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DELCYME

Defining roles and skills of Online Tutors in PARKUR

1. Learning-environment changes implying adaptation

Foreign language learning and teaching have been largely studied in Europe and at a worldwide scale for many decades now, in line with each coetaneous educational and learning situation existing and evolving. Coming to the most recent decades, specially the last one, there have been many changes that are calling for a necessary and immediate adaptation of many factors involved in the learning/teaching process. To mention some, the evolution of information technologies in general and the conquest of the digital sphere in particular have meant an enormous change in all spheres, including learning, of course. Moreover, new trends in learning putting the learner as a more active participant also imply evident adaptations from all parts. DELCYME project and the development of the platform PARKUR have been created to answer to such calls for innovation an adaptation.

Leaving behind the well-known "1+2 principle", included in the EU's White Paper on Education and Training (1995), the newest recommendations now advocate for a "2+2 principle", as per the last *Council Recommendations on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages* (May 2019). It is undeniable that world mobility and advances in learning processes and facilities imply a higher demand of young citizens who can communicate in as many languages as possible. This project's objective was therefore to boost such multilingualism among young Europeans within a mobility project, and, in order to achieve that, to create a net of tutors to help them and guide them in the learning process.

The beginning of this section has mentioned several changes that have motivated this innovative and adapted idea of a net of tutors in PARKUR. This, in sum, are as follows:

- **The way the learner access information and content.** The traditional scenario in which learners could only access knowledge and information through a teacher, face to face and through a textbook has enormously changed in recent years. The evolution of the Internet allows anyone who wants to start learning a new language to find hundreds of websites and apps to do so. Moreover, there is no need for a textbook or coursebook, at least not in its printed version; technological devices cater the learners for as much content (or more) as printed books. Finally, these two factors combined (the Internet and technological devices) have given place to online teachers and tutors who can offer their learners, again, as much knowledge as if they were face to face.
- **The new role of the learner/teacher and non-directive approaches.** In line with recent calls for what is referred to as "non-directive learning", the learner now plays a much more active

role, and the teacher or tutor adopts a more passive one. The former is the negotiator of the learning goals and makes the decisions concerning the path together with the latter, who acts like a facilitator and guide.
- **The objective and motivation to learn a foreign language.** Closely related to the previous factor, learners now have a very active role when it comes to deciding what to learn, how to learn it and why. In other words, the learning objectives and the path to reach them are different to what they used to be. Thanks to global mobility, it is easier now to work and live in another country, but the language barrier is still an obstacle for some people. Moreover, learners do not start learning the language for academically compulsory reasons, but mainly to be able to work and communicate in a foreign environment; therefore, the learning goals have become much more practical than purely theoretical.

In line with these three factors, another key component of this project has emerged over the last years; in fact, it can be argued that it has been born, partially, as an answer to such changes. We are talking about the teacher figure or, as we prefer to call it, the tutor in the foreign language learning process. As mentioned above, this role used to exist only face to face. However, evolution and innovation have resulted in a new wave of online teachers and tutors who are taking more and more ground in the field of foreign language learning. The table below (taken from John Hopkins University, available at https://facultyforward.jhu.edu/learning-roadmap-for-new-online-instructors/comparing-face-to-face-and-online-teaching/(14.10.2020) summarizes the main differences between both types of teacher/tutor. The column on the right ("Teaching online") serves as a motivator for the new role of tutors in PARKUR.

Types of Differences	Teaching Face-to-Face	Teaching Online
Pedagogical	Mostly synchronous interaction, content presented as lectures, hands-on, pencil-and-paper assessments, content can be planned session-by-session	Mostly asynchronous interaction, discussion forums, various means of content presentation, alternative assessments (e.g., collaborative/research projects, presentations), content must be planned out in advance of development
Operational	Held in the same geographic location at the same time — regularly scheduled sessions	Class is in session 24/7
Students	Often live in close proximity to campus, schedule allows for classroom sessions	Often working professionals, can be globally dispersed, personal availability can vary widely
Role of Instructor	Lecturer, sage on the stage that transfers knowledge to students	Facilitator, helps the students construct knowledge by guiding discussions

