

*CREATIVITY and INNOVATION
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Learning Links: the creative process and quest for authenticity in the development of materials for an online English course.

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Abstract

Padua Language Centre's online English course, Learning Links, is designed to be used as a standalone online course (currently from level A1-B1), as well as a resource for both teachers and students to 'dip into' as desired. Creating such a resource can seem a daunting prospect for materials writers, who are simultaneously busy with teaching classes and other duties, but the aim of this presentation is to show how a small group of teachers (plus a web developer and audio-video technician) can exploit their own creativity to produce authentic, motivating materials. Constraints both on time and budget for Learning Links preclude the use of outside contractees. In addition, it is important to keep in mind copyright issues, so texts etc. drawn directly from the web must be avoided. These constraints in a certain sense 'force' creativity, in that they mean that, as materials developers, we have found ourselves necessarily drawing not only on our didactic experience in creating exercises, but also exploiting or developing other abilities in dialogue and text writing, acting, photography and illustration. We aim to develop materials that are as authentic, relevant and therefore motivating as possible. Where appropriate, materials are designed bearing in mind the learning context and likely interests of our users. In addition, in order to represent the voices and experiences of a range of native and non-native speakers of English, we also record interactions between, and interviews with overseas visiting students, friends, family, or other colleagues. Furthermore, we also use our own life experiences and interests as inspiration for some exercises.

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This both eases the creative process and gives prominence to genuine communication between materials writer and user. In this presentation, through examples from Learning Links we wish to reflect on our experience as materials developers and, perhaps, encourage others to 'do it themselves'!

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