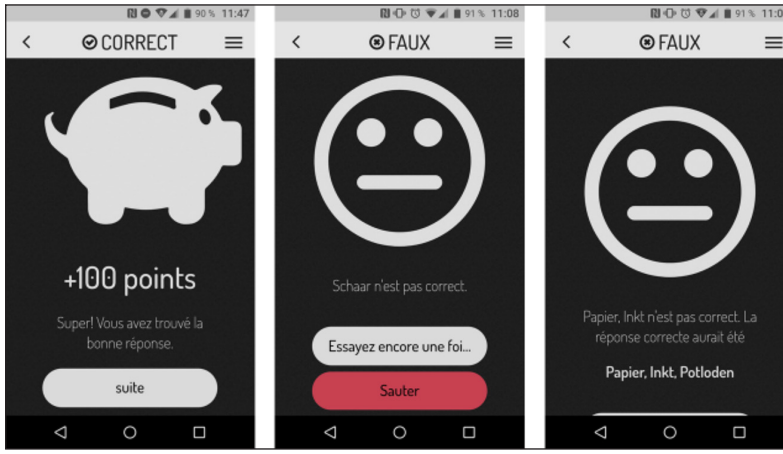
Figure 2. Welcome screen of the Actionbound game



The game consisted in 29 questions in the paper version and 35 in the mobile version (for technical reasons) but the content of the questions was similar. The format of the answers however differed given the functionalities of the Actionbound app (pupils could take pictures, record, or film themselves to answer some of the questions). Gaming elements are also integrated into the mobile app (winning points according to the 'missions' performed and the answers given) and feedback was provided to the pupils after having answered a multiple-choice question for example. Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4 are screenshots from the Actionbound game (or 'bound' as such games are typically called). The complete version is available on the following link: https://en.actionbound.com/bound/objectifherge.

Figure 3. Sample question – video recording

Figure 4. Illustrations of the gaming options (winning points during the mission) and of the feedback provided



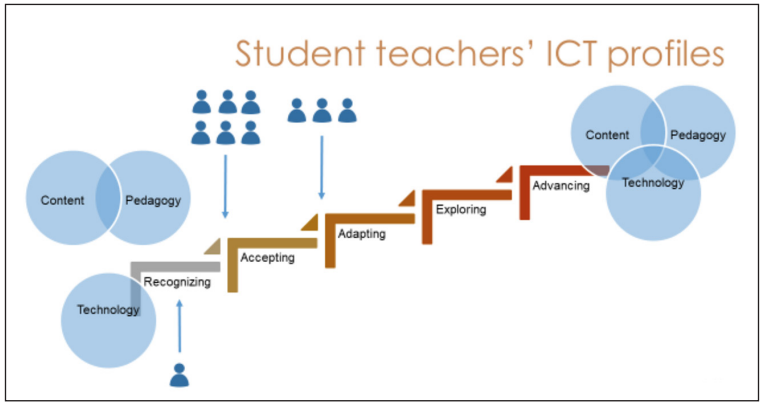
On D-day, the psTs were present in the rooms they were in charge of and welcomed the pupils as they circulated in the museum with their games. The control group performed the hunt on paper and the test group played the game on the mobile app. The pupils from the test group had tested the app with a mini bound game right before coming to the museum, simply to familiarize themselves with the basic features of the app on a tablet.

At the end of the activity, the psTs were asked to fill in a questionnaire to collect their opinions/impressions on the activity and the use of digital technology. The researchers also held a follow-up focus group to further refine the results of the questionnaires.

This data enabled us to draw up the digital profiles of each of the psTs based on Niess et al.'s (2009) Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) developmental model[9], thereby situating them in the digital integration process, and more precisely in the integration of Actionbound. The digital profiles found are presented in Figure 5 below.

9. See Mishra and Koehler (2006) for a presentation of TPACK.

Figure 5. Digital profiles of the ten psTs[10] based on Niess et al.'s (2009, p. 10) TPACK developmental model



One psT is at the recognizing stage. In sum, it is a stage of alignment of technology with content where the person is neither in favor nor against technology, has no intention of using the technology, thinks that technology is not easy to use for pupils, but that it can complement traditional teaching. Six psTs are situated in-between the recognizing/accepting stages, viz. an alignment of technology with content to motivate students, but with no real pedagogical integration. At that stage people are in favor of the use of technology but do not perceive the pedagogical added value of the tool (technology is simply a substitution option); they view technology as a complement to traditional teaching and believe it is important to use technology adequately. Three psTs are in-between the accepting/adapting stages, meaning that they are in favor of the use of technology, are ready to integrate technology in activities, and clearly see the pedagogical added value. The two research questions that we had for our target population (psTs) were the following ones:

