CHANGING IDEAS WITH REGARD TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

Jan Agten

1. CHANGING IDEAS WITH REGARD TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

A. The conception and the birth of a new economy

"All over the world motivated and trained people are developing their competences. Their brain is a never-ending construction site where old knowledge, skills and attitudes are replaced by new paradigms. Paradigms that make it easy for them to conceive new products and services... these new products and services feed the market with new information and the cycle restarts.

This process is responsible for an exponential growth of information.

Taking into account the rapid deployment of information technology and worldwide telecommunication infrastructures, we enter the knowledge-based economy. By increasing our learning power and our power to change we become a learning organization, described by Peter Senge as "The real competitive advantage for organization is their ability to learn faster than the competition, to generate and share knowledge (learning power) and to continuously improve (power to change). A learning organization is an organization that has the capacity to build its own future"
Without us, information would not exist the way it exists now; we the learners and the innovators are creating a new global reality based on information.

This has significant consequences for our manner of learning, and of using, accumulating and of exchanging knowledge.

The exponential growth of information has an enormous impact on the educational institutions. It is impossible anymore to adapt our classical course so they can keep up with the information and the new knowledge that is becoming available.

Classroom teaching cannot keep up with reality. The role of the educational system in society is changing dramatically.

“No longer is the first priority to fill the brains of students with knowledge but to teach students ‘how to breathe information’. This skill is becoming most crucial in order to survive in an ever-changing world. To achieve this information, teachers have to embrace the new society and look for a new role for the educational institution. Without this commitment the educational institution will lose its driving role in the new global reality.”

(Jef Staes, 2000)

B. The rapid deployment of information technology and worldwide telecommunication infrastructure

In the 80 ties companies started to invest in hardware. Very soon after that, investments in software, courseware, groupware and web ware have been made. Educational institutions followed this evolution, but mostly at the courseware level.

The figure 1 shows the integration of all the previous levels in a web ware approach.
Web based learning will play a vital role in the information society and will occur a revolution with regard to teaching and learning techniques.

The implementation of web based learning in technical sciences is probably more evident. The possibility of a three-dimensional presentation of a molecule is a real added value in teaching biology or chemistry. Replacing elements in the composition shows immediately the effect and the changes. Interactive learning by using the computer is here a real challenge. Searching on the www, finding and implementing additional scientific information increases the learning potential of students.

In social sciences we mostly deal with texts (written communication) and direct contact with people in order to demonstrate and train skills in communication, interaction, negotiation, acting, training,... In teaching social sciences we use more or less the same instruments.

Stimulating creative learning and making more use of students' potential in social work education is always a challenge. Next to traditional teaching, electronic learning can stimulate the development of new learning strengths and can help to structure a lot the communication amongst the participants. Traditional classroom teaching can partly be replaced by tele-learning. E-learning can add an extra dimension to the learning process.

The introduction of the electronic dimension in social work practice can change a lot. Life meetings can be replaced by meetings on the internet, spread out over the
time. Reports can be sent by e-mail, discussion groups can be created, being able to consult a library with relevant documents and literature about the subject is very useful, a planning and a time table accessible for all participants is very much needed. Ones on the internet it is easy to find extra information and make it accessible for all group members. Borders between countries are no longer a threshold. Good practices from other countries can be discussed and implemented. Exchange prevents us for not discovering again the warm water.

The increase of 'e-learning delivery methods will create the opportunity of training delivered via corporate intranets ant the internet' (Mc Govern, 1999)( ). Developments in online technology are beginning to challenge the dominance of classroom training'(Rajah, 1999)().

An electronic tool which creates the facilities to integrate the above described functions is needed. It will help to order the dynamic learning process and stress the attention to the same unit. It focus on the core elements defined by the group members or the creator. It will create net-based learning.

A web based tool is based on the standards of the World Wide Web and provides Internet-Based learning.

