INTERACTION DESIGN:
a new interface for the collective text editor (ETC)

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Key words: User Interface , Collective Text Editor, Interaction

Abstract:

The Collective Text Editor ETC is a tool that follows Web 2.0 philosophy. Thus, its aim is to foster collaborative work mediated by computer and to create a space where the synchronous and asynchronous construction of collective texts among geographically dispersed users can be encouraged. The ETC is linked to a research project of NUTED/UFRGS. The present article deals with the reconstruction of the interface so as to adapt it to the current technological demands, giving it credibility and new personality.

1 Introduction

The Collective Text Editor – ETC available in: www.nuted.edu.ufrgs.br/etc – aims to provide a space for collective elaboration of texts, synchronously or asynchronously, by users dispersed geographically. This tool was developed by Nucleus of Digital Technology applied to Education of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. The first version of ETC was built in 2001. Since then, the editor has been used in different teaching-learning situations, considering a variety of work groups, among teachers and students from graduate, extension and post graduate courses in different areas of knowledge. Throughout the use, NUTED has always prioritized the improvement of the tool following evaluations made by users. Several actions, in this sense [1] have been developed and implemented in order to enhance the editor and to contemplate the demands presented.

The present article presents a new graphic project which searches greater comfort and visual harmony. It is a more attractive and intuitive interface, where both the graphic project and navigability were improved, offering better resources to promote interaction and cooperation. It is believed that, this way, better results in the interactive processes can be reached as a result of the collective constructions in the editor. Thus, this article presents the pedagogical foundations that have underlain the development of ETC, it describes the design principles highlighting not only the main problems found in the previous version but also the solutions that have been proposed for the new, ending with final considerations.

2 Design addressed to user

Interaction design is an area of design devoted to projecting systems that enable communication and work through computer interfaces. Preece [2] defines this activity as “the design of interactive products that provide support to people’s daily activities” (p.28). This way, it is centered on the user, aiming to provide comfort for his/her activities and efficacy in the results.

Usability means optimizing the relations among people and interactive products. In the case of ETC, the interaction design aims, above all, to promote textual production through group
work. This project needs, therefore, to highlight usability goals so as to minimize the
cognitive load, so the user can concentrate his efforts in the activity under way and not in
learning to use the system. It is necessary that the interface be easy to learn, intuitive, with
easy navigation and easy to remember in a first contact, guaranteeing users a good
performance next time they need to use the system.

3 ETC: the construction of a new interface focused on
interaction design
Constant technological innovations in our days make softwares and hardwares easily obsolete
and cause an endless search for new systems. It is no different with systems developed for
Education that need constant recycling. Such is the trend that it has been observed that the
editor needed to be updated through suggestions made by users of ETC since 2002. The
previous project of the editor presented navigation problems with links that were difficult to
identify because they were scattered through the pages. User performance was harmed due to
time lost trying to understand how the system worked.
The project of interaction for ETC’s new version, therefore, to cut down on noise in
communication and brought a cleaner and clearer interface. Moreover, for the new ETC
version, units of information were re-organized and hierarchized according to their relevance
and function and re-distributed in a more harmonious way following a construction grid.

4 Conclusion
Through the new ETC interface design, we look for greater efficacy in the system so as to live
up to expectations and, still, we intend it to be more efficient as far as helping the user to
perform his/her tasks. Moreover, the changes presented in this article also aim to adequate it
to current Web 2.0.
Validation of the new interface is predicted to the first semester of 2009, when it will applied
in extension, graduate and post-graduate courses. We hope that, through collective writing
activities proposed, it be possible to identify efficacy as well as possible
limitations/advantages of the new interface developed for the Collective Text Editor. From the
experience, analysis of the new material will be possible, both from pedagogical and
interaction design perspectives, aiming possible adjustments and/or improvements as well as
the availability of use to the community, outside the university.

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