Promoting the Good e-Teacher: Didactical Choices when developing e-pedagogical Competences

Grete Oline Hole

Associate Professor
Centre of Evidence Based Practice
Bergen University College
grete.oline.hole@hib.no

Anne Karin Larsen

Associate Professor
Dept. of Social Education and Social Work
Bergen University College
anne.larsen@hib.no

Jon Hoem

PhD, Associate Professor
The Media Centre
Bergen University College
jon.hoem@hib.no

Abstract

The article gives an overview of how the development of a blended e-pedagogy course for Higher Education teachers have used the experiences from many years of international online courses for European BA students. Influenced by the situated-learning perspective, this course employs student-centred teaching and learning methods. Moreover, inspired by the Community of Inquiry, this programme emphasizes the importance of Cognitive, Teaching and Social presence in the Virtual Learning Environment. The students plan their own courses in accordance with the stages of becoming an e-learner. One uses the ecological "Model of Relations between Didactical Categories" as a framework, and the e-pedagogy course is customized to be "hands-on" learning experiences, which promotes the desired e-teacher competences. During the course the students are engaged in discussions and co-operation by using different ICT-collaborations tools. At this time, the course has been held twice, and is available for everyone as an online learning resource under the Creative Commons license (http://www.virclass.net/eped). Evaluations by students have demonstrated that this hands-on training course can help students attain the necessary competences needed to be skilled e-teachers.

Keywords: E-pedagogy, Didactical model, Communication tools, Web 2.0, Blended learning, On-line collaboration, Community of learners, Social Work education, Virtual campus

Introduction

The European project VIRCLASS (The Virtual Classroom for Social Work in Europe) has developed and carried out e-learning courses for BA students in Social Work all over Europe since 2005 (Larsen & Hole, 2007a). In VIRCLASS the partners have developed competence-based curricular plans for two modules in Social Work with a comparative perspective, credited 5/10 ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). In October 2009, the fifth cohort of students began Module 1, and altogether 326 students and 13 teachers have been involved in these courses. In 2008 the VIRCLASS Consortium, with new partners, received a grant from the Lifelong Learning Programme – Virtual Campus to develop a Social Work Virtual Campus (SW-VirCamp[i]). The overall aim is to make an international specialization within Social Work at the BA level. One way of achieving this goal has been to initiate a new e-learning module, *Community Work from an International Perspective*, credited with 15 ECTS credits, with new learning material, a quality guide and a new framework agreement for a sustainable Virtual Campus.

An analysis of the experiences of those working with e-learning courses shows a need for increasing the e-teacher competences among the staff at the partner institutions. Accordingly, an international course in e-pedagogy for teachers in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) was developed with a grant from Norway Opening Universities.

This article outlines the teaching and learning philosophy underlying all our e-learning courses and describes how this orientation has influenced the development of an e-pedagogy course for teachers in higher education (HE). Finally, the findings from the students' evaluations of the course will be presented.

Methods

The experiences reported here can be seen as a 'single-case study' (Yin 2003) within a mixed-methods approach (Cresswell & Clark 2007). Years with the VIRCLASS courses have revealed the importance of educators having a robust knowledge and understanding of the available technological tools on the Internet. It is important that the 'virtual teachers' know how to enhance e-learning. They need to know which tools are most likely to promote the desired learning activities, and how these can enable the students to accomplish the desired learning outcome. The educator must be aware of how to stimulate productive learning by using the different ways of presenting the learning material offered by ICT.

The process of converting the VIRCLASS courses to the SW-VirCamp project involved a significant expansion of the teaching staff involved. Earlier, teachers shared their knowledge and had 'hands-on' training with the virtual learning environment (VLE)[ii] during the teacher meetings. The decision was made to organize the training in a more systematic and formalized manner through an ECTS-credited course.

