

Publication Lectorate eLearning

Organising and learning experiences
of the first semester

MA Program ePedagogy / Visual Knowledge
Building

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March 2006

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1. Summary

This paper will discuss the process of the MA program ePedagogy / Visual Knowledge Building during the first semester of the academic year 2005 – 2006. This MA program is a joint venture between the Universities of Helsinki, Hamburg and INHOLLAND.

This publication will discuss and evaluate the concrete steps (in terms of learning process) during this first semester. In particular the role of the eTutor will get special attention.

This publication is based on the principle of action research. Hart & Bond¹ defines action research as *“it is a form of reflective inquiry which enables practitioners to better realise such qualities in their practice. The tests for good action research are very pragmatic ones. Does it improve the professional quality of the transactions between practitioners and clients/colleagues?”*

This action research approach is being realised upon three main sources.

As an eTutor and member of the staff of this program I weekly filled in an “Evaluation Log” in which the following questions are centralized:

1. What happened (this week)
2. Significant experience
3. Reflection
4. Actions

Secondly I used a little survey which was being used by the staff to evaluate the first semester. All the three Universities filled in a form with the following questions concerning the education and organisation:

Education

1. What do you consider most hindering in your teaching?
2. What do you consider most beneficial in your teaching?
3. What kind of teaching methods do you prefer in this program?
4. Do you think the course offers are attractive for the target group?
5. How do you evaluate student’s engagements and motivation in your courses?
6. What can / should be improved in terms of collaborative learning activities and processes?

Organisation

1. In what specific context do you spot organisational constraints?
2. Does your organisation recognise and support the MA program?
3. What is your short-, mid- and long term vision on this program?

Thirdly an important source for this action research approach was the International Seminar which was hold in the middle of February 2006. In this seminar the changes based on the questions of the questionnaire were discussed and implemented.

The theoretical framework in this publication is based on the dissertation of Karel Kreijns² (Sociable CSCL Environments). In this dissertation he discussed the collaborative cognitive- and epistemic performance in a CSCLE. The social presence theory takes a central position in this dissertation.

¹ Hart E and Bond M (1995) *Action-Research for Health and Social Care: A Guide to Practice*

² Karel Kreijns dissertation “ Sociable CSCL Environments” 2004

In this paper the pitfalls and barriers concerning a sociable CSCLE are being discussed and evaluated.

This paper describes, the interventions the staff took, in order to improve the educational context of the program. From this perspective we looked very carefully to the barriers and pitfalls in our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). We found evidence for the fact that a good CSCLE consists at least a good balance between Content, Community and Pedagogy. In the program we emphasised our focus (too much) on content and (too) little on community and pedagogy. The community was poor because of the fact that we used three content learning systems, which didn't stimulate the group processes. Pedagogy was too much based on individual eTutor behaviour.

In January 2006, after the courses were ended, the Universities organised a little survey. In this survey was shown that we have to some interventions to improve the learning process. At the International Seminar in February 2006 eTutors and students discussed the problems.

The following interventions are being considered and implemented:

1. The use of three Virtual Learning Environments should be decreased. Especially the INHOLLAND / Blackboard system doesn't reflect the open source philosophy. Besides this the accessibility of this system is not very easy for foreign students
2. The collaborative aspect should be increased, by emphasising the interdisciplinary- and international co-operation. The formation of international subgroups is implemented.

2. Introduction

This publication is based on the principle of action research. Hart & Bond³ defines ‘action research’ as *“it is a form of reflective inquiry which enables practitioners to better realise such qualities in their practice. The tests for good action research are very pragmatic ones. Does it improve the professional quality of the transactions between practitioners and clients/colleagues?”*

Action Research does enable the following aspects:

- Is educative
- Deals with individuals as members of social groups
- Is problem-focused, context-specific and future-orientated
- Involves a change intervention
- Involves a cyclic process in which research, action and evaluation are interlinked
- Aims at improvement and involvement
 - Is founded on a research relationship in which those involved are participants in the change process

This publication deals with Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and about Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning Environments (CSCLE). A VLE is a learning environment in which distance-learning takes place with the aid of computers. The aim of a VLE is to create a learning culture which is based on the same aspects as a normal classroom. A CSCLE is simply an environment in which collaborative learning is supported by computers. Kreijns⁴ states that CSCL environments mostly are oriented on the cognitive aspects of learning. A VLE is also oriented on the social aspects of learning.

