

# The Twelfth Cambridge Conference on Open and Distance Learning

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# **Translation-based distance learning: knowledge acquisition without language barrier**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the possibility of using translation tools to help establish a global distance learning environment where a person living in China who doesn't know English, for example, can visit web pages offered by a distance learning programme delivered in English via translation, and vice versa. This does not mean just localisation of course materials or software interface, but everything included in the process of learning. If this kind of structure can be implemented, it would mean wider dissemination of knowledge without involving language imperialism. People who are interested to learn do not have to be impeded by language barriers and can absorb knowledge from all over the world (e.g. for a British medical student to learn something about traditional Chinese medicine without having to learn the difficult Chinese language). Because computerised translation of a free text between any two fundamentally different languages is still out of reach, it is worthwhile considering what can be done using the currently maturing technology of automatic translation tools and strategies to help achieve this pedagogical aim.

## **Translation and TESOL**

English has been the primary means for encoding and disseminating knowledge in recent human history. In order to acquire knowledge and gain academic qualifications, people have to learn to read and write English. An entire TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) profession was created and feeds on this trend. In more recent years, however, with the advent of cheap and speedy MT (machine translation), the question has been raised whether TESOL (or learning another foreign language) is the only or best way to achieve knowledge exchange and intercultural communication. Is it ultimately possible for people to record and gain knowledge by their native language and exchange knowledge with others via MT? Human translation is out of the question as it is too costly and time consuming to suit any large-scale educational purposes. But MT is a willing slave which can serve millions of learners in an instant and at very low cost compared to high-quality translations produced by humans. Indeed, Cribb (2000) captures this longing for change with the following words:

Given a choice...between a technology (MT) that allows quick and easy access to the written and spoken words of the world or a long-term course in EFL [English as a Foreign Language], many people will choose, and demand, the former (p. 566).

The issue of substituting TESOL with MT, however, is a problem of many layers apart from the obvious level of language: politics, economy, technology, administration, ideology and so on. Most UK universities, for example, disallow an essay or thesis written in student's native language (unless it's Welsh used in Wales and so on). Most

British educators would consider it inappropriate for a person not knowing English to somehow gain a British degree using translation as a tool in their studies. In fact, many UK admissions tutors are proposing to raise the level of English as an entry requirement for international students (e.g. from IELTS 6.0 to 6.5) and tightening up their essay writing regulations (e.g. paying native speakers to correct grammatical errors and generally improve quality of essays no longer allowed). Frankly, there is a giant shadow of language imperialism lurking behind such recent regulations demanding international students to present their English essays within the confines of their limited English rhetoric skills while disallowing their efforts to seek help in language modification to achieve better communication. The same is true of British institutions' disrespect for the writing conventions of other languages and quickly condemning different habits of writing as plagiarism or with other disgraceful terms. Such a kind of atmosphere is certainly not helpful to the thinking of using MT or any kind of translation to help learning and ease the load of learning English.

It is arguable that for some disciplines strongly associated with culture (and therefore language), translation is more difficult and thus a less suitable means for acquiring knowledge or qualification in such domains. Those that come into mind in this strand are: cultural studies, language and literature, law, media studies, and so on. There are branches of knowledge, however, especially of a scientific and engineering nature, which are less bound to culture, and can be relatively easier and more justifiable to deal with in translation.

There is still a long way to go for current MT technology to replace the TESOL profession in any practical sense; for one thing the quality of MT output is simply not up to an adequate standard yet. But that should not prevent discerning educators from envisaging future possibilities. A more difficult problem to circumvent is ideology: for most British educators, the English language (and therefore identity) seems absolutely essential in a physical educational setting on British soil for any foreign personnel contemplating earning a British qualification. How about translation on the distance learning platform? Are distance learning educators prepared to give out degrees and qualifications throughout the world via translation? Isn't this more conforming to the philosophy of lifelong learning and the principle of knowledge dissemination? If issues of ideology and politics could be put aside, then it is time we explore the technical side of the story.

### **Translation and transfer of knowledge**

The preservation of knowledge is especially important in a technical translation, which cannot be guaranteed in machine translation or low-quality human translation. We can distinguish four kinds of information transition in translation:

1. full preservation of information
2. alteration of information
3. loss of information
4. addition of information

Let us illustrate this concept with translations of a very simple text. We adopt a general rather than technical text for easy explanation. Thus for a source text written in Chinese

like (1) below, we can extract information from each sentence and compile a knowledge model like (2) that follows.

(1) Source Text

意外的擦撞，造成張信哲左手挫傷，  
yiwai de cazuang zaocheng zhang xinzhe zuoshou cuoshang  
accidental sideswipe cause Zhang Xinzhe left hand fracture  
所幸並不嚴重，座車也只有輕微受損，  
suixing bingbu yanzhong zuoche ye zhiyou qingwei shousun  
luckily not quite serious vehicle also only slightly damaged  
一行人才決定繼續趕路。  
yixingren cai jueding jixu ganlu  
group of people then decide continue hit the road

(2) Proposition Model – Source Text

1. CAUSE(accidental sideswipe, Zhang's left hand fracture)
2. LUCKY(NOT(SERIOUS(fracture)) AND NOT(SERIOUS(vehicle damage)))
3. DECIDE(convoy, keep moving)

Below I present one translation from a student and one from an online MT system.

(3) Target Text – Student (from an MA programme in translation)

The collision accident caused Xin-Zhe Zhang left hand contusion, but fortunately there was not serious and only minor damage to their car. They decided to continue their progress.

(4) Target Text – MT (Babel Fish Translation)

Accidental scratches hits, creates Zhang Hsinche the left hand to dampen, certainly is not fortunately serious, the passenger car also only has slightly suffers injury, line of talented people decided continues to hurry along.

We can see that the human translation of (3) preserves the three main pieces of information almost entirely. Whereas the machine translation presented in (4) offers a somewhat different information package, which can be roughly captured by the following scheme:

(5) Proposition Model – MT version

1. HIT(accidental scratches) AND CREATE(accidental scratches, DAMPEN(Zhang's left hand))
2. CERTAIN(NOT(FORTUNATE(serious))) AND SUFFER(passenger car, slight injury)
3. DECIDE(line of talented people, keep moving)

Comparing (5-1) with (2-1), we find MT largely preserves the original information albeit that the information is presented in a somewhat less understandable way. 'Dampen' is a distortion of information, however, presumably due to MT's misunderstanding the original word which means 'being fractured'. MT-presented information in (5-2) further shows a distortion of information from the original 'luckily not seriously hurt' to 'not luckily seriously hurt' and, on top of that, the MT added an attitudinal adverb: 'certainly' which is not present in the source text. Finally, MT also

distorted the simple meaning of ‘convoy’ to ‘a line of talented people’ as shown in (5-3).

We saw that for such a simple text as (1) MT made several mistakes in the transfer of knowledge. It is not difficult to imagine that more complex text will inevitably result in more serious information distortions, reductions and additions. To make the current state of MT workable on a distance learning platform, some extraordinary measures need to be taken, and this is where the idea of ‘MTranslatability’ comes in.

### **MTranslatability**

“MTranslatability” refers to translatability of texts by MT systems. Although the ability of MT is strictly limited, all is not lost. We can always enhance the quality of MT output by restricting the input possibilities. Obvious criteria are choosing simpler and unambiguous words and using straightforward syntax. More complex rules are developed by MTranslatability researchers for general or specific settings. Bernth and Gdaniec (2001), for examples, postulated 26 rules to make input more comprehensible to MT systems, including “Do not omit relative pronouns”, “Avoid long noun phrases”, “Avoid metaphors”, and so on, thereby gaining translations of better quality.

If we follow the MTranslatability concept and modify our source text in (1) somewhat, using simpler words and clearer syntax, as in (6) below, we get the new MT output in (7) that follows.

#### (6) Source Text – MTranslatability oriented

意外的 撞倒 使 張 信哲 左手 擦傷，  
yiwai de zhuangdao shi zhang xinzhe zuoshou cashang  
accidental hit cause Zhang Xinzhe left hand abrade  
幸好 受傷 不 嚴重，  
xinghao shoushang bu yanzhong  
luckily injury not serious  
車子 也 只有 輕微 受損，  
chezi ye zhiyou qingwei shousun  
vehicle also only slightly damaged  
大夥 才 決定 繼續 趕路。  
dahui cai jueding jixu ganlu  
guys then decide continue hit the road

#### (7) Target Text – MT (Babel Fish Translation based on 6)

Accidental hits causes Zhang Hsinche the left hand to abrade, luckily is injured not seriously, the vehicle also only has slightly suffers injury, everybody only then decided continues to hurry along.

As can be seen, the new MT output in (7) is much more improved than that in (4) in terms of faithful relay of information content. A major implication for the preparation of MT-oriented distance learning material is then the understanding of the concept of ‘controlled language’ and the ability to simplify the text used for teaching following the

MTranslatability criteria. Next we turn to the problem of MT-based distance learning system design.

### **Towards an MT-based distance learning platform**

The idea of making use of MT in distance learning is not new, but the literature has little to offer so far. Ho et al (2005) is a fuller example of making use of MT in helping distance learners absorb the content of teaching. Ho's system, however, deals with synchronous distance learning of a spoken-language nature, and it does not offer sentence translations of synchronous lectures but instead translates words and phrases only, as they consider the MT sentence output poorer in quality and thus unusable in their setting. Ho's students (in this case, Japanese students taking a pre-MBA programme remotely from a California university) must have certain degrees of English proficiency already in order to benefit from these partial translations which serve a supplementary rather than substitutive function.

This paper contemplates distance learning platforms which deliver the entire range of written material in the learner's native language via translation. The teaching material posted on the distance learning platform is written by the tutor in his native language which conforms to general MTranslatability rationales and is subsequently translated by MT into the learner's language. Asynchronous material complies with Gaskell & Tait's (2006) concept of situated approach and is arguably more useful than the more restrictive synchronous design.

The closest example to the above design concept that can be found on the Internet is the 'Language Translation interface' (Estival, 2005), which represents a series of research projects at Defence Science and Technology Organisation conducted for the Australian Government. The research group created a translation interface which consolidates several brands of MT systems and generates multiple automatic translations for the user (i.e. military personnel) to edit and to choose from in order to get the best possible translation for a given text. In other words, they did not develop a translation system, but an interface for accessing MT engines. It is a good idea to compare translations from different MT systems and get the best result out of them, but this is too time-consuming and clearly impractical for a distance learning system which consumes a lot of teaching materials. What we need is a dedicated MT system and a set of 'controlled language' rules as a function to the usability of this system.

I use Figure 1 as a concept demonstrator to show what a distance learning platform incorporating MT modules could look like in its most primitive form.