2. AIMS, CONDITIONS AND EMPHASES FOR WEB BASED LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK

a) Aims:
Stimulating lifelong learning and providing tools for it
- I am my own leader
- I can contribute actively to the learning process of the group
- Collaborative learning
- Surviving in an increasing information society

b) Conditions:
- Have access to all kind of information resources
- Be able to contribute to the learning project
- Learning environment
- Flexibility in time (not limited to teaching hours)
- Flexibility in place
- Broaden the learning tools
- Dynamic - interactive
- Consultation of project related information
- Structuring the communication

In order to structure electronic communication it is worthwhile to distinguish between 4 levels of communication:
- Chatting: talking, conversation with fleeting information
- Messages: mail, letters, information which is time, person limited relevant
- Discussion: argument, statements, interaction between people
- Documents: ideas, content, a whole of interwoven opinions and information related to the subject
- Inside documents: documents developed within the project
- Outside documents: documents available outside the project
- References: resources, all kind of funds relevant for the subject.

c) Emphases

Transfer of knowledge —> learn how to learn
To get information  —> look for information
Instruction  —> construction
Teaching environment  —> learning environment

Questions / Conclusions?

- People first, technology second?
- In what way can ICT be used in education and thereby anticipate topical matters and the needs of students?
- How can ICT contribute to the motivation and profundity of students?
- How do we convince colleagues of the use of ICT?
- In what way can an e-learning platform fit in with traditional learning methods?
- In what way will the use of ICT affect the role of the teacher?
- How willing and able is the student to work with the learning platform independently?

3. BRIDGED, THE CONCEPT.

Abstract

Bridged is a technological and powerful web based learning environment, developed in an international context. We describe the link with constructivism, knowledge construction and collaborative learning.

A. Introduction

"BridgED is not about how to use educational software but rather a chance to explore how bringing new technology into the classroom and the meeting place. This will change the teaching, the meetings and the learning"

BridgED is a Web based computer application designed to provide a format for web based learning. It is a technological learning environment that has been developed
by a European partnership in the framework of the Leonardo program. It is an empty box, well structured, providing a whole range of tools and instruments. The platform can be used in an advanced constructivist setting, but it offers also a lot of opportunities in a more traditional learning and meeting situation.

B. Description

With BridgED, participants have the opportunity to create a project in which all group members become active. The members, along with the creator, make up a group that collaborate on a project, share ideas, have discussions, ask questions and upload a digital portfolio.

BridgED is based on the philosophy that knowledge is a human construction that takes place as a socio-cultural activity. This learning environment is intended to support the collaborative construction of knowledge in and beyond the classroom or the meeting place. Using BridgED involves changing the structure and culture of the meeting place (classroom) in line with the new concept of learning and teaching.

C. Underlying principles

Its design is based on an ingenious application of recent research on constructivism, collaborative learning and complex problem solving. According to Sir Christopher Ball (1992, quoted in ERT, 1995, p.15), Director of Learning at the Royal Society of Arts in the UK, a learning society involves the following major characteristics:

- "learning is accepted as a continuous activity throughout life;
- learners assume responsibility for their own progress;
- assessment is designed to confirm progress rather than to sanction failure;
- personal competences, shared values and team spirit are recognized equally with the pursuit of knowledge;
- learning is a collaborative partnership between all members."

Decorte and Lowyck7 define learning as a constructive, cumulative, self-regulated, goal-oriented, situated, collaborative, and individually different process of knowledge
building and construction of meaning. These anchors are fundamental for the BridgED environment. The learning environment is compatible with these characteristics because the learner actively interacts with the information, peers and the teacher, he/she connects new learning to prior experience and constructs new meaning in a social contexts.

As stated earlier, it is an environment for building, articulating, exploring and structuring knowledge. The notion of situated learning where students learn while in the actual context where that learning is to be applied, is closely related to BridgED. The different tools offer opportunities for this new learning. It's much more than just a combination of tools for 'posting' information; it is a meeting and work place, where students and teachers build a body of knowledge.

