

Towards an Emergent Curriculum Development Model for the European Graduate Placement Scheme

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Abstract

The European Graduate Placement Scheme (EGPS) project is funded by the Erasmus strand of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. The project began on 1 October 2012 and will end in March 2015. Its overall goals are to establish a European framework for work placements for postgraduate students in translation companies and to facilitate educational synergies between universities and companies in a number of European member states. A major component of the project is the development of a curriculum model for the incorporation of work placements into translation studies degree programmes. This curriculum component is the focus of attention in this article.

More specifically, the project aims to:

- *enhance European cooperation between enterprises and higher education institutions (HEIs)*
- *stimulate and facilitate the international mobility of university students of translation*
- *increase the employability of translation students following completion of their degrees*
- *build on existing collaborative ventures between employers, HEIs and related translator-education projects and*
- ***contribute to curriculum development that incorporates workplace experience within programmes of study***

The scheme is expected to lead to more partnerships between institutions of higher education and employers, providing masters' students with experience in a commercial translation environment and real-life professional situations in another EU member state and thereby increasing their prospects for mobility once they join the workforce. Partners from different European countries will be sharing good practice in the area of work placements with a view toward creating a viable model for European work placements in the translation domain.

It is expected that the project will benefit students by providing them with access to a much wider range of placement opportunities across Europe, and by making them eligible for Erasmus funding. HEIs will be able to offer their students a wider range of placement opportunities across Europe. Employers can benefit from the scheme by accessing masters-level translation students with a range of specialisations and language pairs.

A key component of the project is the development of a curriculum development model and plan for incorporating work placements into translation studies curricula. On the basis of prior work carried out at the School of Translation, Linguistics and Cultural Studies of the University of Mainz, Germany, one of the EGPS partner universities, a novel curriculum model is being created and tested within the scope of the project. It is designed as an evolutionary step beyond the still prevalent reductionist view of curriculum design towards an emergentist vision that is in tune with state-of-the-art thinking on the nature of learning in our post-modern era. The essence of the proposed innovation might be seen as an evolutionary transition from a fractured competence perspective to a fractal (self-similar, self-generating and emergent) one.

The project partners are:

- *Skills CfA, the UK standard-setting body for languages, translation, interpreting and intercultural skills*
- *University of Salford, UK*
- *Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland*
- *Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain*
- *Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany*

This paper provides 1) a brief overview of the present status of the EGPS project, and 2) insights into the curriculum development model created as the pedagogical cornerstone of the scheme.

1. Overview of the project twenty months on

At the two-thirds mark in the EGPS project, a great deal has been accomplished by the five participating institutional partners in terms of: 1) extensive consultations and negotiations on common objectives and standards for translation-related work placements, 2) the formulation of concrete common guidelines in a comprehensive handbook for both placement students and employers; 3) the creation of supporting documentation including informative flyers and placement assessment instruments; 4) the localization of the handbook and supporting documentation from English into the three other languages represented by the EGPS partner countries; 5) the creation of a website (<http://www.e-gps.org>) by the Krakow EGPS partners to host content as it is developed including the handbook, the project dissemination and assessment documentation, and a database of international work placement opportunities available to students enrolled at the four participating universities; and 6) survey research involving current and former work placement participants with the goal of securing a student perspective on suitable placement objectives and standards. The EGPS handbook, which originated in a document designed for UK student placements in the UK, has been thoroughly revised and modified to be consistent with placement norms in the four countries represented by the partner institutions. In addition, a curriculum model has been developed to provide justification and principles for the incorporation of work placements into translation studies curricula at the MA level. [1]

2. Incorporating placements in translator education: focus on curriculum

2.1 The inadequacy of existing models of translator competence

Curriculum development work that was underway at the School of Translation, Linguistics and Cultural Studies when the EGPS project was initiated in 2012 was a major incentive for including the School's participation in the project. Building upon and moving beyond a social constructivist approach to translator education developed at the School at the turn of the millennium [2], the approach being developed for the project takes a fractal, emergentist perspective to curriculum development and instructional design drawing significantly on complexity thinking. The FTSK's main task within the project has been to develop a state-of-the-art curriculum model for translator education that will enhance the integration of work placements into professional education curricula.

'Competence-based learning' is one of the key catchphrases that have dominated didactic discourse in a range of educational domains already for a third of a century [3]. Within the field of translation studies, a number of models have been proposed based on the concept of translator or translation competence over the last ten years [4]. Each of these models attempts to specify the sub-competences this translator super-competence is purported to comprise. From the perspective of the still widespread positivist-reductionist epistemology in the social sciences and education, it might indeed be plausible to dissect the professional translator's overall competence into its component parts. If it were possible, this would facilitate the process of identifying translation-specific knowledge and skills that could be taught in subject-matter courses within a translator-education curriculum, and would also make it easier to measure the degree to which translators-in-training are moving towards the level of expertise, knowledge and skill required by acknowledged translation professionals.

