



**Technical
communication teaching
projects:
Usability Projects in the Trans-Atlantic
and Pacific Project (TAPP) Teaching
Network**



Contents of the presentation

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*Sources for this presentation: conference presentations and articles by "tappers"
(<https://www.uhd.edu/academics/humanities/about/departments/english/Pages/The-Trans-Atlantic-and-Pacific-Project.aspx>)

About me

- ▶ University teacher, Phil. Lic.
- ▶ University of Vaasa -> School of Marketing and Communication -> Communication Studies -> MA programme in Technical Communication

Teaching:

- Introduction to Communication Studies
- Technical Communication
- B.A. Thesis
- Colloquium on Technical Communication
- Web Content Accessibility

Research interests:

- Technical communication curriculum development
- Web content accessibility
- Usability and terminology of information systems
- User-centered technical communication
- Technical communication qualifications

From a two-professor collaborative network to a complex educational network

- ▶ Launched in the 1999-2000 academic year by Dr. Bruce Maylath (USA) and Dr. Sonia Vandepitte (Belgium).
- ▶ Has developed into a complex educational network of 49 universities in 21 countries across 5 continents.
- ▶ Current Network of Participating Instructors and Institutions:
<https://www.uhd.edu/academics/humanities/about/departments/english/Pages/The-Trans-Atlantic-and-Pacific-Project.aspx>

TAPP's main aim

to share insights into individual and collaborative writing across borders and cultures, and, in the course of this work, to gain knowledge of one's own and others' cultural bases.

Coordinator and how TAPP works

- ▶ NDSU's Department of English joined the TAPP network in 2007 and served as the network's hub from then until 2022, with Prof. Bruce Maylath serving as its worldwide coordinator.
- ▶ Prof. Ashleigh Petts (NDSU PhD 2020), assistant professor at the University of Houston—Downtown (UHD), has served as worldwide coordinator since August 2022.

How it works:

1. Send an email to Ashleigh Petts at pettsa@uhd.edu
2. Submit a form to request a TAPP collaboration.

-> Ashleigh Petts will e-mail you (or the mailing list) with information about a partnership.

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Types of projects

- ▶ **Writing-translation projects**
 - ▶ (Co-)authors write source text and prepare it for translation.
 - ▶ Translator(s) localize text for target language and culture.
- ▶ **Bilateral translation-editing projects (since 2001)**
 - ▶ Translator(s) translate from source language (usually their L1) into target language (usually British English)
 - ▶ Reviewer-editor(s) provide guidance for localizing text for idiomatic American English (usually).
- ▶ **Multilateral projects (since 2010)**
 - ▶ Multilateral collaborations simulate the complexity of a multinational work environment. The projects often involve complex topics that necessitate the inclusion of several subject area experts as well as language experts.

Usability projects as part of multilateral collaborations

2010: Usability testing conducted internationally during multilateral projects, simultaneously in the U.S. and Finland. Sets of instructions on various topics.

2012, 2014 & 2016: International co-authoring between students in the U.S. and Spain: Sets of instructions on technical topics. Usability testing in the U.S., Finland and Spain.

2015 & 2018: Usability testing conducted internationally during multilateral projects, simultaneously in the U.S. and Finland. Sets of instructions on various topics.

(2017: Collaboration focused on UX (NDSU/USA and UWASA): Personas as both a UX strategy tool and project outcome.)

(2020: Infographics project between students in the U.S. and Finland)

(2021: Web Content Accessibility project between students in Spain and Finland)

Examples of topics

- ▶ How to collaborate on Google docs
- ▶ How to create a Twitter account
- ▶ How to create an animated GIF
- ▶ How to book a flight online via KAYAK
- ▶ How to clean a set of longboard/skateboard bearings

Multilateral projects, an example from 2014

Cross-cultural virtual teams (CCVTs) spread across 7 universities in 7 nations co-authored texts, tested their usability, and translated the texts.

Co-authoring
English-language instructions
(SPAIN & USA)



Texts for translation in
Belgium, France and Italy



Texts for usability testing
in Finland



1. Technical writing students and engineering students write a set of technical instructions

2. Usability testing in the U.S. and Spain

3. Revising instructions

4. Sending usability test reports and instructions to Finland

6. Sending usability test reports to the U.S. and Spain

5. Usability testing in Finland conducted by communication and computer science students

An example from 2014 & 2016

- * The primary purpose of the tests was to assess the usability of instructional documentation for the target audience, reading in English.
- * Usability testing at all three sites included various phases and methods:
 - * Checklists
 - * Think aloud
 - * Subject surveys
 - * Tester observations

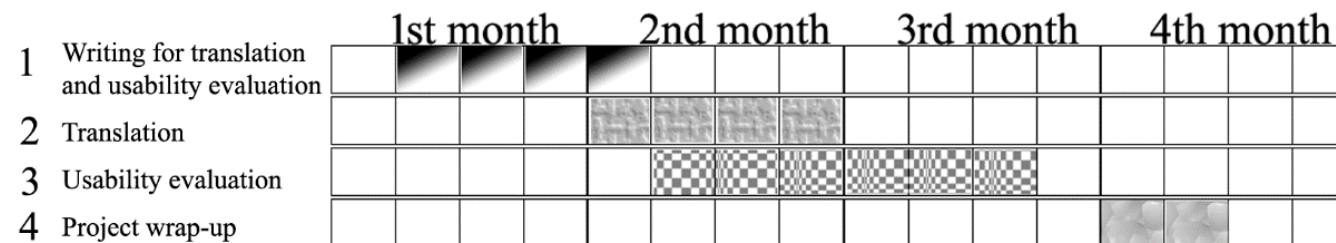
Project phases / all types of projects

- 1. Preparation:** Setting up the partnership and establishing guidelines for the project.
Agreeing on the assignments and project schedule.
Forming teams and choosing topics.
Deciding on the technological tools to be used.
- 2. Implementation:** Participants focus on shared goals and meaningful outcomes and deal with language matters as the need arises.
- 3. Debriefing:** Reporting on outcomes and reflection.
Usually a joint videoconference.

