

INSTB (Buysschaert, J., Fernández-Parra, M., van Egdome, G.W.) (2017). Professionalising the Curriculum and Increasing Employability Through Authentic Experiential Learning: The Cases of INSTB. *Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning E*, 4, 78–111.

PROFESSIONALISING THE CURRICULUM AND INCREASING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH AUTHENTIC EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: THE CASES OF INSTB

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Abstract

Quality in translator training has received much attention since the launch of the European Master's in Translation network in 2009, which sets out quality requirements for translator training programmes in universities. Projects such as OPTIMALE (2010-13) sought to raise the profile of the translation profession whereas the OTCT/Tradutech project (2014-16) aimed to introduce and integrate professionally-oriented practices in a classroom context. Among the drivers for improving the quality of translator training are professionalisation and employability. One method for integrating professionalisation and employability practices into translator training is through the implementation of a simulated translation bureau component into the curriculum as authentic experiential learning. Vandepitte (2008) and Thelen (2016a, 2016b) provide an overview of how simulated translation bureaus can be run successfully within a tertiary education setting.

Building on the work of Vandepitte and Thelen, this paper aims to present a broad perspective of the current professionalisation and employability practices embedded in translation curricula throughout European universities. We begin our investigations at INSTB, the International Network of Simulated Translation Bureaus. INSTB (pronounced “instib”) is a network of universities offering translation curricula where students are tasked with staffing and running their own (simulated) translation bureau. At INSTB's full member institutions, the simulated bureaus are an integral part of the

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curriculum and earn credit points. At the time of writing, INSTB includes participating universities from the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. This paper reviews the current practices surrounding the simulated translation bureaus implemented by INSTB members. Our review suggests that authentic experiential learning through simulated translation bureaus is extremely well received by students, welcomed by teachers and highly valued by employers.

Key words: Translator training, translation simulation, skills lab, professionalisation, employability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The old maxim that “practice makes perfect” is still gaining ground in present-day education, and with good reason. The trend has also reached university courses, which, while continuing to devote due attention to theoretical and research-oriented aspects, have increasingly experimented with practical exercises and internships. One of the main motives has been to promote the employability of graduates.

There are obvious reasons for also integrating practice-oriented tasks in translator training. Graduate translators will end up in demanding jobs, a good many of them as freelancers. To be able to land a job upon graduation, and to successfully hold on to their jobs in the long run, they need to be equipped with a range of skills that go far beyond theoretical reflection on translation. This is all the more required now that the translation industry is undergoing sweeping changes due to technological progress.

One type of practical exercise is the one that simulates the complete process of running a translation company and it is this type of “simulated translation bureau” or “skills lab”, especially as conceived in a cooperative setting between universities, which is the focus of the present paper. Three projects, OPTIMALE, OTCT/Tradutech but especially

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INSTB will be given as examples. First, the institutional as well as the pedagogical or, put more aptly, pedagogico-philosophical frames of reference will be sketched. These projects have provided INSTB's member institutions with a strong incentive to pursue a partnership of simulated translation bureaus. Next, in the fourth section, a brief history of the INSTB network will be flanked by a presentation of the “translation bureaus” of individual members, and that of one candidate member.

2. INSTITUTIONAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Until recently, scant consideration had been given to professionalisation and employability in education. In the 21st century, the terms rapidly became buzzwords. In translator training, these themes appeared at the top of the agenda when the European Commission launched the European Master's in Translation (EMT) network in 2009, setting out quality requirements for translator training programmes in universities. As can be read between the following lines, professionalisation and employability constitute the rationale behind the EMT-project:

There is a growing demand for highly qualified translators able to handle multilingual communication in both the public and the private

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sector. Moreover, the evolution of translation markets has led to professional translators having to cope with activities not traditionally regarded as ‘pure translation’, such as localisation, editing, subtitling or project management. Professionally oriented translator training is needed in order to ensure a good match between graduate competences and employer requirements. (EMT-homepage, in Thelen, 2016a, p. 117).

Clearly, the call for professionally oriented training and for improving graduate employability rates did not fall on deaf ears. For the sake of brevity, only two ensuing projects will be discussed in this contribution.

As the full project name suggests, the OPTIMALE project (short for “Optimising Professional Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe”, 2010-13), had the express aim of building on and feeding into the work undertaken by the EMT, seeking, among other objectives, to map out the specific competence requirements for graduates and to raise the profile of the translation profession (cf. OPTIMALE, 2012). At the end of the project, the deliverables were put to good use, as accumulated knowledge about the profession and professional requirements trickled down to the bases of no less than 32 universities in and outside of the European Union.