Outline of the e-pedagogy course

During spring 2008, the Curricular Plan and the virtual-learning material were developed, and the authors outlined a detailed study programme supplemented with tasks. Updated readings and relevant web resources were found and made available for the students. During the first course, the list of readings and collaboration tools were supplemented, partly because of suggestions from the students in the course, and partly because of the discussion among all participants involved. The course lasts for 12 weeks, with

a face-to-face (F2F) week at Bergen University College (HiB) during week 3. It was credited with 7.5 ECTS credits the first year. Students' evaluations after the course, as well as the teachers' judgement of the workload related to the fulfilment of all tasks, resulted in an expansion to 10 ECTS credits. The course was arranged twice during the springs of 2008 and 2009, with 12 participating students.

Participants

The course was promoted among the VIRCLASS partners, as well as through the international social-work network EUSW.[iii] Because of the grant, participants only had to pay a small fee, but their home institution had to pay the travelling costs and accommodation for the campus week in Bergen. The first year, nine HEI teachers began the course. Some of these were experienced VIRCLASS teachers who wanted to formalize their competences by achieving the credits; others were educators well acquainted with e-teaching from other courses; and some were novices to VIRCLASS, to the VLE used, and to e-teaching. In addition, some of the other VIRCLASS partners were able to participate in the campus week, giving a hand in the teaching sessions and in the hands-on training. This mixture of different competences among both the "teacher-students" and the participating educators created a fruitful learning environment that encouraged the exchange of information and knowledge-sharing. The second time the course started, in April 2009, all the students were teachers from partner institutions in the SW-VirCamp project. Not being familiar with e-learning, they used this opportunity to gain in-depth experience with the VLE and the techniques of e-teaching and e-tutoring.

Students evaluation

The students, immediately after they had delivered their final exam, were asked to evaluate their experiences of participating in the course through an online survey. One objective was to explore whether the course had influenced the participants' way of teaching, and thus a new survey was sent to all of the students in January 2010. This survey had three main parts. The first asked some of the same questions as in the initial survey to see if their view of these issues had changed over time. The second part investigated the extent to which the former students had practised as e-teachers after the course. And finally, some questions aimed to find out if the knowledge and experience from the course had influenced the way the students practised their ordinary classroom teaching.

Both surveys had a mixture of statements graded on a Likert scale and open-ended questions where the students could express their opinions in their own words. While seven out of nine and two out of three students answered the surveys immediately after the first and second courses were finished, respectively, only 50 per cent (six of twelve) answered the last survey. Nevertheless, since it was then six and 18 months since they partook as students, respectively, the response rate must be considered as quite good.

This article presents the authors' own experiences as well as the findings from both surveys. Only the descriptive analyses are done with the quantitative data, while simple text analysis of the open-ended questions has been carried out. In regard to the small numbers of respondents, one must be careful when interpreting the results. But the answers to the open-ended questions from the respondents provided many useful comments. This information made it possible both to refine the course before the second one had started and to give us an impression of how they had experienced the course.

Pedagogical approaches behind VIRCLASS & SW-VirCamp

The underlying teaching and learning philosophy behind VIRCLASS follows social constructivist (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989) and socio-cultural theories (Säljö 2001). The last year's research in how learning takes place has widely changed both the professional and lay view of teaching and learning, and has introduced changes in HEIs all over the world. Student-centred approaches and problem-based or case-based learning, which follow the principles that guide professionals' education in the 21st century, are widely used. These methods are recognized as ways of "narrowing the gap" between 'theory at school' and 'real life practice' (Bruner 1996). The underlying idea is that there will be an improvement of the possible learning outcomes because these study-methods require more engagement from the students during the learning process (Biggs 2003; Marton et al. 1986/2000). Learning is viewed as a situated process (Dysthe 2001) that aims towards promoting a community of learners who help each other towards a new understanding. Building on the knowledge of how student-active learning methods are important for creating resilient learning experiences (Biggs 2003), the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) paradigm has been central in the planning of the courses. The students learn by taking part in activities in the community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), which includes collaboration in problem-solving activities as a kind of 'learning-by-doing' perspective. With a cooperative pursuit of knowledge, as opposed to the more traditional competitive pursuit among learners, the teacher's role is not to be the authority and chief source of information, but is more a facilitator and resource guide (Koschmann 1996). The creation of a student-centred teaching and learning virtual environment places emphasis on making a transparent and a "safe and friendly" atmosphere in the virtual classroom. Students' reflections over their learning process are important because such reflections raise an awareness not only of their new knowledge but also of the obstacles involved in the learning process. This "meta-learning" can be seen as a parallel to the problem-solving process involved in the relationship between social worker and client. Observations made by the social-work students on their own learning and problem-solving processes may be useful in their later work with clients (Larsen & Hole 2007a).