In this paper the educational process in the MA program ePedagogy / Visual Knowledge Building is described. In chapter 3 you will be introduced to the main aspects of the program such as aims and goals, the developed curriculum by the Universities of Helsinki, Hamburg and INHOLLAND.

Chapter 4 describes the individual observations based on the “Evaluation Log” which weekly had been written down. Next to this also the considerations made in the meetings of the staff are described. The most important outcomes are being described in chapter 5. The International Seminar, as a “change moment”, is described in chapter 6. In this chapter also the conclusions upon this process are being discussed.

3. Description of the program

3.1 *Aims and goals*⁵

The aim is to create a MA program (120 credits) for visual pedagogy in eLearning called ePedagogy Design / Visual Knowledge Building: MA eLearning programme.

The planned curriculum relies on the complementary areas of expertise of the partners. Their Skills and knowledge provide the dynamic hub required to deliver an innovative,

³ Hart E and Bond M (1995) *Action-Research for Health and Social Care: A Guide to Practice*

⁴ Kreijns 2004 Sociable CSCL Environments

⁵ Professor S. Sonvilla-Weiss 2004

interactive Inter-disciplinary curriculum, which encompasses the pedagogical vision of the visual dimensions of ePedagogy and its expansive opportunities.

Novel expertise emphasizes the creative and comprehensive implementation of visual skills and pedagogy.

The curriculum reflects changes within professional fields of education, mainly with reference to the expansion and development of ICT.

In pursuit of ePedagogy in eLearning the methods and practices in using ODL, Problem Based Learning, Self Guided Learning, Community Learning and other emerging pedagogical models like P2P are explored, researched, applied and evaluated to enrich the traditional Art and Design methodology to ensure reflective discussion in praxis oriented study. Amalgamation of these methods emphasizing the visual and pedagogical dimensions forms the basis for this CD-project.

The purpose of “ePedagogy Design – MA (Master of Arts degree) eLearning programme” is to improve the quality of higher education and strengthen its European dimension. It does this by encouraging the transnational cooperation between universities, fostering the European mobility of students and teachers, and contributing to improved transparency and academic recognition of qualifications and studies throughout the European Union. This includes mobility grants to a number of students and teachers but also the enhancement of the European dimension in studies for those students and teachers who do not directly participate in exchanges. In this context, intensive programmes, the development of new curricula through trans national cooperation and the development and consolidation of European thematic networks are strongly emphasized. According to UIAH International Strategy CD-programmes are the most important part of the educational development plan.

Entrance requirements

Students who participate in this program were selected according to the following criteria:

- BA or equivalent degree level
- Practical- and theoretical skills in media and visual literacy
- A range of ICT-skills through work or study
- Interest and/or experience in education practice and theory
- Social communicative competence
- Contextual abilities in visual knowledge building
- Openness and basic knowledge in electronic media and educational processes
- Openness to socio-cultural diversity
- Disposition to challenge the ongoing paradigm shift in knowledge society
- Flexibility and attendance to work and practice in collaborative environments

On account of the pilot phase this project demanded extra commitment of the first students in almost all the Universities. Almost everyone was a teacher or a co-worker in the participating Universities. Because of the fact that the staff expected so-called “teething troubles” in this program, they saw the students more or less as co-producers for this Master Program. Experiences in building this program could be shared, and be improved (see also paragraph 7/ overall conclusions).

3.2 Curriculum⁶

The MA-programme aims at a broad spectrum of professional qualifications offered by the three universities involved. Thus the focus lies in a multi-disciplinary approach with special emphasis on communication theory and practice, issue management, visual knowledge building theory and practice in contextual media culture, hypermedia and knowledge organization.