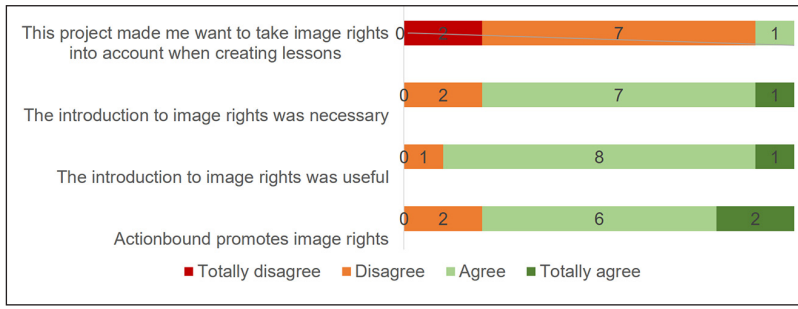
> RQ1. Does the use of Actionbound [along with the pedagogical support of the research team] raise the psTs' awareness regarding the concept of image rights?

10. Only ten out of the 11 psTs answered the questionnaire.

RQ2. Does the use of Actionbound [along with the pedagogical support from the research team] raise the psTs' awareness regarding the concept of OERs?

These questions were briefly addressed in CALL 2018 proceedings (Meurice et al., 2018) and will be tackled here in more detail. Figure 6 below depicts the psTs' perceptions on image rights therefore addressing our first research question.

Figure 6. psTs' perceptions on image rights



The results do not seem to indicate a correlation between awareness (overall agreement in terms of necessity, usefulness, and promotion of image rights) and implementation (overall disagreement in terms of wanting to take image rights into account in the future). This lack of correlation could perhaps be explained by various factors such as the psTs' own experiences as learners, the complexity or the novelty of the concept, or the lack of a collaborative culture among teachers. In addition, the psTs are not yet practicing teachers in charge of their own classrooms and groups of learners, which renders real integration impossible at this stage of their professional development.

Regarding our second RQ – viz. does the use of Actionbound [along with the pedagogical support from the research team] raise the student-teachers' awareness regarding the concept of OERs? – our results show that:

- it is motivating for almost all psTs (nine out of ten) to create a free educational resource;

- two psTs find the creation of this OER activity 'normal', two still consider it 'stressful', and two describe it as 'fun' and 'innovative'; and

- psTs have a more consumer-oriented approach than a producer-oriented one: whilst eight out of ten are inclined to use OERs created by other people, only five would agree to create an OER and share it with a community of teachers.

In sum, whilst the concept of OERs was unknown to the psTs at the beginning of the project, these results show a positive evolution on the issue, despite the tendency to adopt a consumer approach to OERs rather than a producer perspective.

4. Conclusions

As a reminder, our initial aims for the group of psTs involved in the case study were the following ones:

- to promote the use of mobile and classroom OEPs for L2 reading;

- to foster the development of pre- and in-service teachers' and learners' digital literacy skills, including among others the co-construction of OERs and reflective practices on image rights; and

- to create a local professional learning community and community of practice.

The results of the experiment (see Section 3 above) have shown that the setup of our study has come some way to meeting our first aim. It would indeed be

necessary to carry out further activities and/or experiment with the psTs to foster further promotion.

As for our second aim, we believe that the experiment has contributed to the development of the psTs' digital literacy skills but that, as could be expected at that stage of their professional development, there is still room for progress, as shown by the display of ICT profiles in Figure 5.

Regarding our third aim, a one-off experiment is certainly not sufficient to create a solid community of practice, but case studies like ours constitute initial steps that have to be taken towards that goal. Teacher trainers should set an example in fostering the development of PLCs including the various types of actors listed in R. Ellis's (2009) Second Language Acquisition (SLA) – language pedagogy nexus, viz. SLA researchers, classroom researchers, teacher educators, and language teachers. Relying on teachers' experience to foster reflexive discussions (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003) is essential and PLCs have been found to have strong potential for change in the professional culture of a school and for an actual fundamental shift in the habits of mind that teachers bring to their daily work in the classroom (see Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008 analysis of 11 studies on PLC). To quote Mercieca (2017) in her excellent discussion of communities of practice, "this form of social learning, as described by Bandura (1977), is particularly relevant to the higher education sector in the light of contemporary change and upheaval in society and the university world" (p. 3). This is especially true in practice-based programs in higher education institutions, as we have to ensure that, to quote Mercieca (2017) again, students "are supported to successfully negotiate the change in identity" (p. 9) involved in the professional learning path. Taking part in PLC and being active in professional communities of practice thus seem essential for all stakeholders in education.

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Supplementary materials

https://research-publishing.box.com/s/lnr7ltb64gced3stzhnfvlq5yg7cea1p

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