Since the beginning of VIRCLASS, there has been the use of portfolio assessments, which follow the principles outlined by Paulson et al. (1991). The students are given different tasks during the course of study, and they deliver their assignments in their own working portfolio, which is open for all participants to see. They receive comments on their work from both peers and educators. At the end of the course the students are told which of the tasks will be included in their final exam. The tasks and assignments are tailor-made to stimulate the students towards a comparative approach. For example, the students were asked to present a theme or problem to be discussed from the perspective of their home country, and then to compare this presentation with information supplied by peer students from two other countries. Different tools promote interaction and co-operation, such as synchronic and asynchronic written discussions, online conferences, weblogs and shared documents like Google.docs. This is a new way of learning for many of the students; the beginning of the course presented a lesson in task-oriented approaches and emphasized student activity as an important aspect of e-learning. Following Gilly Salmon's advice (Salmon 2004), the instructors introduced the students stepwise to the use of technology and to the learning content. Mastering the simpler tasks before being asked to perform more advanced assignments gives confidence and promotes further contributions.

Gilly Salmon (2004) has introduced a model of the stages involved in becoming an e-learner. The model clarifies the teacher's role and her responsibilities to meet the student's needs in the learning process.
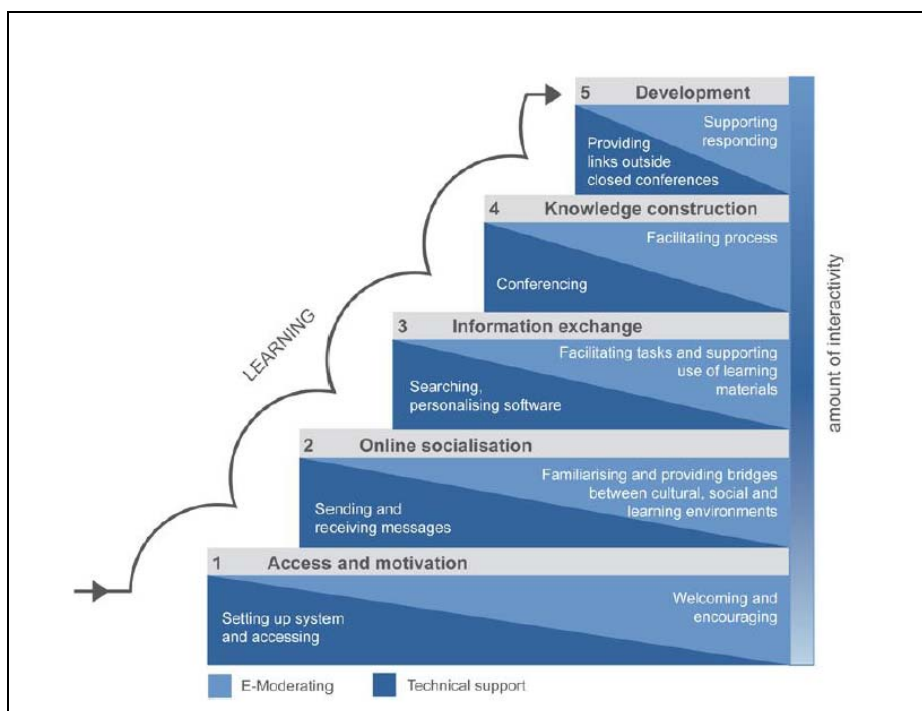
Figure 1: Stages of being an e-learner[iv] (VIRTUAL BOOK, e-pedagogy for teachers in Higher Education)

The stages begin with access and motivation. The students must be socialized in the virtual classroom in order to be able to exchange information with others. This socialization allows for knowledge construction, where they are ready to develop their competences. Because another important issue is to create "social presence" (Garrison & Anderson 2003) in the virtual classroom, the first tasks seek to establish this. Students are asked to write a short presentation of themselves and to upload a picture in their personal account in the VLE. These simple tasks let the students to become acquainted both with the learning environment and with the tools available. By constructing their personal presentation, they can decide how they want to appear in this transparent classroom. At the same time this stage allows the students and teachers to "meet" as individuals with faces and histories, not only as written names on the screen.