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Also worthy of note is the OTCT project (short for “Optimising Translator Training through Collaborative Translation”, 2014-16). Thinking along similar lines as the INSTB member universities that will take centre stage in this contribution, 7 European universities set up a strategic partnership with a view to introducing and integrating professionally oriented practices in a classroom context. The knowledge issuing forth from the Tradutech² experience is set down in the *Handbook for the organisation of intensive sessions* (2016).

Although great headway has been made, especially in Europe, in professionalising translation curricula and promoting the employability of graduates, prevailing ideas on professionalisation and employability need to be clarified better. In a recent article, Thelen warns against the belief that by tailoring the curriculum to the needs of the profession, i.e. taking learning environments as close as possible to real professional contexts, graduate employability is almost automatically secured (Thelen, 2016a). To assume this is the case, Thelen says, would be to jump to conclusions. Referring to the Bologna Process

² The Tradutech concept is to be fathered on Daniel Gouadec. As early as the 1990s, Gouadec of the university of Rennes extended his hospitality for one week to students from abroad and invited them to sit down in groups and work on the same source text, producing different target texts (2000, pp. 97-104).

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[EHEA], he argues in favour of a broader understanding of employability: far from just being the ability to find work, it includes “the ability to stay employed, and to find other, new employment, if needed or desired” (p. 118). This means that the graduate should also be able to keep track of developments in the translation industry, like those related to the requirements on translation services, or the many technological advances in the field. In other words, it will not suffice to simply introduce more and more varied (hands-on) translation exercises in translator training.

3. PEDAGOGICO- PHILOSOPHICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The institutional initiatives taken by the EC and European universities involved in the OPTIMALE and the OTCT project may well have provided a major fillip to professionalisation in translator training, the initiatives were not the earliest endeavours in this direction. The educational term “experiential learning” was coined more than a century ago. It is used to refer to the fact that students can learn from actual experience, and is often opposed to learning from studying content in a lecture or classroom environment (Kolb 2015, p. xviii). Experiential learning draws on one of the two main meanings of the word

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“experience”, i.e. the “objective and environmental” one rather than on the “subjective and personal, referring to the person’s internal state” (Kolb 1984, p. 35). Kolb traces the origins of the introduction of experiential learning methods into education back to William James (1912), who laid the epistemological foundations for experiential learning theory with his philosophy of radical empiricism (Kolb, 2015, p. xviii). After James, three of the intellectual founders of experiential learning theory would be John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget.

Dewey wrote extensively about the benefits of experiential learning in education (e.g. 1925, 1938, 1961), emphasizing that “mere activity does not constitute experience” (1961, p. 139). Instead,

[w]hen we experience something, we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination. The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience. (1961, p. 139)

Dewey was not wholly satisfied with the limitations in the teaching and learning methods that had prevailed since the

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Middle Ages (cf. Kolb, 1984, p. 12) and suggested that learning would be more effective if it were connected to the student's mind through experience, rather than relying on learning occurring in isolation. Similarly, the experiential learning approach can be traced to Lewin (e.g. 1948, 1952), who identified three key components in this theory, namely conversation space, role leadership and team development and highlighted the importance of adequate feedback during action (Kayes et al., 2005). As Kayes et al. explain, in order “to learn from experience, teams must create a conversational space where members can reflect on and talk about their experience together” (p. 332). Then, “as a team develops and learns about its purpose and members, it can begin to share power and influence more widely among group members, as they play roles crucial to the team's mission” (p. 345). Finally, teams develop by following the experiential learning cycle (p. 332).

Since then, other variously termed more cognitive theories have emerged which overlap to a certain extent with experiential learning theory. For example, skills learning theories such as the work of Anderson (e.g. 1993), Berwick (1990, 1993) and DeKeyser (1998, pp. 48-49) are based on the premise that learners can proceduralise knowledge through extensive practice (cf. Ellis, 2003, p. 112). The work of Ellis (2003) draws on these theories but proposes a more sociocultural approach to learning, emphasizing

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that it is “impossible to ignore the setting in which learners perform a task” (p. 199) and also the importance of the learners’ motive. Although Ellis discussed his theory mainly from the point of view of language teaching and learning, much of what he proposed applies equally to translation students in that in order to learn about the translation profession, learners would have to gain real experience in real (or realistic) professional settings. The aim that would compel students to do well in this type of task would be that of employability. Professionalising the learning environment, i.e. making it as close as possible to a real professional context, can lead to increased employability after graduation.

