Learning Norwegian on the web *http://norr.ismennt.is/*

By Gry EK

Center for foreign languages at Laugalaekjarskoli secondary school, Iceland

Pedagogical context

ICT is used in a language course involving parents, the development of computer literacy and student autonomy
The **target group** comprises students in 9. and 10. grade studying Norwegian as a secondary language, (age 14-15 y.) The course is part of their compulsory education, and the students are situated in schools all over Iceland.
The **aims of the course** are   o   language learning, to meet the requirements of the national curriculum   o   making the learning experience more authentic   o   developing student autonomy and computer literacy   o   strengthening contact with parents and involving them more in the students' work
The target language was: Norwegian
Further remarks   This project started in 1998 as a pilot project funded by the Nordic Council, the school authorities of Reykjavik and the Icelandic Ministry of Education. It was awarded the European Label 2000 for innovation in language teaching. In May 2002 the web site was officially opened and is now an established part of the Reykjavik school system.

Organisational context

Size of target group: over 30		
Apart from the target group - were **other people** involved? If yes, who?	How many?	To what purpose?
- parents, headmaster or other representative from the students school.	app. 2 per student	To monitor the student's progress and provide encouragement and technical assistance when necessary.
Teaching period: 3 – 4 x 40 minute classes per week for the whole school year (September – June)		
Was distance learning combined with face-to-face instruction? Face-to-face events are arranged monthly for those living in or close to Reykjavik. These meetings were not required parts of the program.		

Motivation for the use of ICT

Integrating ICT in the learning and teaching process is a priority for Icelandic school authorities, and also required in the National curriculum.

Danish is the compulsory Nordic language in secondary schools. The students concerned have received a dispensation to study Norwegian as a Nordic language instead. They are few in number and are located far apart, all over the country. Suitable learning material and educated teachers are often not available. Via the Internet they can work with a teacher and other students while their classmates are learning Danish.

By using almost exclusively authentic Norwegian web-sites as source material, the students are kept up-dated both in use of the target language and in cultural knowledge.

Learning/teaching via the Web gives both students and teacher great freedom to choose their own place, time and tempo of work. It also encourages individual learning.

Description of the course

The **aim** was to give the students ample opportunity to use Norwegian through reading, collecting information, writing formal and informal texts, drilling grammatical points, listening to spoken language and communicating via the Internet. Thereby, hopefully, developing their skills and knowledge of the language.

The methodology used:

Students and teachers work asynchronously on the Web. All materials are available only on the Web and communication is only via the Web. Students (and parents) initially received information about the assignments and learning goals. This was done in face-to-face meetings when possible. Students were offered face-to-face courses in the use of the computer, Internet and WebBoard (our platform for communication). Those prevented from attending received written instructions. We use a variation on the portfolio method. The student has a list of all the assignments he is expected to do over the year, the teacher can assign further exercises if he deems it necessary. The student collects his work in a web-folder and hands it in for evaluation at the end of the term. Their best work is published on our web site for everyone to read. Students also track their own progress in an on-line log. A lot of extra material is provided for students who want to work more. Initiative and self-discipline is expected from the students. All materials and communication are in the target language. (I suspect that more learning takes place when the student tries to figure out what he is supposed to do, than when he is actually doing it). Students' initiative and proposals are welcome.

Teaching materials used:

Online material, specially designed WebPages or authentic Norwegian websites, interactive exercises. When suitable, students' work was used for demonstration purposes and as a basis for further assignments by everybody. No books or other paper-based material was used. All communication was done digitally.

The **technologies** used:

- Hardware: Desktop computers with Internet access and headphones.
- Software: Browser and WebBoard, Word or other writing program. Various web-

design programs to create WebPages and interactive exercises. Markin32 to digitally mark students work.

- Special workspaces: Students' workspace was provided by the school, in the computer lab, library or classroom. Some choose to work at home, but in this case, they have to pay for their own Internet connection.

- e-mail
- internet chats
- internet discussion forums
- databases
- groupware

- simulations and games

● What was successful

The students liked to be able to study Norwegian within their ordinary timetable, not having to travel to group lessons after regular school hours. Students in remote parts of the country enjoyed being part of a group. They enjoyed the freedom to choose their own time and place and tempo of work. They enjoyed the variety of texts and exercises, especially interactive exercises where the results are shown immediately. The students with the most initiative are starting to choose their own material and working on assignments in discussion with the teacher.

● What was less successful

Truthfully I did not expect much. When we started out in 1999 many students had little or no experience using the Internet. That has changed dramatically. Little time is now needed to teach them how to work. Originally a lot of time was used on logistics: getting the right information to the right people, ensuring students access to working space, updating the web site regularly, developing good methods of evaluation, developing methods to "keep up morale" and preventing students from dropping out. Our project does not provide opportunity for speech-training yet, which is a big drawback.

● Feedback

Initially a lot of scepticism from students and parents: "I hate computers", "he is not able to manage his own work", "we do not learn to speak Norwegian", "how does the teacher know I am the one actually doing the work?", "it is boring to sit and work alone in a computer lab", "I do not understand what I am supposed to do", etc. Now this is an established part of schoolwork, students know they will start this in 9th grade and are much more positive, even excited to start. As always some have problems handling freedom, feel insecure and hardly dare to click a button without permission, but that is usually quick to change. They adapt.

● What we would change next time

Keep the exercises and assignments shorter and more to the point, emphasize even more strongly both to students and parents that the student is responsible for his own work, further develop the portfolio approach to our work, include more listening exercises.

● What we would recommend to other professionals in the field

My students were children, 14 – 15 years old. Start with something simple and clear, include step-by-step instructions at first. Later keep instructions to a minimum, let the students learn by doing and trying things hands-on. Use the target language as much as pos-

> sible. Update frequently. Allow socializing among students, even if it is not on the curriculum, encourage interaction, create a "group feeling". Response to students requests and letters must be as quick as possible.

Personal data about the author

First name Gry		Last name EK
Institution Tungumálaverið við Laugalækjarskoli		
Street/ No. v/ Laugalæk		City: Reykjavik
Post Code: 105		Country: Iceland
Tel. +354 588 7500		e-mail gryek@rvk.is
Fax +354 588 7548		URL http://laugalaekjarskoli.ismennt.is/Tungumalaver/

Professional background

Profession
Educational consultant, language teacher
My current occupation is teaching Norwegian in secondary school, distance teaching students in 9. and 10. grade, maintaining the website, consulting