In addition, the MA in ePedagogy Design fosters international research and community building, student and teacher exchange, field practice and qualification for a position in the international employment market.

3.3 Educational process

The studies leading to the MA degree consist of major courses (obligatory), minor courses, field practice, research methods and MA-thesis. ePedagogy Design study advocates individual study plans supported by Blended Learning, Open Distance Learning, Tutoring and Portfolio Management.

A major part in the programme deals with international research projects that are intended to strengthen the multidisciplinary research strands and junior research among the joint university partners. The study programme is in the English language.

The theoretical framework we have set behind our didactical approach could be termed the constructivist concept. Papert⁷ and his colleagues [, ,], who use the term *constructionism* to especially stress learning as a (social) design activity, build heavily upon computer science and computer use for learning. Similar to others, they stress that students construct new knowledge with particular effectiveness when they are engaged in personally meaningful products. The goals of the teacher are to engage the learner in active participation, problem solving, interdisciplinary work, reflection and discussion. They also stress the intrinsic motivation resulting from the learners choosing their own projects, an open learning community with mentors, students, students as mentors and open projects. Though the members of the group focus mainly on the learning of children, the principles of their approach are applicable to student and professional learners as well.

4. Description of the first semester

4.1 Perceived from a personal evaluation log

During the whole semester I recorded my experiences each week in an evaluation log. With this instrument the following questions were central:

- What happened this week
- Significant experience this week
- Reflection on this week
- Actions taken

In the next section I will discuss the most important aspects during the previous semester.

⁶ Official website MA ePedagogy

⁷ Papert, S. (1993).

The Children's Machine - Rethinking School in the Age of the Computer. Basic Books, New York

What happened

In this section of the evaluation log I made a clear description of the most important activities, happenings etc., which took place during that week.

In the first weeks the orientation lies on the installation and structuring of the modules, provided by INHOLLAND University and the other Universities.

In the curriculum development we decided to use three Virtual Learning Environments (VLE's):

- MimerDesk: This learning environment had two functions. The first utility is the intranet function. All general and overall information should be provided by this platform. The second function was a learning environment in which courses modules from Helsinki University were provided.
- Commsy: the Hamburg University provides this learning environment. In this platform all courses / modules of the Hamburg faculty (Art education) were provided. So this platform is not exclusively oriented on the ePed students.
- Blackboard: INHOLLAND is used to working with the Blackboard as a VLE. A special environment in which all courses and modules were presented for the ePed students was made.

The decision to use three VLE systems was made on a clear base. All features and facilities were available on these platforms and a perceived added value was that we thought that changing from VLE for different courses was a very good experience for the participating students. However the reality is that there is no efficient harmonisation between the ICT approach in the different learning environments.

The MimerDesk and the Commsy systems are both an example of the so called "open source" software. It's open for everyone. The Blackboard system is based on a Microsoft environment.

The arrangement for the entrance procedure for the students from Helsinki and Hamburg took too much time. The ICT environment of the INHOLLAND University is very much protected against outsiders. This conflicts with the so-called "open source thinking" which is crucial in this shared program. Finally all the students and staff received a special entrance code for non-students.

Due to the fact that the Helsinki and Hamburg students are used to working on an Apple computer, there were many connection problems. This had nothing to do with the real cooperation between the Universities but consumed a lot of time. These problems frustrated many students. This resulted in most of the students skipping the INHOLLAND modules / courses in the first semester.

A second important observation was the difference in the use of synchronous and A-synchronous eLearning methods. In the first semester the Universities provided the following courses:

Name of the course	Providing University	Content	Didactical approach
Media Pedagogy	Hamburg	Oriented on knowledge concerning media theory and learning processes	1. Self study (material in the VLE), thus a-synchronously 2. Weekly video conferences, thus synchronously
Knowledge Formation 1	Hamburg	1. Oriented on development of skills (using the tool study-log) 2. Oriented on principles of central / linear perspective versus multi / random perspective	1. Self study (material in the VLE), thus a-synchronously 2. Weekly video conferences, thus synchronously
Visual Knowledge building 1	Helsinki	Oriented on the history and development of knowledge concerning visualities, images etc..	1. Self study (material in the VLE), thus a-synchronously
Learning Objects 1	Helsinki	Oriented on the practises and insights of the usability of learning objects	1. Self study (material in the VLE), thus a-synchronously 2. Weekly video conferences, thus synchronously
Didactical analysis of a virtual learning environment	INHOLLAND	Introduction of the use of a learning environment, including individual and peer to peer behaviour / learning.	1. Self study (material in the VLE), thus a-synchronously 2. Peer to peer learning
Portfolio	INHOLLAND	Skills oriented. The description of the individual overviews, materials and reflections	1. Self study (material in the VLE), thus a-synchronously
Project management	INHOLLAND	Introduction on the steps concerning project work	1. Self study (material in the VLE), thus a-synchronously

Table 1 / Provided Courses and Modules

The greatest focus has been put on the courses, which used the videoconference as a didactical tool. The presence of others is very important to achieving a shared learning process. So the courses Knowledge Formation and Learning Objects had the most attention from the student perspective. Also the course Media Pedagogy included videoconference as a didactical tool. Because of the fact that the time schedule of this course didn't fit with the agenda of most of the students, the contribution to this course was not intense..!

The self-study courses were based on an a-synchronous didactical concept. Students could do this course anytime..., anyplace.....! The lack of social physical presence both on the side from students as from the staff lead to the situation that the contribution to those courses / modules was very low.

Significant experiences

One of the most significant learning experiences from this course was that we underestimated the problems concerning the use of three different VLE's in our

didactical approach. For the students it was very confusing, and didn't give them the opportunity to get an overview of the program.

Students contended that problems concerning the log in numbers were essential. From my point of view I think that this was not the real argument. In a way these students were old fashioned in their study approach. Everything had to be provided easily...! Implicitly, because of the technical problems, this led to the situation that the staff was made responsible for the solution of this problem. From the beginning the staff had communicated to the students that they would be seen as co-workers who were also responsible for tackling problems like this (see discussion on pitfall / section 4.1.3).

Another significant experience was that in this semester we didn't achieve a single videoconference in which all universities participated. The INHOLLAND University is the only organisation that possesses a Multi Control Unit (MCU), this feature is available in the ICT lab which is located in the Haarlem University. This MCU makes it possible that four different locations (with the IP number on a computer) can be connected.

At the beginning of the semester the INHOLLAND University made a schedule when the MCU could be used. Miscommunication, technical problems (to connect, or with audio) were very much disturbing the learning process. After one month this led to the situation that only the INHOLLAND students participated in both courses / modules from Hamburg and Helsinki. The Finnish and German students mostly participated in the courses provided from their own University. This was very disappointing for all participants.

One of the reasons for this failure is related to time commitment. Most of the students, but also staff, combine their study with a normal working life. Three different videoconferences in one week took too much time. Videoconferences shouldn't be only concentrated on one course / module, but in these videoconferences all material in all modules should have been discussed.

The staff could intervene because the courses in Hamburg were connected with other students within that University. We had to keep to the planned time schedule.

Also a significant aspect in the first semester was the fact that we underestimated the cultural and knowledge differences between the participating students. The Helsinki and Hamburg students are theoretically more grounded than the INHOLLAND students. In this first semester the knowledge provided was too abstract for the Dutch students. They had to adopt a completely new learning style, from skill / competence based to a more knowledge oriented approach.

Reflection on what happened

In this reflection section I will discuss and evaluate the first semester on the basis of the dissertation of Karel Kreijns Social interaction within CSCL Environments⁸.

Kreijns stated that for valued learning in a CSCLE three components are required:

1. pedagogy (didactics concerning the way modules are being taught)
2. content (knowledge provided by the courses / modules)
3. community (a sense of a group / collaborative aspects)

⁸ K. Kreijns Sociable CSCLE 2004

When we started this semester we thought that these three aspects in our didactical approach would be sufficient. Our pedagogy was based on the principle that we started the program with the principle of “blended learning”. At the beginning we organised an International Seminar in which staff and students explained their aims and goals of the program and related courses and modules. A combination of self-study courses (a-synchronously) and synchronous approach (videoconferences).