There are, however, several difficulties with this approach. First of all, each of the models referred to above specifies a different set of sub-competences. In each case, these are depicted in a schematic two-dimensional illustration that we believe belies the complexity of 'competence' and, lacking the dimension of time, that reveals nothing at all about how a translator's expertise and professional skills can be developed through instruction and or experience. The two-dimensional models each include a set of boxes, some of which are contiguous and some of which are linked by arrows. The static boxes in the models, labelled with hypothesized sub-competences, can be seen as suggesting a container-like metaphor where knowledge and skills are seen as discrete products or contents that can be pre-determined, dissected for instructional transmission and covered systematically in focused subject-matter courses.



The reductionist thinking underlying this and other competence-based approaches to curriculum development and instructional design has been described by some leading contemporary scholars in educational philosophy as a remnant of the modernist turn in education that has been traced back to the industrial efficiency methods initiated by Frederick Taylor at the beginning of the 20th century [5]. Supported by the prominent behaviourist thinking of the day, the efficiency movement had an enormous impact on education throughout the 20th century. As William Doll [5] explains, the roots of Taylorism can be traced back at least to Petrus Ramus, the French humanist and educational reformer who originated the concept of 'method' and applied it to curriculum design back in the 16th century. The translator competence development model developed at the FTSK, which was intended from the beginning as a conceptual tool for bootstrapping much-needed innovation in translator education in the third millennium, is built on an alternative non-reductionist view of translator competence. Rather than seeing competence as discernable **products**, that is fragmented skills and knowledge, the underlying conceptualisation is that both learning and competence are holistic and autopoietic (dynamic, unpredictable, self-generating and self-maintaining) **processes**.

In agreeing to participate in the EGPS project, it was our conviction that this project would be an ideal opportunity to apply and test this emerging post-modernist pedagogical epistemology in the context of translator education: an educational domain which, while perhaps not normally considered within the realm of vocational education per se, is clearly professional in nature, that is, it is designed to prepare students to function competently if not expertly in the post-industrial economy. The post-industrial workspace is marked less by the kind of repetitive manual tasks that predominated on the assembly line at the turn of the 20th century, but by networked thinking where teamwork in ever-changing constellations, perpetual problem solving, and the dynamic application of evolving computerised tools under ever-increasing time pressure.

2.2 Foundations for a post-positivist model of translator competence

The initial post-positivist model of emergent translator competence under development at the FTSK when the EGPS project began is depicted in Figure 1.