Communication and interaction between groups of one class, between classes of one university or between different universities- national and international- are possible. BridgED is well-suited for setting up interaction among partners that are physically (far) removed from each other. Students work together to maximize their own and each others learning.

This learning platform is not content driven, it is a network system that provides 'across-the-curriculum' support for collaborative learning and inquiry. Because constructivism is the cornerstone, research can be applied to any subject matter, which can be placed into a problem-solving or project scenario.

BridgED is a typical computer supported collaborative learning environment. It provides a structure for collaborative work that facilitates integrating diverse media and other resources and structures. To work with BridgED no extra software is needed.

**D. Strengths**

The internet, websites and virtual material take every day more space in our society. Also in social work education we are daily confronted with this virtual world. You can find important information for your professional work. Students can actively search and collect material in relation to their study subject.

Sometimes it looks like too numerous to absorb. BridgED helps to see the wood for the trees BridgED

- Is an e-learning platform, whereby the contribution of every participants will be honored.
- Helps to structure the learning process and to plan the learning program.
- Is a user-friendly learning environment to exchange knowledge, information topics and know how via the web.
– Can even serve as an e-meeting room where you can plan project and realize them step by step

4. BRIDGED A TOOL, AN INSTRUMENT

Visit www.bridged.org (login: guest / password: guest) and see what your colleagues did with BridgED.

After choosing a project out of a topic list and activating the project you see this Opening screen:

The active project is...

1. Maccess

International Networking and Intercultural Theories

This learning platform project concentrates on International Networking and Intercultural Theories. The subject belongs to an optional module of the course ‘Master in Comparative European Social Studies’. All students, attending this module, all guest teachers, the co-marker and the module convenor are members of this project. At the one hand the project gives you access to all digital material related to the subject. At the other hand the project challenges you to participate in discussing the project theme. For the web reader of the module go to Documents (on your left)

Start date 23/01/2001 End date 23/08/2001

Description of the tools

BridgED has a clear, consistent design, it has an uncluttered, logical organization with content, which is relevant to the goals. One of the key points of the environment is that it can be customized. It can be modified by the member in order to meet the own needs. It has five tools:

A. Mail

BridgED provides an electronic mail service. This Tool is used as main communication mechanism between the project members. This facility can be used to communicate with the teacher, or fellow students belonging to the group and who have access to the particular project.
Example of a mailbox

Your mailbox

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<tr>
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>01 Apr 2001 18:59:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>masa</td>
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13 messages - 0 unread

**Purpose**

The Mail is where you can send questions, messages, and comments to other members, using the BridgED environment. You can also examine and reply to a particular message in this center. When a member submits a posting to a group, all group members will be notified via e-mail of the particular project.

The difference between Mail and Forum is related to the content of the communication. Mail is mostly brief information. The Forum discussion collects statements, additional information, new contents and topics etc.
**General overview**

To enhance the communication between project members a mail system is implemented. This is an own internal mail system with the basic functions of regular e-mail. In a second window you may choose for sending the same message via the 'normal' e-mail. This is only possible if the members introduced their own e-mail address.

**B. Discussion Forum**

Discussion on project topics is collected in Forum.

**Purpose**

BridgED is a Web-based collaboration tool for students and teachers to encourage learning. The Forum enables students to have interactive discussions with other members of the group via the internet.

**General overview**

The Forum is a tool where people can post messages, share solutions, ask questions, debate ideas and read about topics of interest.

The collaborative Discussion forum enables members to take an active role in discussions and in integrating diverse media. In addition, the Forum provides support for reflecting on the collaboration. Each project can have its own discussion forum, where members can discuss what they are working on. All the classical features of a discussion forum will be implemented: selection/creation of discussion topics, replies on messages, etc. Also a full text search of the discussions will be possible. Users, which have sufficient permissions, can fully manage the discussion forums from within their browsers.