The participating Universities provided content. We tried to build up a community in a face-to-face setting in June during the International Seminar. The weak components in our approach were pedagogy and community. Our pedagogy was much disturbed by technical problems and the community didn't wake up after the summer holidays. The International Seminar was held in June and we started the program on 23 October. Between the International Seminar and the real beginning of the program was too much time. People didn't know each other so well, that that was an explicit need to collaborate. In this case I think “community” and “pedagogy” tends to approach too weak, too much we were concerned on providing “content” to the program. Kreijns⁹ defines these as strongest pitfalls that can occur in a CSCLE. Especially the first pitfall, “taken social interaction for granted”, is proofed. Implicitly we thought that the International Seminar would be sufficient to get enough social interaction (“Community”) between the students and staff. Also the second pitfall, “stimulation in a VLE is usually restricted to the cognitive aspects of learning” is proofed. Too much we were considering providing good and sufficient content on the different VLE's. Both students as eTutors were experiencing this. Implicitly we thought that quality of the program fundamentals on the content, we underestimated the contribution of “pedagogy” and “community”.

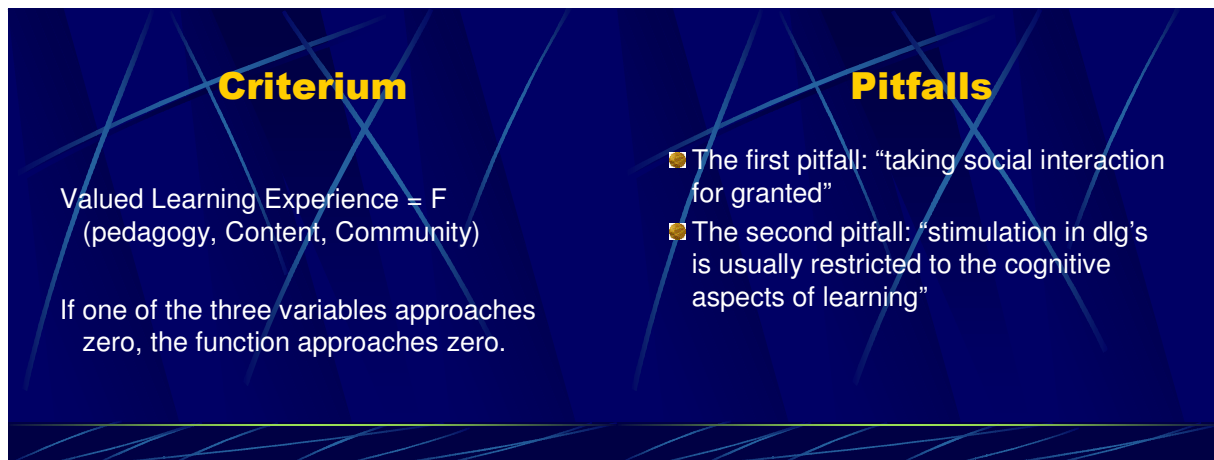


Illustration 2 (Kreijns)

Illustration 3 (Kreijns)

Besides the pitfalls also the barriers defined by Kreijns took place. We thought that social interaction should occur automatically. In reality we were only facing barriers which were based in

- CSCL pedagogy
- CSCL communication media
- CSCL environment.

I believe that our CSCL pedagogy was sufficient. We communicated clearly which modules in which didactical concept were put table 1). So we took the first barrier. We didn't succeed in

⁹ K. Kreijns Sociable CSCLE 2004

scaling the second and third barrier. However, we did not use sufficient CSCL communication nor did we have a stable CSCL environment.

The CSCL communication between staff and students was fixed on to two functions:

- Email: Most of the time when there was something to communicate, both staff and students used Email for this.
- Videoconference: The weekly videoconference was used as a communication tool. But because of the fact that the community was never complete (most of the time only two universities were connected) this didn't stimulate the social interaction between all students.