In view of these differences, and focusing on the column referring to teaching online, the platform PARKUR has designed a net of tutors that answer to all these characteristics. First, the tutors in PARKUR have access to the learning content in advance (previously created by the team of DELCYME), so it is created before the learning process even starts; second, the learners can access the content anytime during the learning period (set in agreement with the tutor), facilitating their independent management of the process as a whole; PARKUR has also been designed bearing in mind that those young professionals are globally dispersed and need to learn the foreign language before or during their work experience abroad; last, but not least, the tutor in PARKUR is a facilitator at all times, helping and guiding the learner. In fact, the most innovative part of this project aims to meet that need of having a facilitator that negotiates the content, the path, but also guides you through it and helps you to reach that goal. This innovative component is that of the double tutor or, in other words, the fact that each learner in the platform is guided by not just one but two tutors, each one having very specific and different roles in the learning process to reach the best outcomes possible.

2. PARKUR: One learner, two tutors.
   The net of Tutor Coaches and Tutor Islands

As introduced, a non-directive, current approach to language learning, means a prior negotiation of the learning goals and path. However, once these aspects have been agreed upon between the two parts (learner and tutor), the former needs to be accompanied until the end. When it comes to language learning, the linguistic and communicative competence can only be best acquired with the help of a facilitator and expert who can check whether the learning process is successful. Therefore, we shall not forget that the learner is free to follow the path and reach the goals, yet there is an undoubtful need for a teacher/tutor/facilitator figure to be there. This is the tenet behind the two-fold idea of tutors in PARKUR: offering a "Tutor Coach" and a "Tutor-island".

To be more specific, the "Tutor Coach" (or TC) is responsible for holding that prior negotiation in an interview in which both participants get to know each other and discuss the learning objectives, situation and strategies to follow. Moreover, the TC will encourage the learner to keep advancing on the path, precisely as a coach would do in all types of situations.

After that first interview, which is held in the learner's native language so as to perfectly understand each other and set the learning goals and steps, the learner starts his/her learning path, during which the learning process is monitored by the "Tutor Islands" (or TI). The reason for the "island" metaphor lies in the design of the learning path as if it was an archipelago made of different learning islands; each independent learning island has a different topic, and each learner will "visit" and "hop" from one island to another depending on the learning path previously negotiated and set with the TC (visit websites for further information and examples). In other words, each island contains a different learning module which may or may not be necessary for an individual, while another learner might follow a completely different path and hop from and to different

islands in this metaphorical archipelago. During the development of the course, the function of each TI is to keep track of the learner's performance and achievements within each island containing the linguistic contents designed for practical and applicable situations to help young learners to be successful in their mobility. In addition, each learning island is based on step tasks preparing to a final task. This is in line with the recent learning perspective known as "task-based" learning (Ellis, 2003), which is yet another characteristic of this project: following a goal-oriented, meaningful and authentic-language perspective, task-based learning and teaching use different tasks or assignments that the learners need to complete in their process, guided by their teacher or tutor.

In sum, the TC contributes to tracing the path to be followed, and the TIs accompany the learner alongside their progress, giving individual feedback and also organizing group interactions in the learner's target language. It needs to be clarified that one TI might be in charge of one content island, yet another TI might be in charge of the next one, or one can be responsible for both; thus, one learner may have one or many TIs during the course. This would vary for each language and learning path.