My Account		Course A	Course B	Course C
About Course			English	
About Staff			Chinese	
Course Documents			Chinese and English	
Assignments	The traditional Chinese medicine comes from China. This traditional medicine take the Chinese medicine theory and the experience as a main body, studies rule which in the humanity vital activity the health and the disease transforms.			
Communication				
Tools				

**Figure 1: MT-based distance learning platform**

Figure 1 shows the user interface of a typical distance learning platform in its very basic form. The top menu tabs and the left-hand side course function buttons are more or less standard. What's new in this interface is the right-hand column consisting of a series of automatic translation tools. Each of these buttons represents a series of commands interfacing with the background MT system specifying details of the translation service requested such as source language, target language, and so on. Choices include displaying the source language alone, the target language alone, or both. Although the system is designed to benefit learners entirely strange to the source language, it does not preclude learners who know the source language to some extent or would like to start learning it as the content course progresses. In that light, the translation tool bar in Figure 1 has room for other translation and language learning functions, such as retrieval of relevant text online through a customised web search engine, looking up of technical terms online, and so on and so forth, which can help enhance the understanding of the teaching material and/or help the learner acquire the second language while doing content learning.

## Conclusion

Translation and language learning need not be a matter of all or none, but rather of more or less. For learners with high language aptitude, it might be more beneficial to learn a second language and then acquire knowledge and degrees using it. But some people are born very poor language learners or don't have the time or opportunities to learn, which is when the MT-based distance learning tools could come in. Apart from raising the technical issue of adapting MT systems for use in distance learning platforms, this paper also wishes to call attention to the more general issue of how to balance between translation and language learning as a way of acquiring knowledge, and the ideological issues of language imperialism, in particular respect for non-mainstream languages and monolanguage speakers as capable intellectuals eligible to acquire knowledge and qualifications in their native languages.

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# **From dinosaur to dynamo: mentoring seasoned Faculty for online efficacy**

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## **Abstract**

In order for universities and seasoned faculty to provide and maintain effective pedagogy for the burgeoning virtual reality community of students, specialized professional development is needed for those educators using the new technologies. This is vital if faculty members are to successfully be able to teach online courses and make full use of their academic expertise. There is a need for institutions of higher education to establish mentoring programs that will train and support the novice online instructors. The environment in which this mentoring takes place and the components that ensure its success are critical to the successful adoption of the new instructional delivery format taught by seasoned educators. One-on-one mentoring promotes a professional, collegial and empathic faculty who will effectively provide a consistent and rigorous academic program for students online.

## **Introduction**

Today, the majority of institutions of higher education offer online courses. The rapid growth of technology globally requires universities to support the growth of this evolving learning society (MacCorkindale, 2002). Educators are frequently confronted with integrating new and unfamiliar technology into their pedagogical processes (Czubaj, 2004) and without necessary preparatory training, many faculty are encouraged to teach courses online (Talent-Runnels, Cooper, Lan, Thomas, and Busby, 2005). There is a great deal of pressure from college administrators for faculty members to embrace technology to increase the number of students served (Uttendorfer, 2002).

The pedagogy for online courses is dramatically altered from that of face-to-face teaching. Teachers must rethink how they teach. Faculty need assistance dealing with this transition (Schar, 2002). Training and supporting instructors in the proper use of web-based delivery mechanisms is of vital importance. Seasoned faculty attitudes toward utilizing this form of technology run from sheer terror to mild indifference and from passive acceptance to overt hostility. Older adults generally exhibit a greater anxiety toward computers than younger adults (Laguna and Babcock, 1997). Change usually represents more work, with no financial support or extra time provided for their efforts (Schar, 2002; Uttendorfer, 2002). This change toward teaching classes online is occurring too rapidly and lack of knowledge leads to faculty resistance.

The purpose of this study was to examine the concerns of seasoned faculty regarding teaching online courses, their perceptions of the existing staff development to further such technology usage, and models of mentoring to provide one-on-one support to help

the dinosaurs evolve into online dynamos. A search of the literature revealed a large number of studies related to online learning and teaching in general. A limited number of studies related to online teaching and mentoring in general. None of the studies found related to the one-on-one mentoring of seasoned higher education faculty by their trusted colleagues in teaching online courses.

## **Background**

To educators not familiar with online presentation, the effective utilization of this media represents a steep learning curve (Wiesenberg, 1999). Evidence indicates the predominant cause of reluctance on the part of educators is due to their insufficient training. This technological change can be hindered by personal anxieties as well as organizational issues. Educators need a model, or guide, to reinforce their acquisition of unique skills and to assist them in navigating the complex online format and to perform ongoing troubleshooting and support (Wiesenberg, 1999). The number one concern educators have expressed regarding incorporating new technology into their pedagogical processes is insufficient training (Czubaj, 2004). In an informal study, two searches on the Internet of educator concerns regarding the use of technology yielded fourteen million hits on each search, with the major emphasis being insufficient teacher training (Czubaj, 2004). The key to effective technological professional development is to make the utilization of this media a challenge, rather than a threat. Professional development involves a variety of components. Among other things, it includes the responsiveness to the specific needs of each individual, as well as the continuity of training to reinforce skills (Schar, 2002).

Staff development is necessary to support this anytime, anyplace flexible learning environment. Faculty must be able to adapt quickly to changes and innovations. The irony here is that universities have a traditional lack of interest in higher education faculty staff development (Saunders and Hamilton, 1999). Many faculty are simply told they will have to teach online, and have to self-educate with a manual or an online training program. The manual could leave out many of the aspects of the online course platform, and the training could be sketchy and ineffective. Even taking the online training program twice may not leave the instructor with a sense of competency. These practices are more the norm than the unique.

Professional development should be designed to prepare as well as support educators. It should include techniques for developing further expertise. Individual improvement will ultimately lead to organizational improvement (Schar, 2002). There is a crying need for help to make research-based decisions dealing with the andragogy of how to teach these courses. It is important that instructors and administrators be able to assess effective outcomes in course management (Talent-Runnels et al., 2005). There are many theories, but very little has been based on actual research.

## **Need for Effective Faculty Development for Online Teaching**

To prepare faculty to effectively meet the demands of teaching in the online environment, institutions of higher education must work to develop the expertise needed to teach in online platforms. Training faculty in the proper use of Web-based delivery mechanisms is extremely important (Spector, 2005). Administrators must be able to deal with the fears and concerns seasoned faculty have, the constraints of faculty time,

and the limits of university budgets (Mishra, Kochler, Hershey and Peruski, 2002). Attitudinal issues of how people perceive and react to technology are even more significant than the physical technological obstacles (Mishra, et al., 2002).

Wilson (2002) conducted a case study to determine faculty attitudes toward the utilization of technology and, specifically, online teaching. Data was derived from three sources. One was the mining of documents. Another was a faculty needs assessment survey, given to 1,500 faculty at nine Kentucky institutions of higher education. The third was through interviews conducted with more than 60 administrators and faculty. Results showed the institutions were under pressure to offer distance education programs. Responses indicated the faculty was unwilling, unprepared, unrewarded and unsupported by the university administration (Wilson, 2002).

The survey respondents indicated a positive attitude toward distance education. However, they were not happy with the idea of their personal involvement. For faculty training purposes, they indicated the most effective form of instruction was one-on-one (Wilson, 2002). In regard to computer skills, the faculty responded that they felt comfortable with using the computer for word processing, e-mail, and the Internet. They felt moderately comfortable with installing software, using a spreadsheet, and using PowerPoint. Faculty felt uncomfortable with all instructional methods associated with instructional technology or distance education (Wilson, 2002).

Chizmar and Williams (2001) conducted a survey to determine what faculty want from instructional technology. The survey yielded several recommendations for staff development. One is that institutions of higher education need to create venues for faculty to meet to share and trade techniques and experiences. Another recommendation is that in order to be effective in learning the technology to teaching online courses, faculty need support. Universities must decide what to emphasize, and provide incentives according to their priorities (Chizmar and Williams, 2001).

Cellante (2002) raised the question of how to encourage faculty to embrace technology and overcome their fears, prejudices, and uncertainties? The researcher cited a 2001 study by Kagima and Hausafus indicating faculty are not supported with in-depth staff development or follow-up activities to provide for integration of technology skills in their teaching. This is a major challenge instructors face in dealing with the use of technology to teach online courses in higher education. Educators are reluctant to replace familiar techniques, methods and strategies learned over several years that have worked successfully for them (Kagima and Hausafus, 2001). Their lack of competence in this area is a major barrier. Existing attitudes, skills and working habits affect their acceptance regarding the use of electronic communication strategies (Kagima and Hausafus, 2001). The study showed that although institutions of higher education are making efforts to provide training for faculty in the use of technology, the major barriers to success are lack of appropriate training, lack of support, and lack of tenure and promotion rewards (Kagima and Hausafus, 2001).

In an action-research, descriptive study conducted by the writers of this paper (2006), fifty seasoned adjuncts were surveyed to determine factors relating to their hesitancy of teaching online. Items on the survey dealt with the process of identifying the mentors and the mentees, the role of each group, and the context and the frequency of the mentoring. All of the faculty members surveyed indicated competency using the

computer for word processing, PowerPoint, e-mail, and Internet. However, the major concern they had was figuring out the “bells and whistles” of the online courses, and the lack of technical support. They wanted to be shown how to navigate the teaching platform and be able to ask questions and get instant responses as they worked. It was important to create a risk free learning environment.

### **Mentoring and Mentoring Programs**

Little research exists on the mentoring of older adult learners in the teaching of online courses and the necessary technical training. With the adult learner, Witte and Wolf (2003) determined it is best to use a facilitative approach in technology courses. The adult learner experiences different developmental stages than a young learner, with different attitudes and perceptions regarding change, curriculum, collaboration, and the learning process in general (Witte and Wolf, 2003). There is a lack of consensus on the exact definition of mentoring in higher education. Possible definitions are guide, sponsor, advocate, preceptor, advisor, or role model (Cotugna and Vickery, 1998). Witte (2003) defines mentoring as a collective practice that facilitates and guides the learner’s educational growth and development. A mentor assists a mentee, or mentoree (also called protégé), to become professionally competent. The concept also applies to faculty mentoring faculty as equals, or as a junior member working with a senior member. There is little research on the learning diversity of midlife and older adults in regard to their receptivity and the effectiveness of different teaching techniques (Morris and Ballard, 2003).

In an article in *NEA Today*, teacher Johnette Davis shared that serving as a technology mentor was like helping her friends. It was a supportive role, not like being an instructor. Since she did not have too much knowledge, people did not feel stupid or intimidated asking questions (Help Is Just Down the Hall, 1997). A teacher competent in the use of technology can be a good trainer for another teacher, creating a positive relationship and a sense of trust. The mentoring program was successful, because instructors had an openness to other educators with different levels of technological knowledge (Help, 1997).

