DESIGNING "SCHOOL ENGLISH" HYPERDOCS FOR A NON-PROFIT REFUGEE ORGANIZATION: INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND MATERIAL CREATION AS A CONNECTION BETWEEN GRADUATE STUDENTS AND REFUGEE PARENT AND TUTOR NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights HyperDocs and evaluates the HyperDocs created for a refugee English tutoring program. Using a course project for a graduate-level education course as a starting point, a team of graduate students worked with City of Refuge, a refugee agency in the MIDTESOL region, to fill a gap in their teaching materials - resources on "School English" for refugee parents and their volunteer English tutors. A description of what HyperDocs are, how the final project was adjusted to meet the real-world needs of the refugee agency, challenges encountered, and an overall review and reception of the created materials will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

This project started as a final project for the course *Principles and Practices of Distance Learning*, a graduate course at Iowa State University, which required the collaborative design of an online learning project for a target audience. Our team members, doctoral students who share a background in TESOL, aimed to go beyond a school final project requirements in hopes of making a real-world contribution to refugee learners of English via City of Refuge, a non-profit

refugee agency based in Columbia, Missouri, where one of our team members had previously volunteered. Learning that City of Refuge needed "School English" materials to teach the refugee parents about schools in the United States and, more specifically, how to communicate with the teachers and staff in their local school district, our team began by asking questions including, *What are the essential vocabulary words, knowledge, and skills that refugee parents ought to have to successfully interact with their children's schools? How can we help structure instructional experiences for the refugees and their tutors, who may have limited teaching or TESOL experience?*

While deciding the scope of the content to teach seemed most important, it became apparent that determining how these online materials would be delivered to refugee tutees and their tutors was crucial. While the non-profit's tutors can tutor refugee children in the schools, 1:1 tutoring sessions with adults/parents are generally conducted in the refugee's home, which poses additional challenges due to a potential lack of technology and internet availability. While our course's final project was intended to be an online, technology-based project, permission was granted to create flexibility in the materials produced. As such, we decided on creating HyperDocs specifically designed so that they could also function as learning materials when printed, which could be used both online and offline in low-tech environments.

ABOUT HYPERDOCS

HyperDocs have been the topic of numerous teacher website articles, conference presentations, and, more recently, empirical research papers (e.g., Carpenter, et al., 2020), and have seemed to help fill a gap during the emergency remote teaching phase of the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to structure remote learning (e.g., Kary, 2020). Highfill, et al. in *The*

HyperDoc Handbook (2016) describe HyperDocs as "digital lesson design and delivery of instruction," highlighting the need for HyperDocs to contain the 4 C's of 21st-century learning: creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (BattelleforKids, n.d.).

In terms of how HyperDocs are used in schools, Carpenter, et al. (2020) found through surveying teachers (N = 261) that teachers created and used HyperDocs in a variety of ways, though sometimes not always following Highfill, et al.'s (e.g., 2015, 2016) guidelines, owing this to the fact that shared online resources often evolve beyond the original author's ideas. These resources, often in the form of a Google Doc or Google Slide, typically contain hyperlinks to information and multimedia, spaces for students to record their thinking, and links to other collaborative spaces to share their learning (e.g., Padlet, a Google Form the teacher created), though can also include lesson objectives and other criteria. Interestingly, while many teachers in Carpenter et al.'s (2020) study emphasized that HyperDocs provided student choice and autonomy, the researchers found that less than one-third of the HyperDocs analyzed in the study granted choice. Given the wide range of English levels of the refugee parents and varying English teaching backgrounds of the English tutors that our materials might reach, we took these mixed results positively as it gave us the freedom to design HyperDocs that might be more linear than the idealized HyperDoc though appropriate for our audience nonetheless.

INITIAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

When starting this project, the concept of HyperDocs was new to most of us, aside for the second author, who had experience creating and using them as a teacher. Based on our teaching and design experience, we conceptualized HyperDocs as content and resource organizer - the online documents feature hyperlinks that direct one to external online resources and tools such as

web pages and videos, as well as spaces for the student to record their thoughts and learning. Based on discussions with the refugee agency, we aimed for targeted instructional language, with short sentences, with few or no clauses, and simple vocabulary. Through this, HyperDocs deliver content and instruction and support engagement as the learners interact with the resource and the resources connected to it through typing and clicking. Moreover, HyperDocs facilitate interactiveness in an online environment as the documents can be easily shared among teachers and learners to establish a sense of community.