From the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, many studies have emerged which continue to demonstrate that a certain amount of experiential learning in translator training curricula is a clear advantage in today’s highly competitive world. It should be noted, however, that translators should not only be taught through experiential means. Quite on the contrary, trainee translators would benefit more from acquiring new skills through a variety of methods, in which experiential learning methods should also be included.

Nord (e.g. 1988/1991) started calling for greater realism in the translation pedagogy designed for professional translators. From a perspective of textual analysis, Nord

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emphasised the importance of authenticity in the classroom. She stated: “Grundsätzlich sollten im Übersetzungsunterricht nur Originaltexte verwendet werden” [On principle, only original texts should be used in translation teaching] (1988, p. 174). Furthermore, she recommended that translation task specifications be provided to students and that their target texts be evaluated on the basis of these specifications. A few years after Nord had tossed the ideas of authenticity and simulation, they were picked up by Kiraly (1995, p. 25) and made more explicit. He argued in favour of practising with authentic texts, and even added that real assignments would be “even better than simulated translation tasks” (p. 114; cf. Kiraly, 2000). These quotes contain some of the key elements of the (simulated) professional activity integrated in today’s translator training curricula, i.e. re-creating an actual professional translation situation, where the texts to be translated by students are actually texts that have been commissioned in real translation jobs, i.e. are authentic.

In 2007, Gouadec analysed the new challenges faced by trainers of the future generations of translators and the changing requirements of the employment market. He suggested that in order for translator training programmes to add a truly professional dimension to their curricula, they should “simulate real-life conditions in skills labs” (Gouadec, 2007, p. 346). He added that having

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“professionally oriented learning outcomes ... is what will ultimately make the difference” (p. 360).

Other names to refer to the same concept include “in vivo” training (Krüger & Serrano Piqueras, 2015), where translator trainers attempt to “project as closely as possible into the translation classroom the professional environment that students will encounter in their later careers as translators” (Krüger & Serrano Piqueras, 2015, p. 5). “In vivo” is opposed to “in vitro” training, i.e. isolated from its context. Krüger & Serrano Piqueras based their “in vivo” model on the theoretical framework of situated translation as suggested by Risku (1998). “Situated learning” is a didactic concept centred around the principles of collaboration and construction, whereby the “cognitive processes linked to the acquisition of knowledge do not occur solely in the brain but are instead shared with the individual’s interaction with others and the environment” (Risku, 2016, p. 15).

4. INSTB: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CASE STUDIES

All things considered, it would, despite appearances to the contrary, be a gross oversimplification to claim that the

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developments sketched above are what spurred the universities involved in the INSTB network on to build a strategic partnership. The provided double backdrop only serves as a means to show how propitious conditions were and are for forming such a partnership. In many respects INSTB and its members can be said to have been ahead of its/their time.

A good case in point is the simulated translation bureau experiment conducted as early as 1984 by the Maastricht School of Translation and Interpreting of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands). On their own turf, students were encouraged to form teams and go through all the steps of a real-life translation assignment (Thelen, 2016a, Thelen, 2016b). In 1991, a lack of placement options prompted them to turn the simulation exercise into a course that would soon become compulsory and, not much later, a cornerstone of the curriculum (Van Egdom 2016). Around that time, the name “Skills Lab” was already gaining currency.

Other universities and colleges soon followed and created their own versions of student-staffed skills labs, some of them inspired by Gouadec (1992), some others by the Maastricht experiment or through independent initiative. With the skills lab concept gaining momentum, Thelen concluded that the conditions were ripe for an international network of simulated translation bureaus: at the CIUTI

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Forum in Paris, he delivered a plea for building a network (2006). By 2008, a number of like-minded institutions eventually got together. Their initiative was to be called the “International Network of Simulated Translation Bureaus” (INSTB) and prospective members started meeting twice a year to discuss their plans. The main objectives of the network were to exchange good practice models and explore possibilities for cooperation.