Besides this there was not one CSCL environment. MimerDesk should have fulfilled that function. In reality we had three CSCL environments. All the participating Universities were much oriented on their own CSCL. The forum within MimerDesk was rarely used, although several times discussions were evoked. There was no community, thus no social interaction.



Illustration 4 (Kreijns)

Kreijns¹⁰ defined the sociability of CSCLE's: *"sociability is defined as the extent to which the CSCL environment is able give rise to a social space; or more precisely, the extent to which a CSCLE is in or itself capable of creating a social space"*. MimerDesk was only a formal place where official aspects of the program were communicated. Social interaction within the community was in that sense never stimulated by the CSCL environment...!

Action taken

4.2 Meetings with the staff

During the semester we had two face-to-face meetings with the staff. The first one was in September 2005 in the INHOLLAND University. In this first meeting we confirmed that all courses and modules were put properly in one of the CSCL environments. Besides this we evaluated the International Seminar in June. Officially we stated the time schedule for this semester to the students. I think at that moment we considered that we were ready for "take off" because all the content for the courses was available. Until then we met each other in order to arrange the curriculum of the program. I think we took the pedagogy and social interaction for granted.

Besides that we also had to clarify the formal aspects of this joint approach. In September 2005 only the position of the Helsinki University was stable. Both the INHOLLAND and

¹⁰ K. Kreijns Sociable CSCLE 2004

Hamburg University had problems with implementing the MA program within their organisations. Much concern was put on these problems in that first meeting.

The second meeting took place in January 2006. Before Christmas we had just ended the synchronous approach in the modules. In this meeting we were very much more orientated on the “pedagogy” and “community” aspects related to this program. The Helsinki and INHOLLAND University proposed a complete different didactical approach in this MA program.

We concluded that the problems concerning the CSCL environment had to be solved properly. To come to any social interaction the barriers Kreijns defined (CSCL pedagogy, CSCL communication media and CSCL environment) have to be taken. We think that decreasing the amount of content learning systems (in this case Blackboard) would help. The decision was made that the so-called “open source philosophy” is an important issue in this program.

Wikipedia defines open source as “practices in production and development that promote access to the end product's sources. It is regarded by some as a philosophy and by others a pragmatic methodology. Before *open source* became widely adopted, developers and producers used a variety of phrases to describe the concept; the term *open source* gained popularity with the rise of the Internet and its enabling of diverse production models, communication paths, and interactive communities. Subsequently, [open-source software](#)

became the most prominent face of open source.

The open source model can allow for the concurrent use of different agendas and approaches in production, in contrast with more centralized models of development such as those typically used in commercial software companies.

The CSCL environment Blackboard of the INHOLLAND University led to many problems in use and utility. The decision was made that the INHOLLAND courses / modules are put on the MimerDesk.

Furthermore, to solve the barriers concerning CSCL pedagogy, CSCL communication and CSCL environment we also decided to intervene in the social interaction between the participants. We saw that the staff was perceived as the “owner of the problem” (traditional instructor / producer role) and too much the students were in a so-called “consumer-role”. We defined that in this program the international and interdisciplinary approach was a crucial part of the program. Too many of the students were oriented on their local University. Social interaction between all participants had to be improved. To realise this we thought it was a good idea to define three subgroups, which would be formed from all participating countries.

These subgroups have to work on a semester theme, and the modules in the next semester would function as suppliers for this project theme. The project theme for the next semester was the usability and utility of so-called “BLOGS” on the internet.

We also discussed our approach in the International Seminar, which would take place in February 2006 in Rotterdam. In contrast to the International Seminar in Helsinki we would not invited external stakeholders of this program, but put the focus completely on the pedagogy and community building within the participants.

The International seminar put the focus on three themes:

- International / interdisciplinary approach
- Study-Log as an important tool within the program
- Introduction of the so-called Portfolio approach.