A peer mentor program can be an effective means to help college faculty with technology in teaching. Chatel (2002) conducted a survey to determine faculty concerns regarding the use of technology and, from the findings, determined that faculty did not have time or success working with the tech support people on instructional issues. The training workshops for technology were slow and the information was general. Teachers wanted intense short sessions specific to their needs. Educators complained that tech support was not readily available, and the tech support providers often seemed annoyed at their questions (Chatel, 2002). As a result, a technology mentor position was created. This mentor was a faculty member with specialized knowledge and an awareness of the academic mission. The concept was received with the full support of the faculty and the college administration (Chatel, 2002).

Faculty, as an informal group, can provide peer support. They can share developments and challenges and issues with the use of technology and teaching online. In addition to sharing innovative efforts, they can offer quiet encouragement to each other (Chernish, 2002). In one university, a group called COWS (Campus Online Workshops) was created. They held three-day gatherings, and combined peer interaction with

technological expertise. Peers shared their experiences, successes, and impediments with each other. This was a collaborative approach, which made sense to the other faculty, and was applicable to their needs (Chernish, 2002). With peer learning, faculty share the responsibility for participating, which results in greater pleasure, mental stimulation, and overall satisfaction (Morris and Ballard, 2003).

A successful faculty development program should be designed to expand the confidence and the abilities of professors and encourage them to become motivated to use technology in their teaching. In a survey of faculty needs, results showed it was desirable for seasoned faculty to have several forms of technology support. Instructors needed help in online course management. They preferred small group sessions or one-on-one personalized instruction. Many requested informal sessions with two-way dialogue with a facilitator (Cavanaugh, 2002). The ideal program was to have small groups, with a relaxed and interactive atmosphere, led by a colleague. These adult learners preferred to acquire new skills among their colleagues (Cavanaugh, 2002; Knowles, 1970). They wanted hands-on seminars led by faculty members who had success in using technology and were willing to share their experiences.

Bump and McGhie (2002) conducted a study for one semester with two faculty members and two PT3 (technology grant) team members teaching technology. The outcome of the study indicated that it is necessary to have different strategies for different instructor proficiency and enthusiasm levels (Bump and McGhie, 2002). A technology person guided each professor through the process, and the comfort and understanding level of each learner was high. The outcome was the transformation of the educators (Bump and McGhie, 2002). Learning can occur as continuous change or as incremental levels of growth. It is most likely to occur in individuals willing to explore different learning possibilities (Witte and Wolf, 2003).

Savage, Karp and Logue (2004) stressed the need for collegiality in mentoring programs, and referred to the study by Naisbitt and Aburdene in 1990 indicating that human response is vital to counterbalance the introduction of technology into society. A human lens is needed to evaluate technology and enable people to embrace technology in a manner that preserves humanity.

Faculty mentoring programs are important for staff development, retention of faculty, achievement of academic goals, and the achievement of institutional goals. Both protégés and mentors benefit from the mentoring relationship (Zeind, Zdanowicz, MacDonald and Parkhurst, 2005). Certain mentor attributes are necessary if the programs are going to work. Mentors must be concerned with the learning styles and needs of the mentees (Witte, 2003). They must possess wisdom, commitment, caring, humor, integrity, and have high expectations. The mentor must be generous in sharing time with the mentee, be willing to learn, have the ability to trust, and have the good judgment to offer appropriate encouragement and praise (Zeind et al., 2005). There are certain skills and dispositions needed to effectively use technology (Duffield and Moore, 2006). An effective mentor must permit the learner to set the pace, and provide support and a technology lifeline (Witte and Wolf, 2003). It is important for a mentor to have the ability to detect qualitative changes in the mentee rather than immediate competency.

The benefits for a mentor are a renewed approach to academic work, enhanced self-esteem, and an increase in job satisfaction. The benefits for a mentee are an increased likelihood of success and a smoother transition into the use of technology. Disadvantages for the mentor are time constraints and the possibility of not being taken seriously, which can lead to frustration. A disadvantage for the mentee is that the mentor might not want to let go and give the protégé independence after the training period (Zeind et al., 2005).

### **Need for One-on-One Mentoring**

Western Kentucky University, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, received an Innovation Challenge Grant referred to as the e-train express (Metze, Petty, Wininger and Mosby, 2002). This was a commitment to advocate the use of instructional technology to enable faculty to help their peers. Most educators do not learn technology use from taking courses, or attending seminars or workshops which are the substance of traditional professional development programs. Therefore, the implementation of this grant was a team effort, in order for the training to be effective for technological learning. Coaches and facilitators worked to guide understanding and were active participants in the learning process. Trainees first synthesized the information, then applied the new technology skills immediately, then integrated these new skills into their pedagogy (Metze et al., 2002).

Mentoring involves meeting with peers to share experiences, seek solutions, reteach specific skills and improve usage (Hinson, Laprairie and Cundiff, 2005). In order to facilitate twenty-first century learners, it is necessary to have effective technological integration, which includes mentoring faculty. Tailor-made training enables the mentor and mentee to determine the correct next step, and individually direct the learning process (Leh, 2005).

### **Recent and Future Developments**

Clearly, one-on-one mentoring is the technological training of choice among seasoned faculty at institutions of higher education. Training and supporting instructors in the proper use of Web-based delivery mechanisms is of vital importance for faculty to be able to effectively teach online courses and make full use of their academic expertise. In addition to the available research, anecdotes from practitioners support this concept. Madelon Alpert, professor at National University in Costa Mesa, California, says, “I vowed I would never, never teach an online course. It was just not for me. I was terrified at the thought of it! Then my Department Chair informed me that in order to meet my teaching load, I would have to teach online. Panic! The month I was scheduled to teach my first online class, two colleagues and I had planned to attend a conference. I took my computer with me. Miraculously, I taught the class online! One of my colleagues roomed with me, and when I had questions about how to manipulate the online format, she was right there to help me and explain what I needed to do. We both learned from the experience! This dinosaur became an online dynamo!

A technique Marilyn Koeller, professor at National University in Costa Mesa, California uses to mentor faculty teaching online is to have them enrolled in an existing online class as a teaching assistant. That way, they can be a “cyberfly on a wall” and observe what the instructor is doing to facilitate the class. This provides a pathway into

teaching online, rather than “jumping in the deep end” and navigating the format without any insights. When Marilyn was planning to teach her first class, this is what she did, in addition to telephonically speaking with the instructor, a trusted colleague from another campus. When she began teaching online, Marilyn called her colleague with questions and got immediate responses.

Daniel Cunniff, professor at National University in Fresno, California, uses the iLinc platform to mentor faculty teaching online classes. “First, I train them on the job (OJT) on how to use the online system. Even though they may have had an orientation, it’s the “hands on” that sets their understanding. In mentoring new faculty online, I have them sign on with me as a teaching assistant. They can then enter the threaded discussions and get the “feel” for the class. This is just like them sitting in on an onsite class.”

Roxann Humbert, Professor and Director of Learning Technologies at Fairmont State College in Fairmont, West Virginia, quotes a professor of 30 years in teacher education who is now teaching online, who tells everyone he is proof, “You can teach an old dog new tricks!” Fairmont State has a faculty mentoring program where faculty are paid a three-hour course overload per semester to help other faculty one-on-one in their departments or schools with online learning. Mentors go through a six-week online class and a Boot Camp on the course management system plus have follow-up professional development.

When teaching online courses, Sam Marandos, professor at National University in Stockton, California invites several adjuncts to come and observe him working online with his class. “I have encouraged a number of adjuncts to brave the new world of technology and they have jumped aboard with the understanding that I will be available to them while they teach their classes. This has proven invaluable to them because several of them keep coming back for support and ideas. One of them became so enthused about teaching online that every time he sees me he hugs and thanks me over and over again for guiding him in that direction.”

## **Conclusion**

The key word is continuation: to provide faculty with the opportunity for lifelong learning through developing new skills and interests (Saunders and Hamilton, 1999). The dynamic nature of communication is that as conversation continues, understanding develops and widens. This is the helix of communication, with no start or end point. The helical approach to staff development emphasizes long-termism, creativity, and strategic dissemination (Saunders and Hamilton, 1999). Professional development for educators is only successful if educators themselves drive the content (Goodale, Carbonaro and Snart, 2002). Faculty want people who have had experience teaching online courses to share their best practices. Those competent in the technology processes can mentor others. Educators would like to be able to ask a colleague to drop by for quick verbal assistance with teaching an online course. Informal chats are social opportunities where people pick up tips and tricks. Instructors do not want to read to learn how to teach online, they want a personal visit and a demonstration. They want a private tutor, face-to-face, one-on-one.

Creating one-on-one mentoring programs for seasoned faculty provides an innovative model for the successful transition to teaching online courses. The mentor can address technical skills as well as university policy concerns and create an “how to” dialogue with a trusted colleague. Effective one-on-one mentoring promotes a professional, compassionate and collegial faculty who will provide a consistent and rigorous academic program for students online.

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## **From box of coloured chalk to PowerPoint and beyond**

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### **Abstract**

This paper will attempt to look at the future of new technologies in learning by examining lessons from the introduction of technology into education in the past. It is largely narrative and autobiographical and attempts to justify those approaches as legitimate in the burgeoning field of distance education. Through stories the paper will seek to demonstrate that advances in educational technologies seldom make the advances in learning that their protagonists claim and that distance educators in particular should case a sceptical eye on technological advances such as e-learning.

### **Introduction**

This conference paper is a little different from the normal run of such things, being largely in the form of narration and autobiography. As its author I would argue that literature on distance education has largely ignored these forms, much to its detriment. Both should play a role in a field that now possesses such a large number of distinguished practitioners and such an extensive history both in time and space. Whilst allowances need to be made for the subjective nature of both narrative and autobiography, both can illustrate and generate discussion in a way that other literatures seldom do.

Narrative – essentially the telling of stories – has been resisted as a form of research for many years. Yet as the distinguished psychologist Jerome Bruner insists that story telling is a vital learning tool. “Why” he asks, “are we so intellectually dismissive towards narrative? Why are we inclined to treat it as a rather trashy, if entertaining, way of thinking about and talking about what we do with our minds? Storytelling performs the dual cultural functions of making the strange familiar and ourselves private and distinctive” (Guardian, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007). His comments have clearly struck a chord with a number of academics and, for example, there is now a regular conference (next at the University of Toronto in 2008) called 'Narrative Matters' which seeks to illuminate William James' two modes of thinking – the paradigmatic versus the narrative modes. The conference organisers claim that the 'Narrative Turn' now influences the humanities and social and health sciences (<http://narrativematters.com>).