In 2015, INSTB (pronounced “instib”) was formally launched. Minimal criteria for membership were agreed upon; one criterion for full membership states that the skills lab or ‘translation bureau’ should be an integrated, i.e. credited part of the curriculum. Four major areas that a translation skills lab should pay attention to were identified (they were largely based on existing European and ISO standards for the profession): client contact, project preparation, the translation process itself and the delivery of the final product (EN-15038, ISO-17100).³

INSTB does not prescribe a specific model but it encourages its members to keep all four aspects in mind when designing their skills labs. Below, eight simulated translation bureaus will be showcased to illustrate how authentic experiential learning is understood at INSTB’s

³ More information can be found on the following website:
<http://www.instb.eu>.

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member institutions and how it can be implemented in translation curricula.

4.1. Ghent University: “Eigen vertaalbureau”

At Ghent University, master students in translation can choose to start up their own translation company, working in teams of three or four, instead of (or in addition to) serving translation internship. The idea is to involve them in all the aspects of setting up and running a translation business and in this way to strengthen their employability competences maximally. The students set up their company as a Student Business Project according to the rules of Vlajo, a Flemish subsidiary of JA Europe that promotes entrepreneurial initiative in schools and universities.⁴ The students look for a translation professional to coach them. They design their own business plan and open a designated bank account. They devise a name and logo for their company, which they make public via social media, business cards and a website, and source their customers themselves. They negotiate all the translation aspects themselves, produce the required financial calculations and administration, maintain customer relations, respect deadlines, keep a log, perform their translations using translation memory tools, and so on. Toward the end of the project, they also present their

⁴ The latter organisation has its website at <http://www.jaeurope.org>.

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project and business to a wider audience of fellow-students, teachers and external parties.

This work experience project provides them with unpredictable, complex and specialist contexts, in which they do not only practise what they learned in their translation classes, execute different tasks such as translation, revision, review, terminological research, and apply the acquired knowledge of the translation market and the translator's deontology. They also practise permanent day-to-day responsibility, critical judgement and self-reflection in the labour market they are training for. In addition, they learn how to function effectively as translators in a multidisciplinary and international environment, both independently and in a team.

4.2. Swansea University: “Translation Work Experience”

At Swansea, the “Translation Work Experience” module has been running for over ten years. Students from BA Translation and MA Translation set themselves up as a simulated translation company with a hierarchy comprising four managerial roles, one senior translator/reviser role and one translator/reviser role. Students are empowered to run their own companies and make their own decisions for everything, from creating a company identity with a logo, etc., to setting fees, liaising with clients, etc., and of course delivering the job on time.

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One truly unique feature in this module is that the two main “clients” of the students are two local translation agencies. The agencies have a double role: they send the students jobs from their archives as “live” jobs and in this role professionalism is of the utmost importance. However, the agencies also act as “module consultants” whereby students can contact them more informally for help and advice as required. In this way, students learn and develop a wide range of good practices and skills from their own experience with the constant help and advice from lecturers and agencies and become fully prepared before embarking on their own professional career.

4.3. Université de Lille III: “Multilingual Specialized Translation”

In the "Multilingual Specialized Translation" Master's programme of the University of Lille, France, specific classes place students in a simulated professional setting. In both years of our Master programme, students are in charge of (at least) two translation projects for each of their two source languages (English and a second language to be chosen from German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Dutch, Swedish or Polish). These projects are supervised by seasoned professional translators and involve in the second

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year of the Master's programme the translation and revision of up to 8,000 words per language per student.⁵

Students usually work for a "real" client (although no billing is involved), as they translate for instance for one of the university's libraries, the Sciences of Antiquity Library, whose blog, Insula, has an official status (it has an ISSN number). Translations are officially published on the blog and signed by the students themselves.⁶

When an opportunity arises, students can also be in charge of translation projects outside classes. Second-year students translated/localised into French the website of Wordbee, the on-line translation management system.⁷ Under the supervision of a professional translator, students dealt with all the different steps of the translation process, each of them playing a specific role (project management, translation, revision, QA, back-up).⁸

⁵ In addition to these projects, the university will open up a "TSM Skills Lab" in the present academic year.