The underlying teaching philosophy in the course

All the students participating in the e-pedagogy course were trained educators. This made it possible to use e-pedagogy as a supplement to their earlier pedagogical and didactical[v] knowledge. The focus was on how the students could use their teaching competences in a Virtual Campus. In contrast to teaching at their home university, the teaching material is delivered through a computer, and the students' learning-work takes place through the Internet. However, teachers must still use their knowledge of the topic they teach and their didactical skills when planning their courses.

Within the field of professional education, the underlying teaching philosophy is often taken for granted. The professional, as an educator at a HEI, tacitly transfer his knowledge to newcomers. To raise awareness both of how the different theories of teaching and learning affect the outline of the actual course and of how students are expected to learn, the beginning of the course included a presentation of a brief overview of learning theories. The course participants were told not to disregard the Behaviourist, the Cognitive/Constructivist or the Socio-Cultural/Situated perspective

(Munkvold et al. 2008) without careful consideration of the topic and the learning objectives for the planned session. This lesson relates to the situated approach of VIRCLASS and SW-VirCamp. The tasks given to the students require cooperation, where students must share their experiences and help each other in order to increase their knowledge. Much interaction, discussion and collaboration take place during these courses, as these are seen as essential skills for future social workers. The e-pedagogy course follows these strategies. The students were reminded of how one must choose methods and strategies in accordance with the topic one covers and with the overall wanted outcome. The tasks and assignments are important tools for the students' learning; the way they are constructed can trigger learning in different ways. Students can be invited either to collaborate or to pursue individual learning. This learning philosophy should always be reflected in the way the teacher constructs the course and plans the tasks for the students. One useful guide for the students in their planning process is the "Didactical Model of Relations", or "the Norwegian Diamond" (Bjørndal & Lieberg 1978[vi]).

The "Norwegian Diamond"

Although the VIRCLASS teachers are familiar with different didactical models, the "Norwegian Diamond", as it is called, has shown itself to be very useful for teachers planning a teaching session. Whether one is preparing a full course or a single lecture, there are some central didactical principles to keep in mind. All elements in the model are interrelated and influence each other.
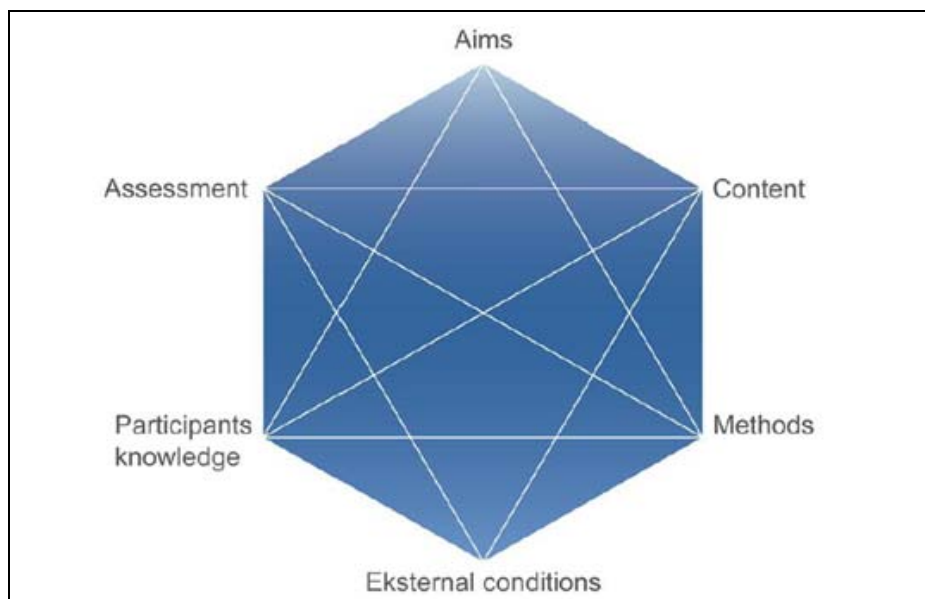

Figure 2: The Norwegian Diamond (VIRTUAL BOOK e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education)

As figure 2 shows, there are six main elements: Aims, Content, Methods, External conditions, Participants' knowledge and Assessment.