Autobiography – the personal histories of people working in a field – has been equally resisted. Yet again there is increasing belief that it should play a role in evaluation. Roth (2002) argues that autobiography is a legitimate sociological method and I would suggest that the autobiographical study of distance education has a similar legitimacy particularly when the subject of the research is within the autobiographer's own institution. As Hannabus (2000) notes ‘The reflexive elements of autobiography can make for more self-aware research, above all when the researchers are researching organisations situations and groups of which they themselves are a part’.

This paper then is both autobiographical and narrative and should be read with that in mind.

## **The Story**

“Those people have stolen the chalk again!” Mr Zewu’s normal geniality had deserted him and he was furious. Mr Zewu was clerk to the Physics department in the University where I worked in Africa in the sixties. His most valued possession in that role was a box of coloured chalk which was allocated stick by stick to the lecturers. Apparently (according to Mr Zewu) in a daring dawn raid the Faculty of Engineering next door had liberated the box and left us just the standard white issue.

I was reminded of that early illustration of the need for teaching aids at a conference recently in Germany. I’d given my PowerPoint demonstration and wanted to illustrate another concept. There in the corner was a blackboard and – yes! – a box of coloured chalk (whatever happened to ‘Vorsprung durch Technik, I wondered?). Suddenly I was 22 again with the feel of chalk on my fingers, the familiar squeal of tip on board and those tiny cascades of dust rippling down the surface after each stroke. Even my audience seemed somehow rejuvenated and had perked up at the unfamiliar sight of presenter and medium interacting in that old and most intimate way.

Of course not all my memories of chalk and talk were positive. How could I forget my old lecturer in mathematical analysis who had worked out that when writing right-handed on the blackboard he ended up standing in front of what he had just written. So applying the logic for which he was famous he wrote left-handed. Which unfortunately was quite illegible.

But my German experience set me thinking about how changes in presentational educational technology from chalk to PowerPoint had changed the way I taught since my first heady days of responsibility in the learning process as board monitor at school. I recall with pleasure the satisfying thwack of ruler on cloth and the little explosions of dust as I cleaned the board rubber (no wonder there’s so much vandalism around with modern children deprived of such outlets for their energies).

Or had the new technology really made a difference? There were certainly inventions that hadn’t made any difference at all. My first contact with technology was in the early sixties with teaching machines. Most of my readers will be too young to remember these; they were huge clunky electromechanical boxes where you pressed an answer button on a simple keyboard which generated much grinding of gears and clicking of solenoids. After some delay you would be told whether your answer was right or wrong and given the next question. These machines were going to revolutionise teaching apparently and appeared just before I left for Africa. When I returned two years later I asked ‘Where are the Teaching Machines?’ ‘What Teaching Machines?’ they said.

The first technical innovation that challenged my teaching technique was the whiteboard. At last - a day in the classroom that didn’t leave me covered in a thin film of chalk dust inside and out. On the other hand there were technical snags. At around that time I became responsible for several OU tutorial centres used by a variety of part-time tutors on Saturdays. Every Monday was enlivened by a string of irate phone calls from various college principals – ‘One of your tutors has used a permanent marker on

our whiteboards! Do you know how much it costs to clean them off?’ Now of course we have the electronic whiteboard which can download onto a pc, make copies and be transmitted all over the place. But as an administrator I was talking to just said “We bought this thing because the lecturers said they wanted it. But none of them use it because they don’t know how and can’t be bothered to learn”.

So apart from cleaner teachers and tougher Monday mornings it couldn’t be said that the whiteboard contributed a great deal to the development of presentational technology in my life. However there was an invention which did change much about how we taught – the overhead projector. I don’t know what genius thought up this happy marriage of light source and Fresnel lens – a combination hitherto known only to lighthouse keepers. But at last here was a presentational technology that, in a literal revolution, allowed the teacher to face the audience all the time instead of constantly turning to write on the board. And by using a continuous acetate roll there was no need for breaks to clean off the board (although in retrospect I wonder if those breaks weren’t a useful part of the students’ learning processes – the unremitting pace permitted by the overhead projector allows little time for reflection on the concepts presented).

The other innovation allowed by the overhead projector was the use of the pre-prepared slide. That wasn’t entirely new of course; conventional 35mm slide projectors had been in the classroom for years. I remember one colleague lecturing in Agronomy whose slide cassettes of blameless botanical specimens were regularly infiltrated with slides of a more directly human biological nature by his students. He’d long ago given up worrying about this – whenever such slides appeared he would merely shake his head at the annual and awful predictability of young men and pass on. But preparing 35mm slides could be a time consuming process whereas the overhead projector made the production of transparencies quick and easy. That was not always a good thing of course; I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve seen a presentation where the teacher had simply copied a typed handout onto a transparency in a layout and font size that made it as illegible as anything my lecturer in analysis ever achieved.

However illegibility isn’t the only problem of the overhead projector. The combination of low ambient illumination, a single bright light in vision and the steady hum of white noise from the fan is as near perfect conditions for hypnosis as you can get. As one of my students noted on a feedback sheet ‘When the projector goes on, I go off...’

And although the overhead projector is an admirably simple and robust device things can still go wrong. There was a teaching session I observed where the Fresnel lens began to overheat and warp slowly from one corner gradually restricting the teacher to a smaller and smaller part of the screen until finally his luck ran out altogether and he had to resort to a flipchart.

Ah yes – the flipchart had been around for quite a while at that point. Of perhaps fairly limited use for teaching the flipchart had found a role in group discussions for reporting back on the activities of small groups to a plenary. Being able to plaster a room with flipcharts covered in writing and drawings always produced a satisfying sense of achievement at the end of a hard discussion session. But extensive perusal of the results of many sessions finally led me to promulgate Simpson’s First Law of Teaching Aids: ‘If it can be said on a flipchart, then it wasn’t worth saying’. The Second Law says the same thing for Post-It Notes.

Of course teaching aids didn't just have to be visual aids. One of the great things about teaching science and technology is that you can seize your teaching aids from wherever you can find them. One of my favourites was when I was teaching engineers about vibration. Having developed an equation connecting the mass of a vibrating object with its spring constant and natural rate of vibration I'd take the class to the college car park, bounce my car up and down to get the rate of vibration and then pile students into it to measure how far it went down on its springs to get the spring constant. I'd then use the formula to calculate the mass of the car to a surprising degree of accuracy. This particular aid had to be suspended when one year I unwisely turned my back whilst the students were getting into the car. On asking them to get out some eighteen substantial young men climbed sheepishly out of what was now a distinctly sagging Ford Escort.

And then came PowerPoint... If education was a business then the idea of replacing the simple, robust and cheap overhead projector with a sophisticated system that essentially did the same thing for at least ten times the cost, probably would never have occurred to anyone. Certainly after some presentations I've seen I wish nostalgically for an 'intermediate technology' approach. The number of sessions I've been at where the technology has sabotaged the presentation is becoming uncountable. The presenter who can't find his slide show... the presenter who has inadvertently added sound effects (that was me actually)... the presenter who has got lost and can't work out where her next slide has got to... the presenter who has let the effects get the better of him so that his audience are mesmerised by the text effects and wondering exactly how it's going to somersault into the next slide... the presenter at an international conference who is complete foxed by the drop down menus appearing in Norwegian... the presenter whose projector was plugged into the wrong slot (me, again – yesterday) and so it goes on and on – we all have our horror stories. And it doesn't get any simpler. As fast as I learn how to use one version of PowerPoint it becomes more complex with more facilities – audio, video and fancier effects. I'm reminded of the man who was waiting for computers to get as easy to use as his phone. He now no longer understands how to use his phone.

Of course the PowerPoint revolution has not succeeded in every aspect of our world. According to a report in the 'Guardian' (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2004 p19) Vice Chancellors of UK Universities gathering at the House of Commons recently had brought along their 'all-singing, all dancing' PowerPoint presentations to explain the issue facing universities. Unfortunately the Palace of Westminster doesn't provide that sort of facility.

So I'm left wondering how far these increasingly complex presentation systems are helping students to learn. Maybe today's students do need higher levels of sophistication in their presentations given their exposure to today's sophisticated media - although if the media has become more complex the messages seem depressingly and familiarly simple.

But of course the point about PowerPoint is that it can be transmitted electronically. Again I wonder how helpful that is. I'm never very optimistic when someone offers to send me a presentation that I've missed because I know that I'm unlikely to understand it. That's mostly because of the curse of the bullet point. The PowerPoint formats

encourage bullet point thinking – every presentation is now a series of short single phrases that need interpretation and expansion before they begin to be comprehensible.

And so we come to e-learning. I'm not sure if e-learning really counts as a teaching aid but I guess if it helps students learn then it must be. But we've a long way to go before we've cracked it. The evidence so far is that it's not particularly attractive to students (although there's clearly a niche market for students in particular circumstances), that dropout rates are higher than for conventional distance education and that it's not necessarily cheaper for students or institutions than more conventional courses (as LearnDirect have found out). The collapse of the UKeU and its £20m platform is a gift to semi-luddites like myself who are worried about whether some of the effort going into e-learning is misplaced. But I've no doubt that e-learning in various forms – perhaps as part of a learning experience rather than the whole – will be the most important teaching aid of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Or at least in the developed world – I note that after any kind of natural disaster in the developing world one of the first things that happens is that UNESCO flies in emergency education kits each consisting of a large tent, a blackboard and, yes, a box of coloured chalk.

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## **Pedagogical design of dialogic eLearning-to-Learn – a meta-perspective**

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### **Abstract**

The perspective of globalization and global citizenship has entered the educational arena. Important vehicles for tackling the intercultural challenges and digital divides involved are educational programmes, enabled by information and communication technologies and unfolding in a cluster of VLEs (Virtual Learning Environment) and VMEs (Virtual Meeting Environments). The purpose of this paper is to theoretically explore and describe eLearning designs and the adequacy of a range of non-authoritarian ePedagogies for fostering sustainable global, democratic citizenship within higher and continuing education. The discussion draws on the design, pedagogical methodologies and practices of MIL (Ms in ICT & Learning), a Danish master programme offered internationally by five collaborating Danish universities. The paper suggests an eDesign concept and blended learning architecture, in which student dialogue is not only a central factor in some parts of the instructional design but a student-generated key resource in the learning trajectories of the students.