⁶ These blog texts are posted on the following website:
<http://bsa.biblio.univ-lille3.fr/blog/category/traductions/>

⁷ The translated text has been published on the Wordbee-website:
<https://www.wordbee.com/fr-fr/>

⁸ A detailed account of the project can be found on our blog (in French): <https://mastertsmille.wordpress.com/2017/01/18/traduire-wordbee-pour-wordbee-avec-wordbee-retour-sur-un-projet-de-traduction-inedit/>

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4.4. University of Antwerp: “Skills Lab”

The Skills Lab of the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Antwerp is an optional course in the 3rd year of the Bachelor programme. Its 3 ECTS credits correspond to an actual workload of approximately 52 hours or 4 hours per week during one semester. The main focus of the Antwerp Skills Lab is twofold: on the one hand, we want to provide the students with as much ‘real life’ translation materials as possible, on the other hand we want to further develop their proficiency in the use of translation resources (such as dictionaries, glossaries, etc.) and CAT tools, predominantly SDL Trados Studio, SDL MultiTerm and Memsource). In the lab, students take on the job of translator/reviser or project manager. All project managers assemble a team of 4 to 5 translators. Jobs received by the PMs are translated by a member of the team and revised by another member of the same team or someone from another team. If no reviser (or translator) can be found within the Skills Lab, help from other simulated translation bureaus is sought. PMs learn to create purchase orders for the jobs they accept and translators, revisers and PMs all create invoices after the job is completed. This way of working allows students to get to know the complete workflow of a real translation job.

At the end of the course, students also hand in a diary in which they reflect on the work they have done, on what they have learnt, etc.

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4.5. University of Mons: “Ateliers de traduction (SkillsLab)”

This *SkillsLab* project is a credited part in the curriculum of both translators and conference interpreters, in the 1st year of the Master’s degree.

The all-in-one simulation of translation offices is prepared by a team of lecturers teaching eight languages (Danish, Dutch, English, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and French, the first language of most students) that makes a well-reflected selection of non-commercial texts with respect to length, text level, text variety and real needs. All texts are sourced from external clients. Then an information and application procedure is organised, around six specific job profiles next to the general translator work.

During the two main weeks of the *SkillsLab* project, the students work full-time in order to deliver publishable texts with the appropriate linguistic, semantic-pragmatic and intercultural quality. The didactic and professional background of these two weeks is based on autonomy, team work and performance. To improve their technical skills, the students make complementary use of a learning platform for their professional communication during the project; they also work with databases, CAT tools and other ICT applications.

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An extensive evaluation closes the *SkillsLab* project, including product quality but also team functioning and project assessment. The credits are granted in close consultation with all participants: lecturers and clients via product evaluation, students via auto-evaluation and peer assessment. In addition, the students are required to complete a general survey focusing on learning impact, which includes aspects like text variety and difficulty, documentation and terminology, revision, autonomy, coaching and feedback, professional communication, problem-solving behaviour and final output.

4.6. Vrije Universiteit Brussel: “Vertaalbureausimulatie”

Vertaalbureausimulatie (*Translation Bureau Simulation*) is a mandatory course comprised of 3 ECTS credits that is offered in the translator training programmes at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The main objective of the course is to create an authentic learning context (Kiraly et al., 2016) in which translation students are able to apply and further develop (in real translation projects) competences already acquired through other course modules in the translation curricula (e.g. translation and revision skills, CAT tools proficiency, project management skills, etc.).

In order to create as authentic or realistic a setting as possible, students are teamed up in small groups, each group representing a fictitious translation company or

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Simulated Translation Bureau (STB). During the period of one semester (26 hours), each STB works on one or several translation projects obtained from real clients in the field (non-profit organisations). During each translation project's life cycle, students are asked to carry out different tasks, either as a project manager or as a translator, using the appropriate information resources and technological tools, e.g. contacting potential clients, drawing up a price offer, creating a project planning, terminology base or translation memory, translating and revising the source document(s), etc.

At the end of the course, each student needs to submit an individual portfolio containing a description of personal activities and responsibilities in each translation project as well as a reflection on personal learning outcomes and strengths and weaknesses of the STB.

4.7. Zuyd University of Applied Sciences: “Skills Lab”

Rather than being a building brick in the curriculum, Zuyd's “Skills Lab” is seen as a curricular cornerstone. Fourth year students get the opportunity to set up and run a translation bureau for 8 weeks at a stretch (40 hours per week). In preparation to the course, they have to apply for office functions: first, the course coordinators hire managers, and, later, the management onboards translators, revisers, reviewers, etc. From the get-go, due attention is

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paid to branding and actively prospecting clientele in order to maximise profitability. In other words, they immediately have to get into their strides and aim for fast turnaround times. However, the need to pick up the pace does not allow them the liberty to deliver poor quality target texts. In order to assure service quality, staff comply with ISO-standard 17100. This means that procedures for translation project planning, production processes and post-production activities are put in place. In other words, no efforts are spared to optimise customer satisfaction. Furthermore, staff members are encouraged to broaden their horizon by specialising and/or diversifying. In the Skills Lab, translation and soft skills are finely honed. This intricate form of skill and competence acquisition is an unmistakeable token of professionalisation and augurs exceptionally well for students' employability.