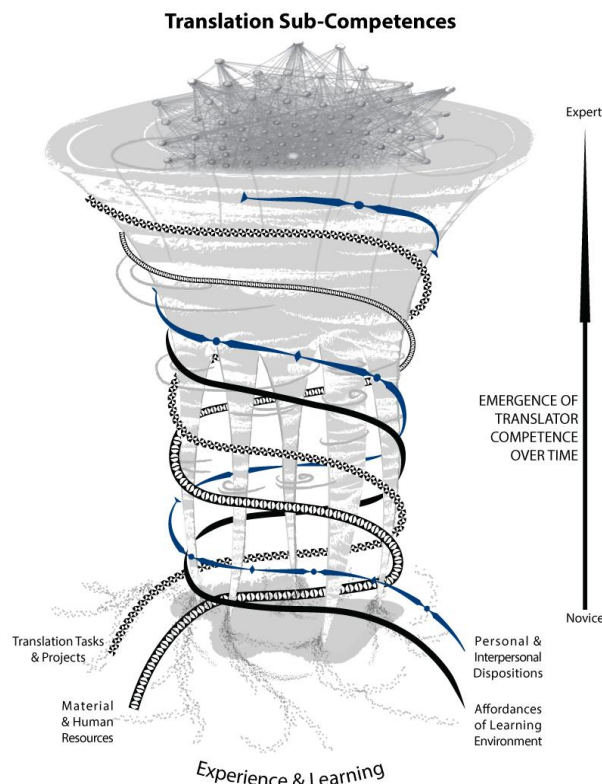


Fig. 1. A Model of Emergent Translator Competence



The model was inspired in part by the view of competence acquisition proposed by Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus [6] but also by complexity theory, which has come to inform a post-modern understanding of learning as a largely autopoietic (i.e. self-initiating, self-sustaining and perpetually dynamic) process of becoming -- rather than a static set of learnable facts and piecemeal skills. The model depicts a set of sub-competences that gradually merge into a single super-competence over time and as the result of experience and learning. Readers with a post-positivist epistemology may well balk at this depiction, which still appears to reflect the deep-seated reductionist convictions underlying the functioning of educational institutions across the globe and from elementary school through higher education and this is a concern we certainly share. What we are proposing is to see the model as an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary one, taking into consideration existing institutional structures (and also widespread reductionist pedagogical beliefs) -- in order to avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater. After all, if the societal, institutional and conceptual barriers to the replacement of a time-honoured system are prohibitively high, then proposing revolutionary change is pointless. So, as an evolutionary step, we have tentatively preserved the conventional notion of fragmenting the professional's super-competence into acquirable, if not always teachable, sub-competences. [7] However, rather than depicting a linear cause-and-effect relationship between teaching and learning, the model reflects our understanding that learning is a holistic, emergent, self-perpetuating and embodied lifelong process that proceeds both within the individual and within communities of practice at different levels. Rather than cause-and-effect educational inputs and outputs, our model depicts the affordances that set the stage for emergent learning to take place organically. And while institutionalized teaching and learning may well be seen as sub-divisions of a super-competence (even though this has been done here less out of conviction than expediency, as mentioned above), the translator's super-competence would be expected to emerge eventually as a unified capacity or capability for professional, expert and flexible workplace performance as the learner progresses beyond Dreyfus & Dreyfus' lower stages of competence-development (novice and competent) towards their more advanced levels of proficiency, expertise and mastery.

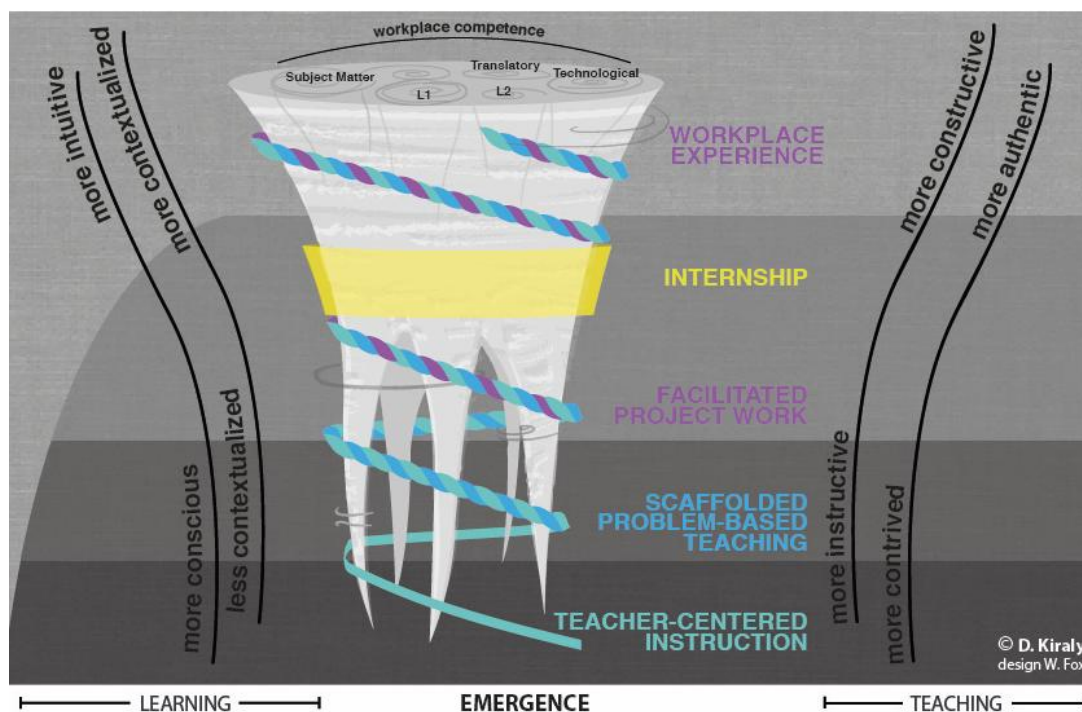


Fig. 2 An evolutionary model of a translation studies curriculum

Figure 2 introduces an evolutionary model of a translation studies curriculum based originally on a social constructivist approach to translator education [2] that has evolved thanks to the influence of



complexity thinking applied to didactic progression. In this model, progression is portrayed not in a conventional reductionist building-block fashion, but instead in terms of movement from less to more complex. Teacher-centred instruction is employed most extensively at the earliest stages of the programme of studies where students are acquiring basic, relatively simple skills. As they move beyond those basic skills and knowledge, students will be exposed to scaffolded problem-solving activities where they can practice the application of the basic skills to realistic situations. The final stage of the curriculum involves facilitated project work, where the students can tackle authentic projects. Course design moves from more to less contrived; learning proceeds from more conscious to more intuitive; activities proceed from the *less contextualized* to *more contextualized*; and the didactic style proceeds from *more instructive* to *more constructive*.