### **Introduction**

The general empowering interactive/dialogic potential of networked communication technology for educational purposes is widely recognized (Conner, 2004; Miyake & Koschmann, 2002). Less so is the need and obligation of a conscious ethical approach when utilizing this potential (Gibson, 2006; Sorensen, 2004). With the prospects of a future prospering global society, there is an increasing need for designers of e-learning to face the ethical aspects of education, such as the need for e-learning designs to match the needs of a wider global society. In this respect, issues of concern are the challenge of how to design for sustainability and good life (human and societal growth, democracy, interculturalism/multiculturalism) (Brown & Davis, 2004). In other words, how to educate and further democratically oriented citizens in a world where terrorism, wars, cultural conflicts, and political and religious disagreements are becoming standard items on the news agenda of the media. Global e-learning politics is often created and dealt with at the general level in politics, just to be handed over to the actors of education – instructional designers, teachers, and learners. These agents then become responsible for defining the “conceptual space”, which is left for the “how” ICT gets implemented and more specifically utilized in educational processes (Sorensen, 2004b; Takle & Sorensen, 2002).

In particular, the empowering effect for learners of e-learning networks appear sensitive to pedagogical design decisions in ways that indirectly promote or hamper the



advancement of non-authoritarian democratic processes and students' activity (Sorensen, 2004b), as these designs are susceptible to underlying theoretical philosophies and pedagogical methodologies in terms of teaching and facilitation. E-learning networks may – as a result of their underlying theoretical philosophy and pedagogical methodology – indirectly promote the advancement of learner empowerment and skills of learning-to-learn (L2L).

### **Learning-to-learn**

Learning-to-learn (L2L) is a broad phenomenon with a plentitude of definitions covering a variety of concepts. Most of these definitions and concepts represent meaningful understandings of what is meant by L2L, but they differ with respect to their identified focus of the concept, and consequently put an emphasis on different aspects of the phenomenon. The perspective put forward in this paper is one which stresses the meta-learning (ML) perspective of L2L as the most significant feature of the L2L phenomenon.

ML covers *learning of meta-knowledge about learned knowledge*, i.e. learning about how one learns; learning about one's own learning, thinking and acting, and learning how to learn is an important part of meta-learning.

### **eLearning-to-Learn (e-L2L)**

#### *Online Meta-Dialogue in focus*

Recent studies along this line of thinking have described the online universe as a meta-communicative world, and considerable research has been directed towards the role and meta-communicative behaviour of the instructor (e.g. as early as Feenberg, 1989). Contrary to the physical world in which involvement is viewed to be primary to reflection (Heidegger, 1986) - the virtual universe provides a context and an "ontology" in which reflection may be said to be primary to involvement (Sorensen, 2004a). Assuming such alternative dialogical paradigm (Wegerif, 2006), and the primary position of reflection through meta-communication, it is very conceivable, from the perspective of collaborative interaction and dialogue in networked e-learning, that also the tasks of both pedagogic design and facilitation of e-learning that aim at incorporating both interaction and (self)reflection, must move at a meta-level in terms of creating awareness of e-L2L.

Dialogic e-learning (e-L2L) may be viewed as evolving in the intersection between three basic dimensions:

#### *1) Consciousness:*

*Awareness* of own learning processes (personal e-learning methods - "teachable", and sensitive to the teaching methodology of formal e-learning situations).

Ability to learn how to learn (L2L): evaluate and modify your own path for most effective learning, yourself, your capacity to learn, successful path used in the path - and your interest in, knowledge of and motivation for the subject you wish to learn.

## 2) *Meaningfulness:*

Online meta-learning (OML) is co-existentially meaningful to you and your peers as its process evolves through – and reflects on – collaborative dialogue and knowledge building, built on a shared *Ethos*.

OML is *personal* in the sense that you become an independent process owner of your own learning processes – in a perspective which is “true” for you (Colaizzi, 1978). ML is an essential part of your life.

You are aware that you construct your own theories/hypotheses and test them continually in your own life, both in empirical experiments (practice) and in theoretical “experiments” (thinking and thought).

Meaningful learning means that whatever you learn is relevant to you, as it is connected to your prior knowledge on the issue

## 3) *Sustainability (in the light of future global elearning contexts):*

OML creates *awareness* of learning processes (Bateson, 1976).

OML promotes the promotion of a global, *co-existential Ethos* (Sorensen & Ó Murchú, 2006).

OML supports *personalization* of learning, as it creates process independence and ownership (Gibson, 2006; Sorensen & Ó Murchú, 2006).

## **The Power of eL2L in a Global Dialogic Context**

The notion of dialogic collaborative knowledge building (D-CKB) online with its emphasis on meta-learning and learning-to-learning represents one such choice of “meta-pedagogy”. Wegerif (2006b) captures the qualities of this choice in the following wording:

This dialogic interpretative framework implies the need for a pedagogy of teaching dialogic, that is the ability to sustain more than one perspective simultaneously, as an end in itself and as the primary thinking skill upon which all other thinking skills are derivative. This pedagogy can be described in terms of moving learners into the space of dialogue. Tools, including language and computer environments, can be used for opening up and maintaining dialogic spaces and for deepening and broadening dialogic spaces.  
(Wegerif, 2006b, np.)

For global citizenship to be cultivated, dialogue is vital. The power of dialogue in a learning process is widely recognized as a general facilitation in processes of learning, regardless of content and topic (Sorensen & Ó Murchú, 2004 & 2005). Less in focus is the potential of meta-learning (Bateson, 1976), the learning that is acquired from the methodological level, i.e. “the way things are learned” – in other words, the methodological aspects and learning effects from the methods used to teach/learn a content. Thus, while the making (“Bildung”) of democratically oriented global citizens

takes its point of departure already in the implementation of educational methodology, it plays a significant role in the education and self-understanding of the global citizen, as it promotes: 1) meta-learning and learning-to-learn, 2) learning to think (including creativity and imagination), and 3) learning to dialogue.

Reminding ourselves that we *cannot* design learning (Wenger, 1998) - but only *for* learning - leaves us as educational designers with the option of taking qualitative meta-pedagogical initiatives, which cultivate growth through a quality of learning-to-learn, and for practising learning methods and prepares for learning to take place in ways which support learner-centeredness:

- applying non-authoritarian methodology (again, reminding ourselves that the method we are exposed to and by which we learn, is the most important part of what is learned)
- highlighting the initiative of the individual learner and creates ownership
- supporting learners in their own learning and their constructing new knowledge to be integrated in what they already know
- making visible and actually operationalizing what the learner brings to the shared learning process
- allowing for a practising of student-centered collaborative dialogue

In a meta-learning perspective, learning together globally in an online learning architecture, while at the same time being submitted a pedagogical methodology and practice, based fundamentally on collaborative dialogue and the sharing of values - cultivates democratic skills, attitudes and intercultural perspectives on citizenship in the learner for the benefit of global prosperity. Through learning designs that methodologically are conducive to illustrating and promoting (through both example and content) democratic principles and values, we (the nations on our globe) are more likely to be equipped with the means to interact with each other, collaboratively, constructively and diplomatically.

There is always an Ethos or a presupposed set of values – whether explicit or conscious - behind any online learning design. The latent values should become visible and explicit, as they influence the design decisions we as pedagogical designers make, and the pedagogical/instructional methodology we choose for teaching the core curriculum. For example, awareness and potential utilization of meta-learning for promoting processes of learning-to-learn are methodological decisions, “submitted” the set of latent values.

### **Application of e-L2L: MIL**

The suggested meta-learning perspective has been utilized for six years in the context of an online masters programme, “MS in ICT and Learning (MIL)”, in Denmark. MIL is a cross-institutional, educational initiative between five Danish universities, (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al.; 2004; Fibiger et al., 2004; Sorensen, 2003; Sorensen et al., 2006), and it provides continuing education for working adults engaged in educational planning and integration of ICT in learning processes at schools and all types of educational institutions as well as employees with educational responsibilities in different types of organizations. The presented e-L2L concept has –rather successfully - been utilized in the design of some of the individual courses in the various modules.

A typical *MIL course format* is a course lasting 5 weeks. It is divided into a period of reading and preparation (two weeks) and a succeeding period of debate (3 weeks). According to the assignment given, the participants, in the two-week preparation period, have to prepare individually for the succeeding plenum discussion. The literature/resources may be distributed according to themes within the course subject. The themes corresponded to the names of the three discussion fora in the succeeding period of discussion. The participants may be asked to distribute a set of roles among members of their small online group (on average consisting of 4 participants). The roles are supposed to form, support and guide their later moderation of discussion and to give participants a concrete point of departure in the discussion. In the debate period, some are presenters, some moderators, etc. The description of the roles is clarified in the assignment. Both teacher and students agree on committing themselves to attending the virtual learning space for a minimum of five times a week over the three weeks of debate. In the debate period each of the groups are asked to present, in the plenum forum belonging to their theme, a commonly agreed problem that is related to the literature/resources. They are asked to initiate, conduct and wrap up the succeeding online plenum discussion that evolves from the problem formulation of their group. In parallel with the discussions, participants and teacher are engaged in meta-reflections and meta-communication in meta-fora, to reflect on and discuss the experiences and processes of participation, as well as the principles of dialoging. The participants are graded, on both quantitative and qualitative criteria, on their contributions (Stahl, 1999; Sorensen & Takle, 2002; Sorensen et al., 2002).

## **Conclusion and Future Research**

In this paper I have made a theoretical plea for the notion of e-L2L in a global context of education. From the perspective of meta-learning as a way of promoting ethical education supporting the development of responsible democratic global citizens, I have discussed the qualities and benefits of the principle of e-L2L. The positive experiences in terms of the effect of utilizing e-L2L in a collaborative “space of dialogue” in the Ms in ICT and Learning (MIL) are significant. But more studies are needed to support my theoretical position.

More research designs are needed, studying the use of e-L2L. How can we design studies that challenge the assumption that L2L, practiced in a global context, leaves significant “imprints” (meta-learning) on learners in terms of their self-perceptions and radius of action in their process of becoming global democratic citizens working towards: global sustainable development, fruitful human and societal growth, and supporting an Ethos of global democratic (co-)existence while still allowing for cultural diversity.

Each place and time, each case of our learning projects contains both some general features and highly specific features, which sometimes hinder general regularities and sometimes foster them. Selection of general regularities to be learned might be done by basis of their importance for promoting sustainable development, good environment and good life. Learning is not only repetition of earlier learning; it is creative, innovative, proactive, future constructive learning. New ways of thinking and acting are created and learned (e.g. Michael, 1973; Argyris, Putnam and Smith, 1985; Engeström, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Mezirow, 1996; Taylor, 1997). Moreover, learning, teaching

and research becomes powerless, alienated, dull and meaningless without passions and emotions.

In an e-L2L approach both general regularities, generalizations and relevant details of contexts and situations are learned. In education for sustainability, good environment and good life, it is necessary to have experiences of what can be justified as worthwhile. Learning from these experiences requires meta-reflection on experiences.