4.8. University of Exeter: “Student Translation Business Project”⁹

The “Student Translation Business Project” has been successfully running since 2013 as a non-credit bearing employability initiative for the College of Humanities

⁹ The University of Exeter is a candidate member of the INSTB network. The simulated translation bureau is not (yet) a compulsory course and does not earn student credits. The Exeter case exemplifies that a packed curriculum need not thwart attempts to put translation simulation into operation.

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(HUMS) at Exeter. The project grew out of the desire to increase interaction between final-year HUMS undergraduates and MA Translation students, foster team work and provide a professional scenario in which students could apply their linguistic knowledge.

The applicants for the project (around 30 per year) are grouped into teams and allocated the standard roles found in translation businesses, as defined by the ISO-standard 17100. The core focus of the project is not only on translation as a linguistic activity, but also on efficient teamwork. Students set their own intermediate deadlines and milestones, they identify a product, market and brief; they research and provide an appropriate quote and invoice. In short, students are empowered.

The project runs over 10 weeks from January to March. The groups build towards a final gala event, where they present their businesses, comment on the development of the project and how they overcame any issues that arose. This is judged by a panel of translation and business professionals who give detailed feedback, and a winner is chosen based on how they worked together professionally as a team.

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Throughout the project, leaders provide training in industry software and information about the translation industry.¹⁰

5. DISCUSSION

The review of current practices within INSTB member universities shows that translation simulation exercises (can) come in different forms. Therefore, the notion of simulated translation bureau might be considered a cluster concept. What is clear is that the formats under review offer various ways of drawing not only professional practices, but in some cases even translation professionals into the classroom. All formulas have been found to positively affect student motivation and empowerment, and there is a firm belief that they contribute to graduate employability. The skills lab helps raise awareness of team processes and of the full spectrum of tasks/activities that can be associated with translation service provision (ranging from translation and revision to project management, and all the way to book-keeping). Furthermore, this exercise allows students to hone essential soft skills. However, this form of

¹⁰ The project blog showcases students' work and all the events organised (<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/etbp/>).

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experiential learning does not go at the expense of the core business of translation, i.e. accurately transferring meaning from the source to the target text.

It is superfluous to spell out that the role of the teacher changes noticeably in this student-centred learning environment. Far from becoming a redundant observer standing on the sidelines, the teacher adopts the role of “a facilitator” (Kiraly 2000). The teacher has to manage diverse responsibilities such as initiating discussion, channelling interaction between team members, summarizing and rephrasing arguments, etc. The degree of teacher supervision is highly dependent on the individuals’/institution’s take on translation simulation and on the expected learning outcomes. In every configuration, the teacher is a catalyst for emerging language and translation professionals.

6. CONCLUSION

The EMT was called into existence to create a “gold standard” for translator training. Two pillars of the network were professionalisation and employability. If the European Master’s in Translation were to narrow or, preferably, bridge the (skills) gap between translator

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training and translation practices, more effort was to be put into mirroring real-life translation projects. The EMT launch was certainly well-timed: around that time, social constructivist ideas had come to fruition. Advocates of social constructivism were promoting authentic experiential learning – and with great success. Their ideas were rapidly gaining a foothold in translator education.

One “social constructivist” concept that can be said to have appealed to a good many translator trainers, trainees and employers alike is that of the simulated translation bureau. The concept has been meritoriously turned into a learning method/approach as translation simulation is taken to another level. A few of the simulated translation bureaus that have been introduced in translation programmes are presently sailing under the banner of INSTB. The members of this international network exchange best practices with a view to professionalising translator training and enhancing graduate employability.

As can be inferred from the showcase in this contribution, past and present experiences at member institutions lend credence to the conviction that, owing to this form of authentic experiential learning, graduates become more aware of what professional translation practices can comprise and of how acquiring those professional skills will boost their employability. As argued, future-proofing

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translator training does not hinge entirely on a professional(ised) learning environment. For that reason, it should be emphasised that the skills lab experience is also likely to increase employability, as the honing of soft skills will help graduates find their way in an ever-changing professional context.

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