You may perform keyword searches to find relevant information.

**How to join the discussion?**

Overview of the discussion topics
Discussion thread of a pre-defined topic is an example of a forum that allows learners to open a topic for discussion, called a 'tread'. Other readers can post responses to the threads or start new threads.

The BridgED "Forum" looks like a typical newsgroup. Threads of discussion are reflected on the page. BridgED prompts students to identify the kind of notes they are contributing to the collaboration and suggest things to say in notes of those kinds. The goal is to encourage knowledge building, knowledge exchange and metacognition with students. An individual note is selected by clicking on any note link from the home page. A note indicates its author, title, and body.

**Example of the discussion topic list within the project: Leonardo gender Placement**

**Discussion Topics**

- **gender placement**
  How do you experience the first gender differences in your daily work? For the moment I am working for a man and everything goes well. How do you first days have gone? Did you all get used to another country? (2/12/01 4:18:27 PM)

- **How to involve your working partners into a gender discussion**
  ideas, suggestions, advice (2/14/01 9:21:42 AM)

- **How to prepare yourself for a gender placement abroad**
  Suggestions, advice for a good preparation (5/31/00 2:52:55 PM)

- **How to prepare yourself for the country where you will be staying**
  Suggestions, ideas for a good preparation on the country (5/31/00 2:54:08 PM)

- **How to prepare yourself for the social work overview of your chosen country**
  Suggestions, advice and ideas for a good preparation on social work (5/31/00 2:55:56 PM)

**C. References**

A Reference Collection is a group of related bibliographic or www-references. The References is like a course library. It contains the reference material for the course or project, which might include documents, links to web sites, graphics, video, and audio files, or other forms of multimedia that the project requires.

**General overview**

Reference Collections include hierarchical lists of references and links that enhance and support the different projects. This Tool serves as a repository for all the group's
activities. There are different types of activities possible in this center.

This is a database of information, which can be used while working on a project. References can be for example: books, urls, people … but also uploaded documents can be used as a reference. The more users add references the better the reference database will become.

Users can perform a keyword-based search through the entire reference database or they can navigate through the database by clicking on a hierarchal tree of hyperlinks, which represent categories of references.

Users, which have sufficient permissions, can fully manage the reference database from within their browsers.

References makes use of the possibility in the BridgED environment to look at sheets. If one clicks on a link with sheets the sheets automatically will be opened in the browser. So that means that it isn’t necessary any more to make handouts for everyone. Students can look them up themselves and can print them out.

You can perform keyword searches to find relevant information.
The references must be unambiguous, meaning that other people should be able to find a referenced publication without problems. In order to do so, several guidelines exist to write these references such that they satisfy the criteria of reproducibility.

D. Documents

The Documents tool is the work library of the project members. It contains the reference material for the project, which might include documents, links to websites, graphics, video, and audio files, or other forms of multimedia that the project requires.

This tool, designed for the members, serves as a repository for all group activities.

General overview

There are different types of activities possible in this center. Documents makes use of the possibility in the BridgED environment to look at sheets. If one clicks on a link with sheets the sheets automatically will be opened in the browser. So that means that it isn't necessary any more to make handouts for everyone.

Content box of the project Leonardo gender placement

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Students can look them up themselves and can print them out.

The Documents encourages students to explore a topic in multiple media and guides them through alternative and often conflicting perspectives on a subject.

Documents are initially composed by the teacher. The tool contains the material for the project, which might also include links to web sites, graphics, video, and sound files, or other forms of multimedia that the project requires. When the teacher approves the recourses, they can be copied to the references and are valuable recourses for other projects.

Documents Folders

Project folders of the project International network Development and Intercultural Theories

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If you click on Reader.htm, you have directly access to the module reader. This is a web reader, providing all tools, information, basic texts, arrangements, time table, overview of guest lecturers, …relevant for the module.

