

ECML project 1.3.3 – **I.C.T. and Young Language Learners** – was conceived as a testbed for what we choose to call, for want of a better term, constructionist language learning. Like constructivism, constructionism centres around a view of learning as a process of building knowledge structures. In addition, constructionism posits that such cognitive constructions are especially facilitated when the learner is “consciously engaged in constructing a public entity” (Papert 1991 p. 1). The construction of such public artefacts is a central tenet of constructionism.

When applied to the foreign language classroom, constructionism is to be understood as the production of linguistic artefacts in the foreign language by the learners for public consumption. The linguistic artefacts may take the form of stories, poems, jokes or even recipes – the form itself is immaterial and is one variable the language teacher can tweak to better suite the learners’ particular circumstances and the curricular demands.

Such artefacts, however, are not to be constructed as an end in themselves – the presence of a receptive audience is crucial in completing the cycle of constructing knowledge. How to acquire such an audience for the novice language learner, especially within the confines of a classroom, has always been the chief challenge when implementing such ‘communicative’ approaches to language learning. In casting around for a way to break down the walls of his classroom in the 1920s, Celestin Freinet hit on the idea of installing a printing press and having his students produce and publish newsletters for circulation among schools in the vicinity.

Today’s publishing technology is the World Wide Web, with its attendant advantages of cheap production costs, practically instantaneous turnaround times, and potentially global circulation. Publishing on the web however is not for the faint-hearted – the technical knowhow required to produce a web page, although not in itself particularly advanced, can easily overwhelm the average 8-year old. We wanted to design, create and deploy a tool which would empower the young foreign language learner to publish his or her linguistic constructions on the web to a receptive audience of peers from around Europe – what Illich would probably have described as a ‘convivial tool’ (Illich 1973)<sup>1</sup>. This publication describes this convivial tool, and the pedagogy of constructionist language learning which goes with it.

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ILLICH, I. *Tools for Conviviality*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973.

PAPERT, S. “*Situating Constructionism*”, Chapter 1 in HAREL, I. & PAPERT, S. (eds.) *Constructionism*, Ablex Publishing Corporation, New Jersey, 1991

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<sup>1</sup> “Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his own vision”, Illich (1973) p. 22.