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# **Laptops, literacy and language learning: a framework for assessing the challenges faced by one-to-one laptop programs in Japan**

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## **Abstract**

This paper takes Warschauer's recent study of one-to-one laptop programs, *Laptops and Literacy* (2006), as its starting point for an analysis of a laptop program in a Japanese university. Through an evaluation of Warschauer's recent research, focusing on a comparative study of 10 schools in California and Maine in the USA, the paper outlines a framework with which to assess the challenges facing foreign language educators' use of one-to-one laptop programs in second language learning. Warschauer's discussion of laptops in relation to a new concept of electronic literacy is seen to be particularly valuable in that previous studies have sought to measure the effectiveness of laptops only in terms of improved test scores. Warschauer's approach and discussion provides a much-needed point of reference in an area of research that is lacking substantive studies, though not lacking in investment from governments and educational technology agencies. Warschauer's framework is here used to contextualize an ongoing research study of a one-to-one program at a Japanese university involving English major students on an undergraduate degree program.

## **Introduction**

Most problems associated with the integration of computers and educational technology in learning environments have been related to the issue of 'limited student access' (Warschauer, 2006, 144). Over the last five to ten years the introduction of one-to-one laptop programs has had the attempt to overcome the problem of student access at or near the centre of its main objectives. Though laptop programs have seen increased growth and status since 2000, there has been a dearth of substantive research studies, with only two large scale projects (Walker, Rockman and Chessler, 2000; Silvernail and Lane, 2004), and approximately 30 smaller research studies, published in the period 2001-2005 in the USA (Warschauer, 2006, 32), where the majority of programs have been developed. The extant studies suggest a number of parallel findings, focused on the increased use of technology in the learning process, higher levels of student and teacher interaction and engagement, as well as advantages for students using autonomous learning environments. Based on the findings of the reports, the most obvious uses of laptops included 'writing, taking notes, completing homework assignments, keeping organized, communicating ... and researching topics on the Internet' (Penuel, 2005, 3-4). One of the most important conclusions was that the use of laptop technology was mediated by the pedagogical assumptions, ambitions and limitations of teachers' attitudes, principally towards their students, and their concomitant understanding of the risks involved in working with new technologies (Warschauer, 2006, 32-33).

Given this context, this paper takes Warschauer's study of one-to-one laptop programs, *Laptops and Literacy* (2006), the first major book-length study on laptop research, as its

starting point. Through an evaluation of Warschauer’s research focusing on 10 schools in California and Maine in the USA, it is possible to outline a framework with which to assess the challenges facing foreign language educators’ use of one-to-one laptop programs in second language learning in Japan.

Unlike the previous research studies and commissioned reports (Walker, Rockman and Chessler, 2000; Silvernail and Lane, 2004; Penuel, 2005), the main focus and topic of interest in Warschauer’s study is the issue of literacy, and how laptop programs are deconstructing traditional understandings of the concept, to grapple with the digital literacies required by a new generation of ‘digital native’ students. Warschauer’s findings are significant in that they enable a comparative study of changing conceptions of literacy in the global higher education system. In conclusion to the paper, the parameters of a research project using a one-to-one laptop program at a Japanese university will be outlined.

### Laptops and Literacy

One of the central theses of Warschauer’s argument is that by providing each student with a relatively small and portable mobile device such as a laptop, students will be able to overcome areas of inequality in terms of differences in access at home or school, or between affluent and less affluent students. Warschauer describes the challenge confronted by laptop programs in terms of three inequalities or ‘digital divides’: past and future, home and school, and rich and poor. The latter refers to the differences of opportunity between high socioeconomic status (high-SES) and low socioeconomic status (low-SES), in addition to race, ethnicity and language (Warschauer, 2006, 13).

### Past and Future

Central to many laptop programs is a concern with improving students’ literacy skills. In today’s globalized world that mixes traditional learning with new learning environments on the Internet, the concept of literacy has also changed. It is now possible to identify ‘traditional literacies’ such as reading and writing as well as the ‘new literacies’ concerned with ‘information literacy and multimedia production’ (Warschauer, 2006, 144). Warschauer refers to a table of literacy skills called EnGauge (Table 1) for the twenty-first century designed by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and the Metiri Group (2003).

Table 1. Twenty-First-Century Literacies

<b>EnGauge 21<sup>st</sup>- Century Skills</b>	
<b>Digital-age literacy</b>	Basic, scientific, economic, and technological literacies Visual and information literacies Multicultural literacy and global awareness
<b>Inventive thinking</b>	Adaptability, managing complexity, and self-direction Curiosity, creativity, and risk taking Higher order thinking and sound reasoning
<b>Effective communication</b>	Teaming, collaboration, and interpersonal skills Personal, social, and civic responsibility Interactive communication
<b>High productivity</b>	Prioritizing, planning, and managing for results Effective use of real-world tools Ability to produce relevant, high-quality products



Warschauer focuses especially on what he calls digital or electronic literacies (Warschauer, 2003). He identifies 'four sets of overlapping literacies' in this area:

1. *Computer literacy*: this refers to the general ability or 'fluency' to use and 'navigate' a computer.
2. *Information literacy*: the ability to define the information required for a particular situation and how to select and retrieve it.
3. *Multimedia literacy*: the ability to understand and produce projects using a wide variety of digital and multimedia content.
4. *Computer-mediated communication literacy* (CMC literacy): relating to the written skills necessary to successfully communicate in an electronic environment.  
(Warschauer, 2006, 4)

In addressing each of these types of literacy, laptop programs produce a change in focus which can be associated with three main points: processes, sources, and products of literacy (Warschauer, 2006, 144).

### ***Processes***

The use of laptops makes students more autonomous. Students have much more control over the type of learning they wish to engage in, the learning content that they are able to access, and the form and pace at which they learn.

Laptops make students' work available to a wider public audience. As a consequence, their work has the opportunity to engage to a much greater extent with actual events and authentic materials, rather than focus merely on the audience presented by the classroom learning context.

Laptops encourage not only individual learning, but also collaborative group work. Small group and team work can produce task-based learning that is more open to a cyclical process of collaborative research, planning, writing and revision.

Laptops allow students to use a range of other supplementary tools at their disposal. Through their laptops students have access to learning tools such as dictionaries, spell and grammar checkers, thesauruses, learning games and a range of online learning resources. Feedback to students can also be provided straight to students' laptops with the use of screen recording software.

### ***Sources***

Laptops encourage students to access a wide range of publicly available information, articles, and references, to enhance their studies. Laptops encourage students to engage in the collection of primary data collection using questionnaires and interviews, and to analyze data using applications such as Word and PowerPoint that automatically generate detailed charts and graphs. The use of additional hardware such as computer-connected probes can be used to collect data for research projects. The digitalization of audio, video, images and text allows students to compile a rich archive of learning materials that they can easily reference and search.

### ***Products***

Access to a range of software applications allows students with laptops to produce writing from a wider group of genres. Written work from projects can reproduce brochures, newspapers, letters, reports, and advertisements, among many other examples available.

Projects using laptops also tend to integrate a wider range of media, including video, audio, slideshows, pictures, music and animation. The ability of students to cultivate multimedia skills of this kind is also extremely valuable for their future employment. Access to multimedia resources and the ability of students to engage with them productively and creatively, enables language learners and teachers to redefine the parameters of the language classroom and to move beyond its traditional limitations and focus. Rather than merely allowing the teaching of technology, laptop programs enable a ‘focus on broad and purposeful learning activities that incorporate technology’ (Warschauer, 2006, 146).

Against the grain of those who argue that technology training of this kind can be done ‘on the job’ at a later date, Warschauer argues that:

“The shift toward broader and more purposeful learning activities, as seen in the changes in literacy processes, sources and outcomes ... represent not vocational training but rather preparation of students with the kinds of thinking, analysis, and communication skills needed for a wide range of important careers and for other forms of societal participation in the twenty-first century” (Warschauer, 2006, 146).

### **Home and School**

As portable devices that students use outside of their traditional classroom environments, laptops can be used to address inequalities between home and school access to technology equipment and resources.

Laptops allow students to participate in media-rich research and work both at home and in school. Whereas studies have reported that students at home were much more likely to engage in game-playing and watching television, students with laptops ‘were able to capture students’ enthusiasm for using new technologies and, at least in most cases, use that to focus on the mastery of academic content and the development of academic literacies’ (Warschauer, 2006, 146).

Laptops provided by the school were much more likely to be new and therefore much faster than desktop computers students might otherwise have had access to at school. The use of one dedicated computer that students could use at home and at school was a vital factor in promoting continuity between school and home learning environments. The constant requirement to transfer and update information between a school and home computer as opposed to storing all data on one laptop was identified as a significant drawback of non-laptop programs.

The use of one laptop brought more continuity and coordination to the learning process, allowing students to study wherever they were. The only identifiable disadvantage in using laptops to overcome the home-school divide was the physical effort required by students to transport them alongside their other school textbooks and folders. As laptops

and mobile learning devices become ever smaller and lighter in the future, and textbooks and learning materials are digitalized, these problems should recede.

Two of the schools analyzed by Warschauer's research did not allow students to take their laptops home from school. This was largely due to the perception that they could be damaged or even stolen, especially as the schools in question were located in low SES areas. Such examples exemplify Warschauer's third category, which deals with the inequalities between rich and poor users of educational technology.

### **Rich and Poor**

The inequalities between rich and poor were identified as the most significant by Warschauer's research. Findings reveal how parents of low-SES students were much more enthusiastic about laptop programs than their more wealthy counterparts. Laptops were seen to promote increased access by their children that they otherwise might not have had.

The use of laptops was also perceived to have a motivational effect on students from low-SES backgrounds, students who are normally more resistant to learning in traditional classroom environments.

On the other hand, striking differences emerged in terms of the perceived risks identified by the educational institutions in low-SES areas vis-à-vis laptop programs. Schools perceived students as less likely to possess the foundational skills required for using laptops productively, as well as having to cope with a number of formal disciplinary issues that hindered the good will necessary to allow students to take the laptops home. Students from low-SES areas were thus perceived to require a steeper learning curve and to be less willing to support the care and support needed to compensate for these failings. Students from higher SES backgrounds were much more likely in contrast to have developed a familiarity with computers and to be much more confident with the basic keyboarding skills and learning skills necessary for effective autonomous learning. Furthermore, high-SES parents were more likely to have had previous experience with computers and a positive perspective on them as a result.