Evaluation

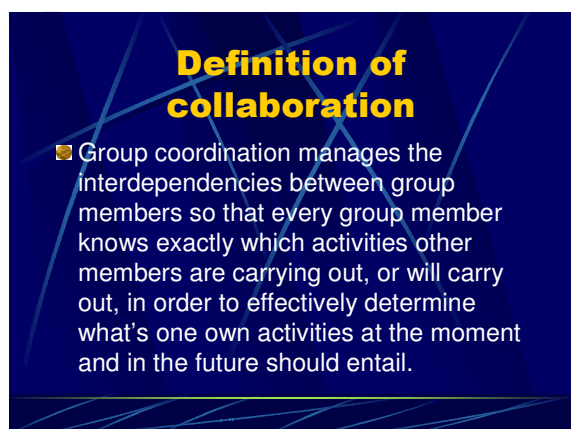


Illustration 5 (Kreijns)

5. Intervention in the educational concept

The model Kreijns¹¹ provided can be put as the framework for the approach in the second semester of the MA program. First of all we emphasise the collaborative aspect of the program. Collaboration in this program means the international co-operation and the interdisciplinary approach.

As presented in illustration 4 we try to identify which the subgroup approach two aspects:

- *Epistemic interaction:* Within the subgroups different types of knowledge and competences are evident. This collaborative group learning imposes critical thinking and so-called deep learning. The combination of these two ways of approaching cognition / knowledge will lead to an improved learning performance (interdisciplinary).
- *Informal interaction:* By forming the subgroups socio-emotional and social processes will take place. Group dynamics will lead to “passing the stages of group development” and to “developing group structures”. The combination of these two aspects will lead to improved social performance (international co-operation)

¹¹ Sociable CSCL environments 2004

6. Description of the International Seminar

6.1 Aims of the program

The most important aim of the International Seminar is that the participants of the MA program physically meet each other. The virtual learning community is too weak to provoke real social interaction. Kreijns¹² defined such presence as “the degree of psychological sensation in which the illusion exists that the other in the communication appears to be a real person”. Because of the fact that we evaluated that the social interaction between the participating students was very low we wanted the International Seminar to function as a change moment. Both the epistemic and the collaborative aspects should be recognised and emphasised. Morrison and Collins¹³ defined epistemic interaction or fluency as “the ability to identify and use different ways of knowing to understand their different forms of expression and evaluation and to take perspectives of others who are operating within an epistemic framework”. Our goal is to improve the quality of the program by seeking collaboration in which interdisciplinary provokes epistemic learning. The different backgrounds of the students could lead to this epistemic fluency or interaction.

Besides this epistemic interaction the International Seminar should emphasise the collaborative learning approach. Working in subgroups will lead to:

- Positive interdependence
- Individual accountability
- Interpersonal and small group skills
- Group processing

We want to facilitate the group dynamics, Tuckman & Jensen¹⁴ defines certain stages in group forming “The formation of some groups can be represented as a spiral; other groups form with sudden movements forward and then have periods with no change. Whatever variant of formation each group exhibits, they suggest that all groups pass through six sequential stages of development. These stages may be longer or shorter for each group, or for individual members of the group, but all groups will need to experience them. They are forming, storming, norming, performing, mourning and retiring”.

On this very moment the group forming process is at the stage of storming to norming. We want to realise that with more tense groups (internationally / interdisciplinary selected) the education climate will improve....!

The role of the eTutor should be changed in the second semester. Hiltz¹⁵ proposed the following change *“the role of the Tutor changes from transferring knowledge to students (the sage on the stage) to being a facilitator in the construction of student knowledge (the guide on the side)”*.

¹² Sociable CSCL environments 2004

¹³ Morrisson & Collins 1996

¹⁴ Tuckman, B.W. & Jensen, M.A.C. (1977) Stages of small group development revisited. Group and Organizational Studies, 2, 419-427

¹⁵ Hiltz 1998

We also had the expectation that the interventions in the International Seminar would lead to a more co-workers approach. Responsibility for the learning process is on both tutor and student sides.

6.2 Description of the process

The International Seminar was held from 16 February 06 to 19 February 06.