Following the principle of an individualized learning, each learner will therefore follow a different path according to their needs; however, all learning paths share a final assessment, which is, as explained, of a qualitative nature, focused on their achievements and progress. For this final assessment, but also during the whole path, the TC and the TI are in contact in order to assess such progress. This is what we refer to with that "net" of tutors, who are always connected. All this is best summarized in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Two-fold idea of tutors in PARKUR
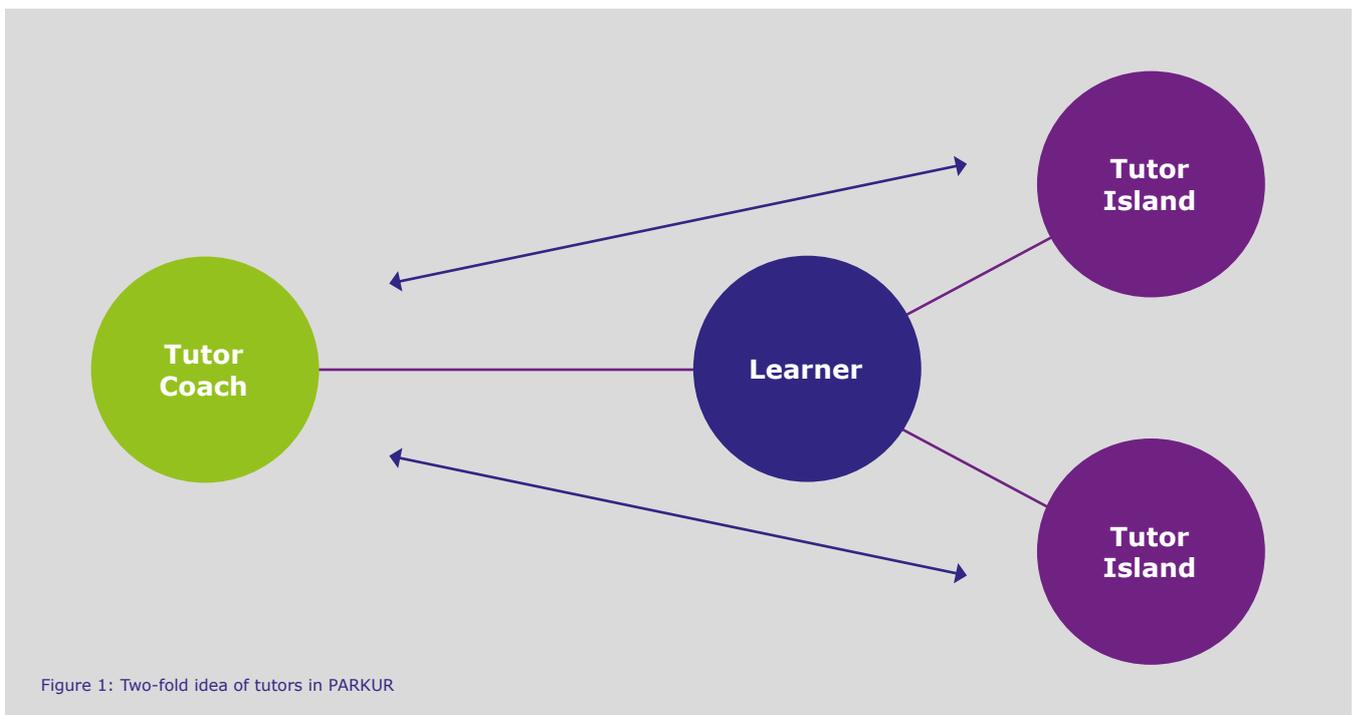
In order for this net to work properly, however, there is an important aspect to cover: the training process that all future tutors need to complete prior to becoming a tutor in PARKUR. This process has been meticulously designed by the team of DELCYME, by setting a list of previous requirements that both roles ask for and designing a training that caters for the qualities and capacities that both need to have.

3. The profile of tutors in PARKUR and their training

Being an online tutor has become a very common trend among foreign language teachers nowadays, mainly due to all the advances mentioned in section one. However, if we want this complex net of tutors and learners to fully work, it was necessary to set a clear list of requirements that any tutor who want to become part of the team needed to meet first. Although they are not very strict, they have been agreed specifying the different qualities for each role ("Island" or "Coach") so that it is clear from the beginning of the training process. All these competencies that potential tutors are asked to have are summarized in Table 1 below, as agreed by the team of DELCYME:

	Tutor Coach	Tutor Island
Entry competencies	- Has language competencies L1: French, German, Italian, Spanish or Polish - Has language competencies L2: at least one of the above mentioned languages level B2 (according to CEFR) - Experienced in working with young learners - Experienced in mid-term/long-term individual mobility abroad - Showing intrinsic motivation to participate in the project - Altruistic attitude desired - Sharing values of European Union and showing multi-cultural awareness	- Has language competencies L1: French, German, Italian, Spanish or Polish - Has language competencies L2: at least one of the above mentioned languages on level B2 - Experienced in language teaching/ training - Showing intrinsic motivation to participate in the project - Altruistic attitude desired - Sharing values of European Union and showing multicultural awareness - Strong affinity for long-distance learning - Communication and presentation skills