The first thing to do when planning a course is to decide what the *Aim* of the course should be. What are the intended learning outcomes? Depending on what the students need to learn, teaching strategies will differ. In professional education, there is a trend towards a competence-based curriculum where Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes are integrated as 'Core Competencies' (Adams 2002; Larsen et al. 2008*). This approach has consequences on the course's structure, and on the planning of the assessment. Compared to more traditional academic courses, a professional educator should be aware of the following nuances: should students learn in solitude and study by themselves,

or should one stimulate a more collaborative learning situation where dialogue, discussions and reflection are important?

One things is the teachers intentions, but the goals the students' set for themselves will often differ. Do they really want to put a lot of work into the course they sign up for, or do they just want to pass and get the credits? A good way to explore this question is to ask the students to present their learning expectations in the beginning of the course.

The starting point for planning the *Content* of a course should be the approved curricular plan. From that, the weekly structure of the course must be decided. This involves several questions. How should the course progress? How can one stimulate the students' learning? In line with this, one needs to decide what learning materials should be available for the students during the course. One must find and decide upon the concrete syllabus, such as literature and lectures, web-links and audio-visual material that can trigger learning. Planning how the students should work with the learning material is also vital: what tasks and assignments will result in the wanted learning outcomes?

Taxonomies linked to the expected learning outcomes can be helpful when deciding how students' progress through the course should be. Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive outcome (Bloom 1956) classifies knowledge in six steps: from "knowing of" via "understanding" to the "application of knowledge". The last three steps comprise the "analyzing", "synthesizing" and "evaluation" of knowledge.
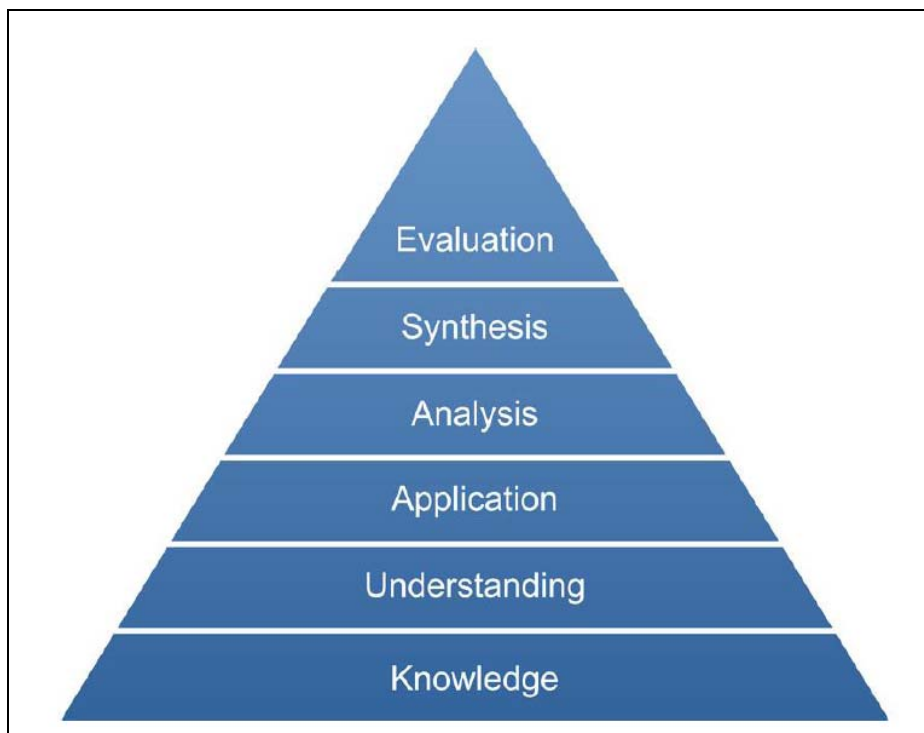

Figure 3: Bloom's "Taxonomy of Knowledge" (VIRTUAL BOOK e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education)

Other useful taxonomies are Krathwal's taxonomy of attitudes and Simpsons' taxonomy of skills (Munkvold et al. 2008).

