**Instructional Design & eAuthoring - Meta Reflection**

The initial concept for the project was to provide an introduction to Microsoft Word for pre-college students. It was later suggested to include a complementary referencing guide for new entrants to third level education. It was hoped that this would go some way to break down the formality of referencing as it is commonly introduced to first year college students.

It was agreed by all in the group that this ‘pre-college course’ could be useful for entrants lacking word processing skills and fearing the ‘unknowns’ of referencing in academic writing. This was reinforced by the literature review undertaken for the annotated bibliography. We found a number of challenges to the notion of a “digital native” generation and significant research into issues with computer literacy in third level education.

Developing a profile of our target audience was an interesting process on this project. We individually drafted a persona which, on comparison, turned out to be almost identical. A 17 year old boy with an average Leaving Certificate, an interest in sport and video games emerged from the process. What was most significant here, in my opinion, is that we all envisaged a person from a disadvantaged background. We did not elaborate in our discussions on this point but it was apparent, on some conscious or unconscious level, that this aspect of the persona was somehow related to an individual’s proficiency with desktop computer applications.

In essence, our learning resource follows a behaviourist approach. The content is specific to the learning objectives and the learner is not required to go beyond this. Activities within the presentations are used along with separate quizzes for reinforcement. There is also alignment with Gagné’s nine events. For example, images are used at the beginning of sections as a hook to gain learner attention, learning objectives are introduced, content is provided, activities are incorporated incrementally to elicit performance and provide feedback, and quizzes are provided to assess performance.

The concept and learning objectives of the e-learning resource was decided before we settled on an instructional design model. Initial discussions centred on the use of the ADDIE or ASSURE model. While we were deciding, initial development work was taking place on the resource. PowerPoint slides and draft documents were produced outlining the design concept. These were then presented to the group for feedback and adjusted/edited based on consensus opinion. When we then finalised our choice of ID model, we felt that the work to date reflected an agile approach which was most consistent with the SAM model.

We continued to follow the SAM model as it reflected our initial approach to the work. It was important to define a model to employ as it helped inform our planning and made it easier to reach consensus on decisions. The approach worked well in that roles were assigned to leverage the skills within the group. It also enabled us to make a quick decision on the tools we were to adopt. In settling on Articulate Storyline software, we knew that we could employ PowerPoint slides to produce indicative content and visuals and that these could be easily developed for importation into the final resource format. By developing early, well defined visual representations of resources were available for incremental evaluation and testing by the group. This meant that we could identify issues with scope, look and content early before work was well advanced.

While the SAM model adopted was not completely efficient (a significant amount of material was discarded in the process), it did lead us to the development of a very complete and robust storyboard. This was sufficiently developed to allow for handover to the project member responsible for importing into Articulate.

There were some definite advantages to working within a group. The obvious one was being able to leverage the expertise and knowledge of a number of people. This allowed us to assign roles that fitted the skill set of the individuals within the group. It also meant that work completed by an individual could be tested and evaluated by the entire group.

Working in a group, however, does require careful planning and regular communication. There were times at the beginning of the project when group members were unsure of their role or the expectations of work to be completed. This occurred as we initially relied on week to week meetings before or after Tuesday morning classes. Once these problems were identified, we adopted Basecamp, a project management app, to improve organisation and communication and also scheduled a number of separate meetings as project milestones were reached. This improved the efficiency and worked better for the collaborative effort.

As already mentioned, we adopted the SAM model so evaluation was ongoing throughout the design and development phases. We also considered the final resource using LORI. There was general agreement that the resource is accurate, balanced and at an appropriate level of detail. There is plenty of opportunity provided for learner interaction and feedback, through both formative assessment activities and the quiz. We also believe that the visual presentation is strong and appropriate for the target group. There was a lot of thought put into this as we were conscious of striking a balance between the informality of the visuals and avoiding patronising the learners by trying to be too ‘street’. A lack of word processing skills and fear of referencing for college entrants is widespread enough to make the potential reusability of the resource strong.

We did not get the opportunity, as a group, to evaluate the usability and accessibility of the resource. My own reflections on this though are that we could have tidied up some of the navigation elements. There are issues at the end of some levels where it is not obvious for the user how to progress or return to main menu.

Overall with the project, the main issue that arose was that we were being over ambitious with the scope. We set out with great intentions of developing a comprehensive learning resource but the realities of timescale and resources quickly became apparent. Initial drafts and outlines highlighted a need to scale back significantly. It was not always easy on individuals to have significant amounts of work omitted as the resource developed but it was a necessary part of the process. We did discuss this as a group and often justified decisions through reference to learning theory. This included focussing on the need to follow good practice for avoiding cognitive overload.