Table 1: desired entry competencies for future tutors in PARKUR

As for the training, it has been designed by a coordinated part of the project with the purpose of preparing the entering participants for their future role of tutors of the PARKUR team. Such training, as indicated in the training scenario, is divided into different learning islands that tackle topics like learning approaches, the characteristics of learning online, techniques to provide constructive feed-back, among others. In sum, its sole or main objective is to prepare the tutors in all the involved factors for them to develop their role in the best way possible. Moreover, even if there are some common topics in the training for both roles, it also offers different hands-on training activities specifically designed for each one. The outcomes of this training process are best summarized in Table 2:

	Tutor Coach	Tutor Island
Training outcomes	**Psychology of Learning:** - basic knowledge of psychology of learning - knowledge about the self-directed learning - knowledge about e-learning - knowledge about media didactics	**Psychology of Learning:** - basic knowledge of psychology of learning - knowledge about the self-directed learning - knowledge about e-learning - knowledge about media didactics - knowledge of the socio-constructivist theories of learning ("teacher is a coach", "learning is co-operation")
	Knowledge of the e-learning program PARKUR: - Knowledge of content and structure of PARKUR in specific - Platform Chamilo - Concept and objectives of PARKUR	**Knowledge of the e-learning program PARKUR:** - Knowledge of content and structure of PARKUR in specific - Knowledge on how to use synchronous & asynchronous online-tools - Knowledge on how to cooperate and collaborate in long-distance learning
	Support of the learner: - how to use synchronous and asynchronous online-tools - Knowledge of possible assistance during e-learning process - Awareness of the tutor's role - Knowledge on how to give constructive advice and conversation techniques - Knowledge of techniques for giving constructive feedback - Knowledge on how to monitor learners' activities - Knowledge of the evaluation and feedback documents - Knowledge of the FAQ document for learners	**Support of the learner:** - Knowledge of how about long-distance tutorials - Awareness of tutor's role - Knowledge of how to deal with group dynamics - Knowledge of how to give constructive advices and to use intercultural conversation techniques - Knowledge of how to give constructive feedback

Table 2: Outcomes of the tutor training

As this is an on-going process, it must be clarified that both the requirements or entry competencies the participants need to have and the outcomes they obtain after the training process are in constant change and adaptation.

4. Conclusions: towards the best training scenario

In close relation to the last idea in the previous section, the process of training future tutors is one of the challenges this project envisages, as it needs to cope with many factors at different levels.

One of the main walls the project as a whole and the tutor-training part in particular have come across is the different learning traditions of the tutors-in-training and the future learners of the platform PARKUR. In other words, this is an international project embracing learners and tutors from five different countries and five different languages. In addition, it is well-known that learning traditions, strategies, methodologies… vary not only across countries but even within them, or from one educational centre to another. Thus, while a future tutor may have had a foreign language approach where communication was the core element, another one may come from a different perspective in which more formal aspects, natural of the traditional approach, are still preferred in schools and centers. Bridging the gap between all kinds of educational backgrounds is one of the challenges of the project and the tutor training program, as it needs to fit all potential tutors and therefore all profiles.

In close relation to this, the five countries involved also differ in terms of multilingualism versus bilingualism or even monolingualism. While participants from regions in the north of Italy may not only speak Italian but also German and/or French for its proximity, and west-Germans usually have good command of French as well for the same reasons and vice-versa, Poland and Spain are two countries which have been traditionally more isolated in linguistic terms. While some regions in Spain are bilinguals (like Catalonia, where some north-Catalans may also have a good command of French), the rest of the country is mainly monolingual with a good command of English as their L2, but the remaining four languages of the project are not that commonly studied. Even in multilingual regions where Italian, German and French are learnt (for example), it is highly unlikely that their inhabitants have a good command of Spanish and Polish as well. While this plurilingual factor is one of the main highlights of the project, it can also be an obstacle when it comes to tutor-training encounters, not only face-to-face but also virtually, as the tutors-in-training need to communicate and, having five different backgrounds with five different L1s and numerous L2s or L3s, it may be difficult to choose one. However, this can perfectly be solved as there is in fact no need to choose only one and tutors shall have the liberty to use any of the languages they have command of to interact with their colleagues.

In sum, and in order to solve these and other problems natural to a multilingual and multicultural project of this kind, it is essential that the training team always provides future tutors with the right information, instructions and formation. The recruiting process needs to stick to an accurate communication policy at all levels and there must be transparency for all partners of the project. For this reason and purpose, documents like the Tutor Training Scenario or the Concept of Online Tutoring are necessary and shall be followed.

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