After learning that many of our learners lack computers and internet access in their homes and have lower digital literacy levels, we reconsidered what a HyperDoc might look like in an offline or hybrid environment to account for our learners' *digital literacy* level and *digital accessibility*. When teaching "digital natives" who grew up with digital technology, instructional designers can implement various digital tools into classroom practices to facilitate participation and engagement because they are accustomed to active learning (the New London Group, 1996). However, adult refugee learners may need to first become more familiar with the basics, including typing and establishing a Google account. Moreover, as adult refugee learners may be less confident in digital-based learning when *both* the language and the computational skills are "foreign" to them, we aimed to limit the online learning tools to the mainstream ones, including Jamboard, shared Google Docs, Google translate, Quizlet, and Flipgrid, which were integrated into multiple lessons to increase familiarity.

Our thoughts then shifted to if we could make a resource that could 1) be a HyperDoc online, 2) work well when physically printed - with the tutor showing some of the digital content online or offline through their smartphone or other tech devices, and 3) also provide enough guidance for the tutors so that the HyperDoc could be used completely offline, if necessary (e.g.,

if the tutor did not have a tech device, the bandwidth, or enough tech skills to facilitate the prior two options). Due to these considerations, we chose Google Docs over Google Slides as the format of our HyperDocs due to the resemblance of physical textbook pages, their printability, ease of fitting into a binder (if necessary), as well as to aid in print literacy development and so that the familiar page format might reduce learners' cognitive load and anxiety. Through this retooling process, we insisted on designing our materials primarily as HyperDocs as we agree with Carr (2021) that transforming how learners perform literacy skills is necessary for this technological century. In the following sections, we will elaborate on a more detailed description of the design process.

ABOUT SCHOOL ENGLISH

Central to the development of this project was learners' need analysis. Communicating with a City of Refuge coordinator, we were told that one urgent need of the learners was "School English." As parents with young children attending the local schools, the "School English" needed by our learners refers to the communicative and literacy skills needed to engage with their children's school lives instead of the English skills to tutor or assist the children's schoolwork. Children can commonly play the role of interpreters or language brokers for their parents (e.g., Perry, 2014); however, the parents need opportunities to explore and extend their agency, which is important for everyone's growth and acclimation to their new community.

With "School English" as the topic, we established three modules to serve different realistic needs, creating a manual for the tutors and housing all resources on a Google Classroom for easy access. The three modules are *school vocabulary*, *school documents*, and *communicating with teachers*, each consisting of six to seven HyperDocs which would serve as

standalone lessons for tutoring sessions. The three modules and all the HyperDocs under each module are not in sequential order; therefore, users can start with any topic or lesson depending on their or their tutee's needs and preferences. The *school vocabulary* module includes the most commonly used English words in the school setting, such as school abbreviations, words used for counseling, names of the school buildings and rooms, clubs, sports, and activities. The *school documents* module includes the essential forms for regular semesters and summer school, school calendars, and school policies/rules. Lastly, the *communicating with teachers* module provides multimodal samples for common occasions to communicate with the teachers, such as parent-teacher conferences, emailing the teacher, calling the teachers, or attending virtual meetings. All HyperDocs are interactive for the learner to practice and self-evaluate. Besides the three modules, we also provided a manual for the tutors in which we explained our teaching philosophy, the flexibility of the tools, practical tips, and technological advice.

DISCUSSION

The following section highlights the City of Refuge's reception of the HyperDocs and their plans for use and the graduate students' evaluation of the materials and goals for further improvement prior to tutors and tutees using them.

Reception

City of Refuge was excited to be part of this project and receive the HyperDocs and manual produced by this project. Beginning next year, the agency hopes to provide training for tutors and English Buddies to explore and become familiar with the materials; the manual will be a helpful guide to using the HyperDocs, and it will also supply these volunteers with reasons why it is important to familiarize our parent participants with school vocabulary. Beginning with

the 2023-24 school year, City of Refuge plans to incorporate the HyperDocs training into our annual Back to School Bash to 1.) get parents accustomed to the idea of school involvement and 2.) make this tool available to more families.