In the introduction the staff discussed the goals and aims for this seminar:

- Improving international collaboration
- Improving the interdisciplinary approach
- Defining subgroups for the second semester
- Explaining the semester theme
- Subgroup development (epistemic / collaborative)
- Informal interaction

We started the international seminar in the afternoon by discussing the so-called portfolio approach. Each student in this program has to make his own portfolio. Following individual reflection peer-to-peer reflection and feedback is emphasised.

On the second day we started by dividing the group into three subgroups of 4 or 5 persons.

The subgroups followed two workshops:

- Collaborative working: In this workshop the students were put in a brainstorm session in which they had to define related to a so-called “Blogsphere”. This “Blogsphere” is the semester theme. All the groups defined a lot of related items. The next step was to determine for each group member three issues he / she would like to investigate during this semester. These issues were put together and the group received the assignment to define a project plan on this topic. The next day they had to present their first plan to the other students and to the staff.
- Introduction to Study-Log: Next to the portfolio in this program we would emphasise the use of study-log. In this workshop we discussed usability and utility of this tool.

The process in the workshops was very positive. The first group development took place. In the evening many subgroup already began starting defining their project plan.

A very good intervention came up by one individual student. He presented his creation of a “Blog” which looks like the official website (<http://epedagogydesign.uiah.fi>) but is not (<http://eped.loveitorchangeit.com/2006/02/17/day-two-building-groups/>). This intervention leads to a situation in which interdisciplinary was central.

The third day the three subgroups presented their project plans:

Group 1: want to work on the integration of a WIKI and a BLOG into a so-called “Bliki”
They want to try to make it possible in a technical and educational sense to combine these two knowledge tools

Group 2: want to work on the distinction, which can be made in knowledge building.
They proposed to investigate and to do research on two identified groups, the “sedantic” approach and the “nomad” approach. The sedantic approach reflects more building data and information and the nomad approach reflects the ability to monitor and use appropriate knowledge.

Group 3: want to work on the Blog as a tool in which ubiqueness and criticism journalism could function.

The morning session showed a change in responsibility. Both in an epistemic and in a collaborative sense the subgroups were working effectively. This approach could lay the base for a more collaborative working process in the next semester.

Because of the fact that everybody slept in one Hotel, with no outside interference, the group process was very dynamic and intense. On Saturday evening there was a good spirit among the participants of the International seminar. The aims for this seminar turns out to be successful.

6.3 Conclusion

The first semester of the MA program provided a lot of information about the ongoing learning process:

- "Taken social interaction for granted"
- "Stimulation in CSCL environments is usually restricted to the cognitive aspects of learning"
- "To reach social interaction a virtual learning environment needs besides good content, also a clear view on pedagogy and community building"
- "Using three different learning content systems isn't appropriate for a good virtual learning environment"
- "More emphasise on collaborative working by creating smaller groups"
- "More integration of the various modules / courses through implementation of a semester theme"
- "More focus on group dynamics"

The first conclusion is that the social interaction and collaboration between the participating students was not optimal. One of the main reasons was the fact that using three different virtual learning environments disturbed this process. The INHOLLAND virtual learning system will not have a function in the second semester. All provided courses will be offered by MimerDesk.

Also the fact that too much emphasis has been put on constructing the content and less on given attention to pedagogy and community lead to poor social interaction. The course "Didactical analysis of a virtual learning environment" stresses especially these aspects. It's essential that all participating students will give attention to this course.....!

Not enough attention was given to the different backgrounds (cultural / intellectual) of the participating students. The students from Helsinki and Hamburg are more oriented on the heuristic approach, while the INHOLLAND students work more competency based.

The provided courses offered too much a fragmented approach to the program. Students want more integration of the provided knowledge. The formation of subgroups with a semester theme could be a good solution for the next semester.

For group formation and dynamics it is important that real interaction between the students take place. The contribution of the International Seminar to the social interaction is very important. Tools to achieve these goals are:

- More face to face meetings / seminars (also within subgroups)
- Intensifying the use of videoconferences (also peer to peer usability)
- Maybe intensifying the use of other electronic techniques (Skype etc...)
- Emphasising the role of the student as a co-worker
- Creating subgroups

The seminar provided new energy and motivation for more effective group processes.