The two next pages will give you an idea about how the web reader has been constructed and how students can use for their learning.
Web Reader

Why a web reader?
A printed reader of the module is available. It will support the teaching and stimulate further reading and use of the network material in relation to students' dissertation subject. This web reader will focus on e-learning, build on learning power with a good learning tension and info flow. (see electronic networks and digital learning environments)

The amount of information available for most people is tremendously growing from day to day. The question is not to have the information, but to manage it and to use it for knowledge and learning.

Peter Senge:
"The real competitive advantage for organizations is their ability to learn faster than the competition, to generate and share knowledge (learning power) and to continuously improve (power to change). A learning organization is an organization that has the capacity to build her own future"

The present reader is aimed as a guide for walking through the different parts of the module. There is now compulsory walking tour. You are invited and challenged to experience the website in your own way and on your own rhythm.

By walking through the web-of-culture-landscape you can get the feeling to be lost, while clicking from one link to another. By doing this you enter in the tummy of the web and you will easily discover the core elements of the reader.

If you get lost, just use the bottoms on the left to find your way back:
### Week 1: 27/01/01 - 30/01/01 Networking

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<td>Mon 29/01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 12/02</td>
<td>Interviews and Intercultural Theories</td>
<td>Jan Agten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue 13/02</td>
<td>Psychological aspects of intercultural exchanges</td>
<td>Kinga Göncz / Jan Agten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 14/02</td>
<td>Intercultural Communication and Management of Diversity</td>
<td>Edwin Hoffman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu 15/02</td>
<td>Anthropological Approach of intercultural communication</td>
<td>Juliana Roth / Jan Agten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E. Events

"Events" is a tool for time-planning

Purpose

This tool gives the opportunity to all users in a project to manage their time for all important events in a most efficient way. It is like a schedule for an Internet-course and should help you to plan how all the necessary events (e.g. Net-meeting, Online-presentations, ...) can be visited while working in a project.

General overview

To get an optimal overview of all your private obligations within a project you have to fill in some data as an user or administrator. That means by writing of all the data of all events (e.g. date, time, content and so on) very carefully in your "Events" book you will receive a complete and detailed survey when and how you have to be present for realizing that project and to follow the demands made by the administrator.

An agenda can be kept with each project. That way every member can view all the events which will occur and which are important for the project. Users which have sufficient permissions can fully manage the agenda from within their browsers.

Details

1. Click on a special date within the calendar (at the top of the right site) for choosing the preferred day.

2. Select a time within this day by clicking into the timetable on the left site of the screen. A new screen marked by the title "Event modification" will be opened to enter or change the data of an event.

3. Write into the "Subject" field what is the content of that event. Into the field "Location" you should fill in, where you have to stay during the event. In the fields "Begin" and "End" you can enter the date and the time for the beginning / finishing of an event. By using the multiple-choice field "Label event" you can mark the status of your presence on a fixed term. The available statuses are "empty", "probably", "absent" and "fixed". In the most upper field you can write a full description of the "Subject" and how to do. After
entering all data you have to click on the "Insert" button to store the entry and to go back to the starting screen. When you do not want to store any data you can go back to the starting screen by using "Back".

4. All data with a stored event will have a light-red color in the background of the calendar. By clicking on such a date you will get the timetable for that day with the "Subject" description of the event(s). By clicking on an event-text the input-field as described in point 3 will be opened to read (than Back function) or to delete (Delete function) or to change (Update function) the data of that event.

5. In the field "Overview" you can see all your events, which are stored in a chronological order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Date</th>
<th>Event Subject</th>
<th>Added by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05/12/2000</td>
<td>bijeenkomen met casestudy werkgroepje</td>
<td>Jan Agten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/12/2000</td>
<td>Les Europa</td>
<td>Jan Agten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/12/2000</td>
<td>europades</td>
<td>Jan Agten</td>
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