With respect to the *Methods* in e-learning, one of the first things to do is to plan how to familiarize the student with the virtual-learning arena. By means of good tutorials and small introductory tasks, the students can find their own way through the virtual classroom. Giving the students a pre-start period

before the learning work starts, just to get to know this learning environment, has been useful (Larsen & Hole 2007b).

What are the methods chosen for letting the students acquire the wanted competences? Are the students going to read and study on their own, or are they expected to discuss, reflect upon and share information? With the latter approach, there has to be some planned group work among the students. Since many students choose e-learning owing to the flexibility, it is especially important to present a schedule of the course programme in the beginning so that the students can incorporate this into their overall planning of activities.

Given that the participants in an e-learning course do not have F2F contact, group work and synchronic communication should create an experience of being in a shared classroom. The educators should carefully consider the desired outcome from the communication session. They must keep what access students have to different tools in mind when deciding what to use and when to use it. Different tools are available: chats or a virtual conference room, the keyboard for written communication, a headset or web camera for talk and audio-visual communication.

Different tools should be used for different purposes. If the aim is to let the students reflect and work with their comments, an asynchronic discussion forum, where students can participate when it suits them, should be used. This gives them time to think, to discuss facts, and to check their spelling before they write an answer.

Sorting out the access, tools and equipment are important parts of mapping the *External conditions* of an e-learning course. Other elements in the study situation must be considered as well. The students' learning situation, the teachers' own working situation, the time allotted for the work along with many other peripheral factors will influence the course's progress. Is this a mandatory part of the students' study programme, and will they have time to do what is expected? Or is this a voluntary course "on top of" all other duties? Do you have part-time students who study in the evenings and weekends? If so, then you might have to adjust the delivery dates for their coursework. And as the experience from VIRCLASS has shown, in an international course, the different holidays through Europe, as well as the diverse start of the terms and other exams all influence the students' participation.

As figure 2 illustrates, the *Participants' knowledge* is another point to consider; however, it is one that is often taken for granted. The curricular plan presents the expected learning outcomes, but students seldom knows what expectations the teachers have regarding their prior knowledge. This should be assessed in the beginning of the course, because good learning starts with building on already existing knowledge.

The last element in figure 2 is *Assessment*. Depending on the overall aims for the course, the assignments should be constructed in different ways. How the students' learning outcome is assessed is also important. If one wants to stimulate a student-centred and reflective learning process, one must make sure that there is an assessment of this process! Our experience has taught us that portfolio assessment is a good way to ensure this. An e-portfolio may consist of reflection notes and different tasks the students have done during the course, with comments from teachers and peers. In their final assignment, they may be assessed on some of the products in their portfolio, which they have had the chance to work further with and to improve before submitting them.

Collaboration and transparency

Traditionally, online courses do not promote interaction and cooperation. This might be the reason why e-learning often is seen as individual and isolated. VIRCLASS and SW-VirCamp focus on collaborative learning methods in a community of learners. When this takes place in an international online course, it is important to plan the conditions for collaboration carefully. Students must feel that there is an open, friendly and inviting atmosphere in the virtual environment. They must learn to navigate in the VLE so that they can manage the technical aspects of their new learning situation. An online chat in a synchronic discussion forum during the first or second week of the course can help students feel as part of a group of students in the same classroom.

Future students will have different attitudes and expectations in how they access, use and produce information. Close to 90 per cent of college students begin an information search by visiting a search engine (CIBER 2008). The changes that are taking place are transforming teaching and learning, and they calls for new ways of communicating in education.

Transparent e-Portfolio

All tasks and assignments during the study are tailored to fit into the student's own teaching work at their home university. All tasks performed during the course are stored in the student's e-portfolio for further development. During the 12 weeks the course lasts, the students are guided 'step-wise' towards more complicated tasks, a structure that follows Salmon's (2004) model. The level of complication related both to the technical tools they need to learn to use and to the level of cognitive challenges the tasks demands are considered.