Project phases / usability projects

1. Writing-for-translation-and-usability-evaluation
2. Translation
3. Usability evaluation
4. Project wrap-up

The flow of a multilateral TAPP project



Isohella, S. (2017). Incorporating International Collaboration and Usability Evaluation Into a Technical Communication Course.

In: Mousten, B., Vandepitte, S., Arno, E., & Maylath, B. (Eds.). (2018). *Multilingual writing and pedagogical cooperation in virtual learning environments*. IGI Global, 344-363.

The Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project

Multilateral Collaborations, 2018

Phases and Process Descriptions

Participating institutions and number of students:

North Dakota State University, 9 students
 Pittsburg State University, XX students
 Polytechnic Institute of Porto, 40 students
 Tarleton State University, 44 students
 University of Padua, XX students
 Vaasa University, 5 students

Translation- Reviewing- Editing Project	Transl	Edit	Writing-Testing- Translation Project	Write	Write	Write	Test	Transl	Transl
	Padua	NDSU		PSU	TSU	NDSU	Vaasa	Porto	Padua
Introduction of process in class and on learning platform; background literature is uploaded.	5 Oct	22 Aug	Introduction of process in class and on learning platform; background literature is uploaded.	2 Oct	(m) 15 Oct & (t) 16 Oct.	22 Aug		8 Oct	6 Oct
Students find source texts suitable for translation for the North-American market and fill in the excel form which they upload online	19 Oct		Students decide on the topic of their texts and fill in the excel form which they upload online	9 Oct	(m) 17 Oct & (t) 18 Oct	26 Sep		na	na
Students form teams around source texts	19 Oct		Students form teams around source texts	4 Oct	15 Oct 16 Oct	26 Sep	6 Oct	9 Oct	10 Oct
<i>Pre-learning reports</i> are filled in by students and shared between the American and	20 Oct	17 Oct	<i>Pre-learning reports</i> are filled in by students and shared between the American and	8 Nov	(m) 7 Nov & (t) 8 Nov	10 Oct	6 Oct	9 Oct	10 Oct

Easy collaborations

TAPP collaborations spread swiftly and easily for several reasons:

- **The network operates at the grassroots level.** No administrators are involved, and no approvals are necessary.
- **Collaborations are highly flexible.** Students' projects are whatever assignments that the instructors agree upon.
- **Projects do not depend on funding.** No grants are necessary. Students rely on existing “freeware” communication technologies, e.g., e-mail, WhatsApp, Facebook...

The secret of the TAPP

- ▶ Bruce Maylath in the opening keynote of the first TAPP conference, hosted in 2016 by North Dakota State University, in Fargo, USA:

“we see that the TAPP...flourish[es] because it follows a simple recipe: Pour in equal parts instructors, mix their students, and—voilà—amazing learning happens. It flourishes as well because it is not hampered by institutional agreements, administrative bureaucracy, or the agendas of non-teachers, such as grant-funding agencies and university governing boards. What’s more, it is not subject to budget cuts...”

Usability projects: Benefits and challenges

Benefits:

- ▶ Partners communicating with each other across cultures
- ▶ Writers learning to emphasize text quality from the standpoint of readers from different cultures and to localize text features to the target culture
- ▶ Testers at all sites: Experience in conducting usability tests, learning to compare results across cultures

Challenges and suggestions:

- ▶ Scheduling: less time for usability testing at the end, often resulting in translators getting revisions based on testing after translation has begun → encourage the students to be proactive in the planning phase and testing also at the beginning.
- ▶ Results of usability tests can be better communicated and compared → creating a common usability test reporting format → reusing and sharing

Lessons learned

(Arnó-Macià, E., McCall, M., Kenzie, D. Isohella, S., Maylath, B. (2021). Designing telecollaborative projects for professional communication and user experience. JUCS - Journal of Universal Computer Science, Vol.27 (5), p.450-471)

1. Balance **clear structure** with openness. Working closely with the other instructors involved in the project is important to be able to explain the general stages, goals, and expectations of the project to the students at all sites.
2. Give **students the freedom** to choose topics, documents, tools, and procedures
-> increases their engagement in the project and helps them learn to negotiate with others.
3. Allow **multimodal outputs**. As digital media continue to supplement printed documents, students' projects are becoming increasingly multimodal, for example, teams may produce video tutorials (rather than written instructions) for visual projects (e.g., creating an origami figure).

Keep it simple!

Guidelines (Isohella, S. (2017). *Incorporating International Collaboration and Usability Evaluation Into a Technical Communication Course.*

In: Mousten, B., Vandepitte, S., Arno, E., & Maylath, B. (Eds.). (2018). *Multilingual writing and pedagogical cooperation in virtual learning environments.* IGI Global, 344-363.)

1. Implement international collaboration in an existing compulsory course on usability.
2. Describe the course and its learning outcomes in a way that the course can be carried out flexibly.
3. Use a shared calendar and review it weekly.
4. Create one particular time zone as the default.
5. Prepare the students for the project.
6. Guide the students to choose topics.
7. Be prepared for changes.
8. Reserve time for wrap-up discussion.

Future plans

- ▶ Remote usability testing
 - ▶ Students working in teams across cultures in a virtual environment
 - ▶ Test subjects from other TAPP partner countries

-> PhD/Suvi Isohella in progress, working title "Remote usability evaluation in international collaboration - A resource for technical communication curriculum development"

- ▶ UX research methods and tools

THANK YOU!

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Publications about the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project

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