These factors revealed that low-SES schools tended to focus more on integrating laptops into formal teaching contexts, whereas high-SES were more effective at promoting continuities that bridged the main 'opportunity divides' we have identified. So while educators and technologists see laptops as helping to overcome inequalities, the reality is that high-SES schools are able to use their privilege to 'leverage their pre-existing educational, social, and cultural resources' (Warschauer, 2006, 149) to greater effect.

While the advantages listed above are significant and compelling, their status is based on anecdotal evidence rather than on a comparative analysis of quantitative data such as measurable test scores. In some of the low-SES schools, Warschauer notes that the one-to-one programs existed purely as a result of grant funding rather than centralized financial support for educational institutions. In fact, in two of the case studies, the laptop programs were discontinued when key teachers were transferred or took up new positions at other schools.

## **The Future of Laptop Programs**

Over the last ten years laptops have increasingly gained a lot of ground against the traditional conception of desktop computers in schools. They are increasingly cheaper in price, more portable, and just as powerful as desktops. Laptops will also have an effect on the organization of learning spaces, replacing the dedicated computer lab with multi-functional classrooms. Traditional learning materials will also be increasingly digitalized and students will be able to access them directly from their laptops.

Warschauer notes that whereas other technologies such as radio, film and television were once promoted as the main forces behind a reorganization of educational delivery, they have remained marginal to the educational experience and ‘largely failed’ (Warschauer, 2006, 152). His argument is that computers such as laptops will not experience the same result, however, their increasing ubiquity in educational institutions will depend on a rethinking of the ‘literacy and learning challenges’ of the twenty-first century. This means replacing a view of ‘hard’ with ‘soft media determinism’ (Levinson, 1997):

The former suggests that the presence and use of certain media automatically bring determined results. The latter means that media can enable change, but do not in and of themselves bring it about. Computers and the Internet certainly enable forms of information access, communication, and knowledge production that were not possible previously, and one-to-one access to such technologies amplifies such affordances. One-to-one programs thus represent the best opportunity yet to transform education through incorporation of technology (Warschauer, 2006, 153).

In order to capture his understanding of the future of laptop programs, Warschauer uses a metaphor of the ‘word and the world’. That is to say, activities associated with the ‘word’ (reading and writing) have to be made relevant to and brought into contact with, the wider world, thus breaking down the barriers that separate them. Laptop programs bring about the best opportunity we have yet had to collapse this distinction and to make authentic learning materials available to students in more effective ways. Where traditional classroom teaching has been guilty of privileging literacy skills (reading and writing) over an engagement with authentic materials (the world), technologists have often done the reverse. They have been guilty of over exaggerating the potential of ICT environments at the cost of providing structured learning environments for literacy development: ‘exposing learners to the world without providing adequate support for them to master the word is likely to worsen educational inequity’ (Warschauer, 2006, 155). Students’ comprehension and literacy skills need to be both scaffolded and supported as well as related to broader horizons and perspectives.

## **The Context of Laptop Programs in Japan**

Nagoya University of Commerce and Business Administration (NUCB) is a private university located in Aichi Prefecture in Central Japan, 15 km south west of Japan’s fourth largest city. Like many Japanese universities, it is relatively small in terms of student numbers, currently having approximately 4,000 under- and 300 postgraduates, but has national and international ambitions. As a business university it is only the second university in Japan to be accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The university is ranked in the top four in the central

region of Japan, second in its prefecture, and twenty-fifth out of 765 national institutions, according to recent league tables. This status allows it to recruit students from prefectures all over Japan as well as international students from other parts of south-east Asia.

Since 2000 the University has given all undergraduate students a laptop computer to use both on and off campus. Since 2002 all laptop computers have had wireless LAN cards installed and have been able to access the university's wireless network, one of the first such wireless networks in Japan. Since 2002 the university has developed an ICT strategy based on students' and faculty's use of laptops, a campus-wide wireless LAN environment, and the Blackboard Learning System as a Course Management System. This framework represents a significant investment and faculty have been encouraged to integrate students' laptops into the curriculum. Nevertheless, the university persists with the installation of desktop computers (5 dedicated labs with approximately 170 computers) alongside the provision of laptops, thereby indicating the risks envisaged in switching to a purely wireless solution.

Since 2004 data has been collected to evaluate English major students' changing patterns of face-to-face and autonomous study behaviour in the context of the laptop university. Previous research about the university's laptop program focused on a number of areas: such as how can the laptop university help Japanese students to learn English more effectively? And how will faculty and students adapt the laptop learning environment to facilitate foreign language learning? (Thomas, 2005). The current research will take a narrower focus and concentrate on the implications for literacy – both in terms of traditional conceptions of the terms and those types of new literacy identified by Warschauer (2006). The study focuses on a cohort of third year undergraduate students (n=190) studying English as a foreign language. While English is their major course of study, some students also study Asian languages (Chinese, Korea, Thai or Vietnamese).

Based on Warschauer's framework of challenges confronted by laptop programs in the USA, the study in Japan will consider:

1. Issues of motivation related to Japanese students of EFL
2. Continuities between home and university usage
3. Challenges presented by high-SES and low-SES
4. Past and future conceptions of literacy
5. The attitudes of educators to laptops and how this informs their pedagogy concerning literacy practices

## **Summary**

This paper has discussed the findings of Warschauer's recent study on *Laptops and Literacy* (2006). As the first substantive research study based on observation of one-to-one laptop programs involving a number of educational institutions, it presents a valuable overview of the main issues involved with the future integration of this new technology. Warschauer's main focus – the implications of laptop programs for our understanding of literacy in general and electronic literacies in particular – provides a thorough re-evaluation of the term that will be integral to approaches necessary for the integration of educational technology in the digital era of the twenty-first century.

Warschauer's framework is here used to contextualize an ongoing research study of a one-to-one laptop program at a Japanese university involving English major students on an undergraduate degree.

Warschauer's approach and discussion provides a much-needed point of reference in an area of research that is lacking substantive studies of a comparative, longitudinal or quantitative type. Finally, the context of the Japanese research project on a one-to-one program in second language learning is outlined, and it is hoped that by considering Warschauer's research in this context, that valuable recommendations and implications will emerge for developing laptop programs in the context of Japanese higher education in the future.

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## **A testing and evaluation system based on internet technology**

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### **Abstract**

China Central Radio and TV University (CCRTVU) is one of the biggest Universities of the world in student numbers. This paper introduces a Testing and Evaluation System based on Internet Technology to meet the demands of processing data from a large number of students. The system is to be developed for the purposes of learning, teaching and management both in on-line and off-line ways, which is suitable for Open Education. This paper introduces the design principle, main features and an application of the system. The system has been proved to be very successful.

Since the beginning of the year 2001, a Testing and Evaluation System has been developed by CCRTVU, which was based on Internet technology. The system performs the function of helping teachers to arrange assignments (homework) and test papers for distance-studying students, in both on-line or off-line learning modes. That is, for every semester, the teachers or the course-designers will issue partial but important homework and test papers through the website. Students have to finish all the activities at first in off-line mode (normally) and submit their homework with the on-line mode, transmitting the finished e-papers of homework through the Internet to their teachers (tutors). The teachers will analyze it, assess it, and then send the students back further study guidance. The system works to automatically collect and analyze data, supervising the most important studying procedures of a student. The system was established by new technologies, which include Network Grid, Message Middle-Ware and Work Flow; and by theories of Distributing Computing, Available Measuring, Cooperation of Human and Machine, etc. The system guarantees that the data will be transmitted promptly and safely. For example, a strict control procedure is required for e-paper examinations in on-line mode.

The design principles and main features of the system are described below:

1. The Testing and Evaluation System should be satisfactory to the students, the teachers and the requirements of the course-managers. Particularly in the design of website teaching and learning, the system should meet the requirements to receive data from a large number of students, quickly arouse the teachers' response, accurately accept feedback from the teachers, and finally promptly send students back further information, etc.
2. The system should support the function of arranging partial homework and test papers by the Internet for the students. E-papers should be suitable for transmission through the web, suitable for the students to open, and also suitable for teachers to assess the reports sent by the students. Furthermore, a Testing Database will be gradually established by the accumulation of data every year. In a word, the system is frequently used for daily learning and teaching, and is also gradually being used in examinations for e-papers in on-line mode.

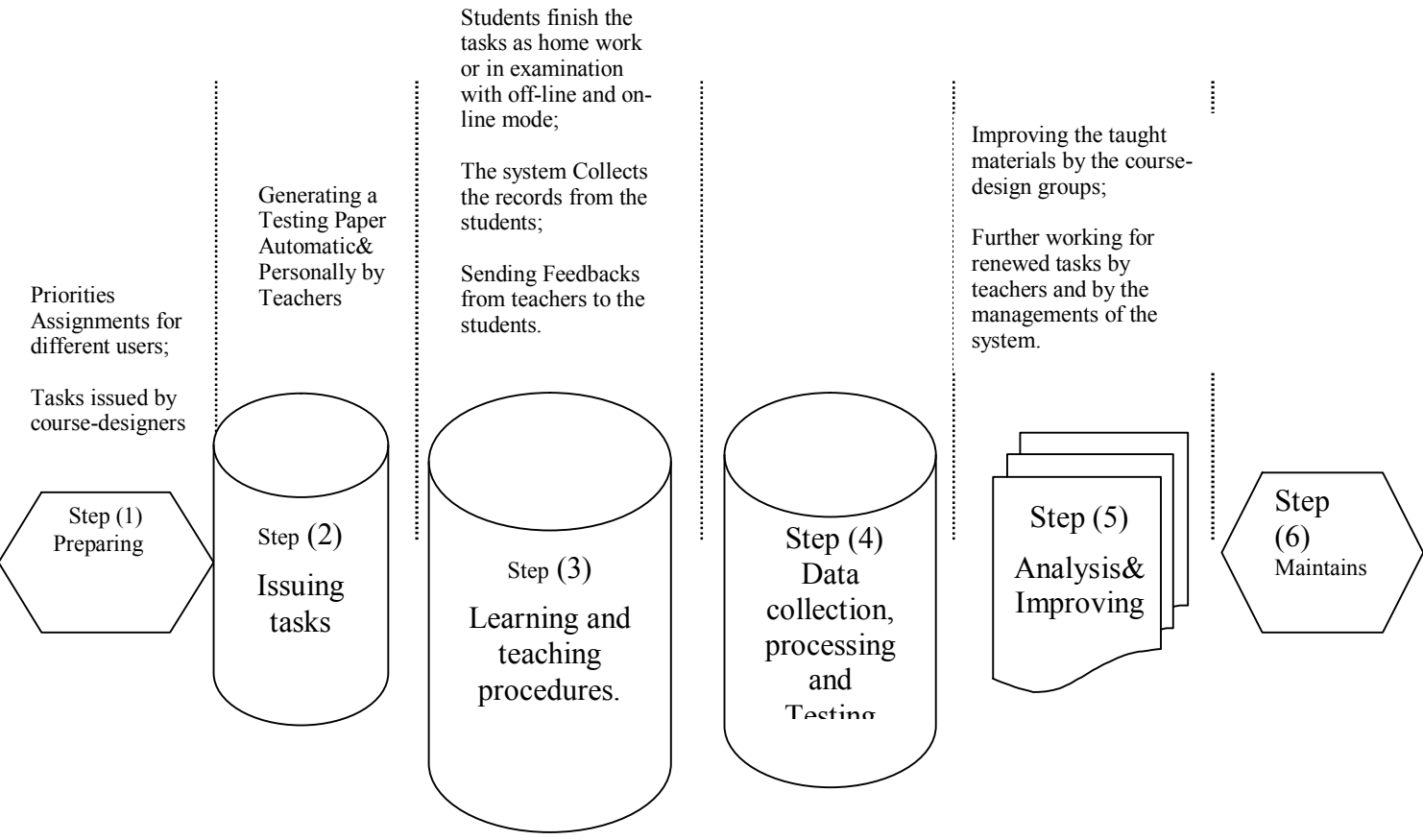
3. Technically, the system was built to adapt to different situations around our country, for most provincial universities have somewhat different environments in hardware and software for supporting their distance teaching.
4. The kernel of the system is the gradually established Testing Database, which performs the functions of supporting the activities of learning, teaching and testing.