Training for tutors will likely take place over a few sessions and will include the expectation that they take some time on their own to gain a better understanding of and more experience with the HyperDocs. After tutor training, they will meet with their English Buddies (the adult refugee parents), and work on the various modules over time. Monthly or bi-monthly, we will meet as a group for *Parent University*, where refugee parents, tutors, and the School Liaison (the third author) can discuss the content of the materials. We will also address questions and get insightful feedback from parents in our refugee community.

HyperDoc Evaluation and Future Directions

Given the positive reception by City of Refuge and their future goals with the materials, the graduate students' goal is to improve upon them to be of most use. Upon evaluating the materials after the completion of the course, areas of improvement include the following: 1) lowering the readability level of the HyperDocs and standardizing the language so that they are more holistically consistent, 2) restructuring a few HyperDocs that seem more *worksheet*-like, and 3) standardizing the amount of white space to improve the readability of some HyperDocs and reduce possible anxiety.

Writing educational materials about potentially complex subjects in simple English for adults is no easy feat, as the authors have learned through this project. While our intention was for our materials to be written at an upper elementary/lower middle school level, upon analyzing our texts using the WebFX Readability Test Tool (WebFX, n.d.), the majority of our HyperDocs did not meet our goal, with only five (25%) HyperDoc's readability scores in the 5th-7th grade

range, though an even lower age range might be preferable. The remaining 15 HyperDocs'

readability spanned from 8th grade through high school age ranges (75%). Moreover, the

HyperDocs are noticeably written by three separate individuals; given the short turnaround time

for a final course project, this seems understandable; however, to provide a professional resource

for the tutors and tutees, we will work to standardize this.

Viewing our 20 HyperDocs holistically, a few, unfortunately, seem more *worksheet*-like

and may not qualify as a HyperDoc. Highfill (2016) warned that HyperDocs "can easily be a

digital worksheet depending on the lesson design and content you include." As such, our

worksheet-like HyperDocs may appear this way due to our goal for these HyperDocs to remain

usable when printed or due to the concepts the HyperDoc aims to teach and the web-based

resources the HyperDocs are linked to. Highfill (2016) recommends checking that the cycle of

learning present in HyperDocs follows the explore-explain-apply model and integrating the 4 C's

as ways to help remedy this.

The final goal is more subjective; however, as instructional designers, we have noticed a

need for standardizing the amount of white space to improve the readability of some HyperDocs.

While an initial concern was to limit each HyperDoc to two to three pages maximum to limit the

amount of printing necessary for tutors/tutees who would require physical copies, this has led to

a small number of the HyperDocs seeming too dense, which could increase tutee anxiety.

Knowing that these HyperDocs would end up being printed by some tutors, short URLs to

resources were intentionally added to the bottom of the pages. While out of the way, they add to

the seeming lack of white space. While crisp font and formatting choices were made to enhance

the HyperDoc's flow online and off, expanding these few HyperDocs to include more white

space should go a long way in standardizing the unit.

CONCLUSION

Through this course project turned service project, a mutually beneficial relationship between graduate students and a non-profit organization was forged, culminating in the creation of HyperDocs that can benefit refugee parents and their volunteer tutors. As graduate students, this project has strengthened our understanding of how to better serve unique learners in the MIDTESOL region and also how graduate students can help bridge the gap between universities and the community. As many graduate students are international students or from out-of-state, it is important for college professors to help students make community connections and encourage students to make projects to benefit local teachers. Similar to how Beck (the first author) and Simms (2021, MIDTESOL Journal) used a graduate courses' final project on English Learner assessment to benefit EL teachers nationwide through the creation of an online practice speaking test, we encourage graduate students to get creative with their course projects and publish about their endeavors too.

In total, the graduate students (authors 1, 2, and 4) contributed over 40 hours of remote volunteer service to City of Refuge, which the non-profit can document when applying for grants and conducting community outreach on their organization's efforts. Most of the graduate students were able to share about this project through presenting at CALICO's (the Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium) 2021 national conference, shedding further light on HyperDocs and the university-non-profit connection we made. We hope sharing through this year's MIDTESOL Journal will encourage more community-minded graduate work, whether graduate students reach out to local teachers in public or private schools or local non-profits.

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