Aspects of Phronetic Workplace Competence

Teamwork

- Ethical action
- Responsibility
- Empathy


Working praxis

- Routinization
- Heuristic capability

Quality control

- Capability for self-assessment

Readiness for perpetual learning

-  = Authentic emergent project

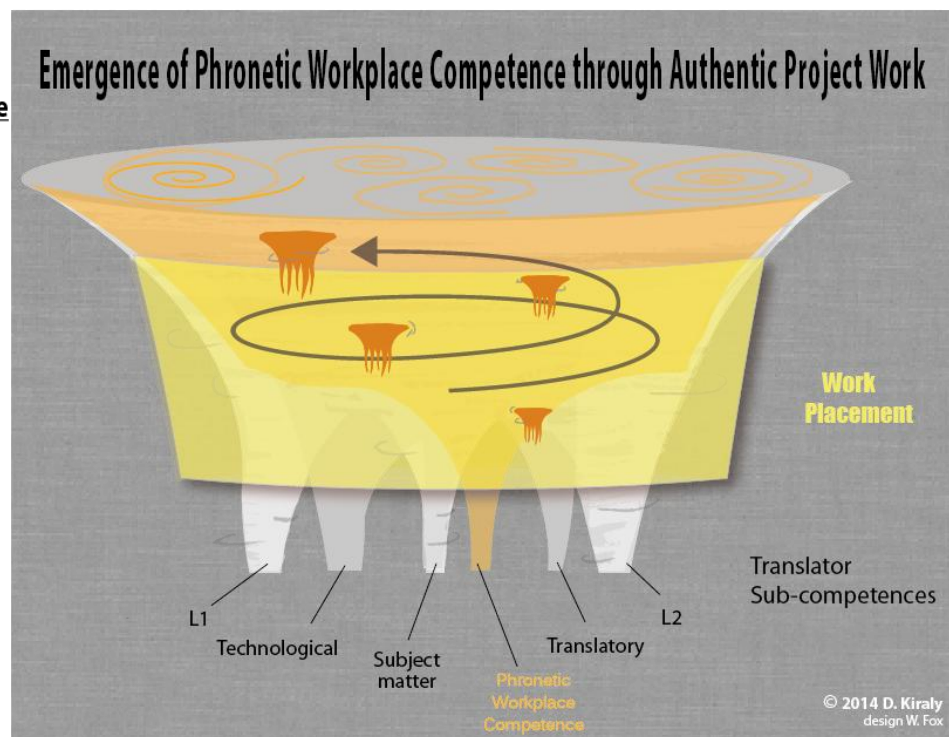


Fig. 3 Workplace Competence and the Work Placement

Moving beyond the classroom, we have also incorporated the work placement into the vortex of learning and increasing competence that is seen to emerge over time in this model. During the early development of the EGPS project, the institutional partners agreed that the ideal time for a work placement for translation students would be at the MA level after a basic understanding of the norms, practices and tools of professional translation has been acquired in coursework (progressing, as shown in Figure 2 from teacher-centred instruction to largely autonomous authentic project work).

Figure 3 depicts our current understanding of a plausible role for a work placement within the development of workplace competence: providing the unique affordances of a professional working environment to facilitate the merging of the institutionally expedient sub-competences. In our view, it is specifically the experience of undertaking actual work in the workplace that allows the learner to move beyond the fragmented sub-competences imposed by the modernist curriculum and to merge them into a unified translator competence. Rather than classes covering specific sub-sets of subject matter or sub-sets of discrete skills that are endemic in the institutional curriculum, the extra-curricular work done in the workplace can be seen to be comprised of fractal (that is, self-similar) multi-dimensional authentic projects, through which knowledge and skills can emerge and evolve as the placement student progresses from one to the next. The facets of workplace competence listed to the left of the model in Figure 3 are not meant to be seen as discrete, reductionist entities but are rather more like

facets of a crystal or, like the self-similar structure of a romanesco cauliflower, as self-similar but irreducibly interconnected bundles of learning, experience and competence. In this way, by changing the way we look at competence, we hope to be able to change attitudes towards the work placement. No longer should it be seen as an optional extra-curricular supplement to a university-level education in translation studies, but as a vital integrated stage in the process of merging the sub-competences developed in the institutional setting into an all encompassing translator super-competence.



Figure 4: A living metaphor for fractal learning, competence and curriculum

This does not, of course, complete our project work on a suitable translation studies curriculum that incorporates work placements. The model clearly holds little more than hypothetical status and needs to be corroborated as a viable approach -- or rejected -- on the basis of feedback from the EGPS partner institutions and from returning EGPS placement students as well as their placement mentors. This is the curriculum development work that remains to be completed within the final ten months of the EGPS project.

References

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