The following describes some key points considered when building the Testing Database of the system.

- The Testing Database is composed of many kinds of learning, teaching and testing materials, which are designed by the course-designers and are gradually accumulated from the assigned homework by e-papers in on-line mode. It has two functions: issuing partial homework and e-papers for examination.
- The Testing Database is composed of many sub-systems, each with functions with different hierarchies of access, to guarantee the whole systems management. For example, the teachers in our provincial (local) universities have lower level access to the Testing Database than the course designers of the Central University. This means that the local staff can issue some homework for their students, judge the records of students returned from the web, send helpful information to guide students' learning, and give teaching suggestions to the course-designers and so on, but they usually do not have the right to modify the contents of the test e-papers.
- There are many forms of test e-papers in the system, including single choice items, multiple choice items, correct or wrong choice items, explanation of technical terms, comprehensive understanding of topics, and calculations.
- There are many attributes in the Testing Database, which are designed to enable the system managers easily to control the whole system. These include information about the designer who originally presented the test e-papers, the beginning and ending time of issuing a test paper, the knowledge points to be tested, the difficulties in the knowledge to be distributed, evaluation standards, superiority of a test item, and the exclusive information among the relative testing items in a set of testing e-paper and so on.
- The procedure for issuing a test paper to students usually begins with an automatic process, in which the controlling software generates a set of test papers according to the designed teaching strategies. As this process is controlled by software automatically, students in same classroom may get different test materials, which will prevent any kind of "copying answers" problems in our country. This teaching approach will help and monitor students individually. Generally, after the software generates a test e-paper, the teachers responsible expected to modify it for quality assurance purposes.

The following figure shows the scheme of the system in outline. It emphasizes that the course-designers (teachers) take the most important roles in the process.





It provides an example of the system being used for daily teaching and for examinations, and shows how the system actually plays an important role in distance education.

Table 1

	2005 Spring	2005 Autumn	2006 Spring	2006 Autumn	2007 Spring
Courses	6	13	15	48	52
No. of Schools	28	44	41	44	44
No. of Students	3985	12084	13541	69055	
No. of Teachers	151	454	338	4306	

Table1 shows that in recent years, the system has been used increasingly widely in the system of our university systems, for teaching and testing purposes. It shows that, for example, in Autumn term 2006, 48 courses, 44 local universities, about 7 thousand students and 4306 teachers were involved in those learning, teaching and testing activities based on the website. It might be a trend that in distance education, combining the modern technology of the Internet with computer software applications will have a large effect on traditional teaching approaches. For example, printed papers will be gradually reduced, and instead, there will be more e-papers, all working procedure will be treated more promptly, efficiently and with increasingly sophisticated software.

Table 2

	Western economics ( course 1 )		Advanced Written English (course 2)		Management Strategy for Enterprises (course 3)		Website Technologies (course 4)		Chinese Culture (course 5)		English I ( 1 ) (course 6)	
	No. of student s	Pass rate ( % )	No. of student s	Pass rate ( % )	No. of student s	Pass rate ( % )	No. of student s	Pass rate ( % )	No. of student s	Pass rate ( % )	No. of student s	Pass rate ( % )
05 Spring	438	90.0	74	91.0	40	98.0	80	85.1	238	87.0	2901	68.1
05 Autum n	2896	91.0	758	74.2	931	80.1	214	77.0	889	89.2	2687	68.0
06 Spring	3254	79.0	478	73.5	1364	72.0	103	68.3	396	88.1	2032	72.2
06 Autum n	3765	80.0	797	74.3	869	81.3			397	73.2	2200	71.0

Table 2 shows some pieces of actual data from 6 courses appearing in our database of the system. The data were drawn from a testing procedure in the middle of the semester. Students were expected to complete the test papers on the website and also were asked to attach files related to the records of their homework. And then the teachers in charge of the courses analyzed the data.

Table 3

	Western economics ( course 1 )		Advanced Written English (course 2)		Management Strategy for Enterprises (course 3)		Website Technologies (course 4)		Chinese Culture (course 5)		English I ( 1 ) (course 6)	
	No. of students	Pass rate ( % )	No. of students	Pass rate ( % )	No. of students	Pass rate ( % )	No. of students	Pass rate ( % )	No. of students	Pass rate ( % )	No. of students	Pass rate ( % )
05 spring	404	57.92	70	100	40	92.50	73	98.63	222	86.49		
05 autumn	2754	79.77	603	88.72	906	60.82	188	77.66	812	87.56	2139	84.90
06 spring	2892	80.74	365	96.71	1293	83.68	71	95.77	373	82.57	1643	72.12
06autumn	3434	56.17	651	97.39	793	90.54			368	79.62	1810	84.25

Table 3 shows the information from those courses which were tested in the second testing procedure of that semester. In the table, it can be found that in most cases, the pass rates were higher than before, because teachers had usually sent students guidance related to their performance in the former test. Some results shows the pass rates of the second were unsatisfactory, for that course was designed in the traditional teaching way, which is not very suitable for distance studying students.

## Workshops

### Beyond events: exploring the potential of networked professional development for distance tutors

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#### Abstract

Professional development has traditionally taken the form of workshops or seminars, where participants meet face to face in a room. Such events have the advantage that staff are taken away from their desks, and can devote time to thinking exclusively about the current topic without the distraction of email or phone. And yet recent research (Knight and Yorke, 2006) suggests that such events may be less significant for professional development than we as staff developers fondly imagined them to be. Provision for distance tutors have always been challenging because it can be difficult to get staff in one room together, whether because of geographical or temporal constraints. For these reasons we have been exploring the options for making use of online communication media to join people up and provide them with opportunities for professional development while, at the same time, offering some flexibility in provision. We summarise here four of these initiatives, together with the practical lessons we have learnt from their implementation (Jelfs et al, in press; Macdonald et al, 2007; Cornelius & Macdonald, in press; Macdonald & Hewling, in press).

#### Summary of case studies and lessons learnt

Approach	Example	Lessons learnt
Assessment framed experiential and collaborative approach to learning skill; time limited, fixed start & finish	Tutor Moderators: online 3 week course for inter-disciplinary groups of 20-25; undertaking 5 activities/wk	Group size matters They appreciate peer support Self certification and reduced flexibility helps engagement Want access to bright ideas later
Course related group	Formed for discussion of marking moderation, approaches to question wording; sharing tutorial resources; peer support	Very popular and persistent Core to the role of tutor A true example of CoPs in action?
Plenary inter-disciplinary discussion group	Long lived discussion forum: on issues around supporting students online. Catered to shifting population ~ 300 tutors.	Constant human presence of moderator Size message base vs readership patterns Relationship to core role Key usability issues
Group reflection on practice	Promoting Effective Tutoring project: blogging student-tutor interactions by 40 tutors, all Faculties, over 13 week period	Promoted effective and very detailed reflection on tutoring activity as it took place; good sense of peer support and community. Initial f to f meeting helped with discussion on the language of reflection?

## **Workshop activities**

1. Introductions. Attendance at events at the OU in Scotland. 5 mins
2. *Activity 1* What are the advantages and drawbacks of using events with distance tutors in your institution?  
To what extent do you think their needs could be met in other ways? 20 mins
3. Description of three case studies and lessons learnt 30 mins
4. *Activity 2* Which approach has most potential application in your institution? What might be the constraints on making it work? 30 mins
5. Plenary 10 mins

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## **Social Learning and Second Life**

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Email.....**

### **Abstract**

Twenty-first century students are famously time-poor, and social learning often suffers in the rush to squeeze studies into the available on-campus time. The loss of informal and extra-curricular intellectual exchange is regrettable, particularly for advanced students, and may have consequences for individuals' readiness to pursue further studies. Educators are beginning to consider on-line social space as providing an alternative forum.

This paper will report on the pilot project investigating the utility of Second Life as a virtual social and educational environment. A small pilot project has been developed in first semester 2007 to provide a Conference experience for third year Honours students in English at La Trobe University in Melbourne. Although Conference experience can be very valuable for beginning researchers, it is rarely provided until the Honours or postgraduate level, because of the dollar costs and the time demands for both staff and students. Second Life provides the possibility of a lively conference experience with little inconvenience or expense for participants.

The participating students are enrolled in the compulsory Honours Subject, an introduction to and overview of literary theory over the last century or so. As well as covering this area, the unit is intended to build *esprit de corps* for intending Honours students, and to introduce students to collegial discussion and the culture of research in the discipline. In this it has been quite successful, although students have little time for socializing outside class. WebCT provides some generally asynchronous social space which is fairly well used. It is a significant advance to expose students to a more structured experience of the networking and intellectual development that can occur in the conference environment.

A Second life conference venue will be set up and students from the Honours seminar will be invited to attend (via avatar, of course) a Conference called 'Becoming a Researcher'. They will watch a short video presentation (5 minutes) by the postgraduate co-ordinator, listen to a brief Power-point address by the avatar of the Honours Co-ordinator, and make short presentations themselves if desired. There will be general discussion and (as often in first life) the avatars will then adjourn to an appropriate second life bar to continue the discussion informally. The whole experience will take an hour and a half. Students will be surveyed after the Conference to evaluate the experience.

If the experience is successful, the project will be further developed to provide on-going conference facilities and gallery space for the entire Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

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