One part of the final assignment is to outline a sketch for a course, and to demonstrate the content for its start, middle and end. Another part is to state the reason for their didactical choices. This statement should be linked to the six elements in the "diamond", with references to relevant pedagogical literature. While this paper should be around 2000 words, the students should also write a reflective note of 1500 words about their own learning process. One of the mandatory tasks during the campus week was to write a daily weblog describing the reflections of their experiences. During the rest of the programme, the students were encouraged to reflect in their weblog and to look into and to comment on peer-student's weblogs. In their final reflection, the students are expected to go back in their blog and to find citations to illustrate their 'learning journey'.

Collaboration through Web 2.0

An important requirement was that the different learning activities should be interwoven with the students' everyday work processes. To be a practitioner in social work, one has to be able to reflect upon one's work, and to share and discuss experiences within a community of trusted peers. In e-learning, parts of these processes are moved into the virtual domain, and the virtual learning environment must support similar ways of communication.

Any online learning environment has the potential to interact with other forms of web resources. With the increased use of the Internet, there is reason to expect that most students already participate in various social networks online. Thus, a learning environment often comes in addition to these activities, and a number of thematic connections may occur. One must, however, be aware that the various arenas have different "rhythms". A social network has a relatively large number of participants, and the users are likely to expect frequent activity. A personal website, on the other hand, is updated

much less frequently. This creates different expectations, which has consequences for how users engage with the different services and tools. Users of social-networking services can expect new content every time they visit the site; however, in the case of an individual website, a journal or a weblog, one cannot expect daily updates.
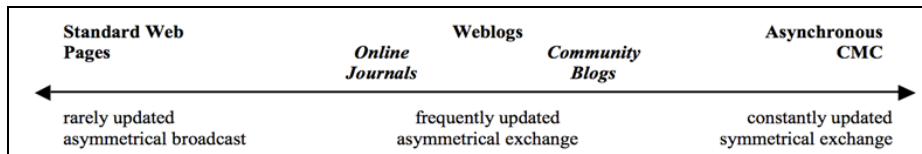
Standard Web Pages	Weblogs		Asynchronous CMC
	Online Journals	*Community Blogs*	
rarely updated asymmetrical broadcast	frequently updated asymmetrical exchange		constantly updated symmetrical exchange

Figure 4: Weblogs have qualities that make them able to fulfil different communication needs, form one-to-one discussions to collaboration within an online community[vii]

Figure 4 illustrates how weblogs "bridge the gap" between different forms of asynchronous computer mediated communication (CMC). Weblogs find their place between personal communication and communication within a community. Thus, weblogs are useful tools in educational situations where one wants to encourage individuals to present and reflect upon their personal experiences, and to discuss this with their fellow students.

Weblogs are normally written by an individual, but often with close connections to a number of other users. Thus, weblogs share some features both with asynchronous discussion forums and standard web pages. Weblogs are developed to fulfil the needs of individuals, who become able to connect their learning activities to other users within various peer networks. VLEs, on the other hand, are to a larger extent developed to provide more centralized educational services (Siemens 2006; Hoem 2009). Compared to VLEs one can argue that weblogs are more oriented towards what is happening on the Internet, and offer individual users a safe haven from which they can approach and reflect upon external information resources.

Most VLEs, including the one used to support parts of this course, often try to facilitate a number of different ways of communicating. These systems normally include individual pages, personal journals, forums, chat-rooms, a variety of tools that support different tests, and so on. From one perspective this makes the system "complete". However, one can argue that the large variety of tools does not always encourage communication on a more personal level. When one wants students to take a stand and to express their personal opinions on a specific topic, one sometimes needs other tools. Weblogs and similar tools seem to have some of this potential, and the students should learn how to master these tools as a Personal Learning Environment (PLE) (Hoem 2009).

One noteworthy difference between PLEs and most VLEs is how they differentiate between users. On the one hand, in an ordinary VLE there are distinct differences between the possibilities offered to the educators and those offered to the students. In some situations, this is a necessary feature, say, when doing individual assessments. On the other hand, when one uses weblogs, the educators and students have the same possibilities. There are no "backdoors" that allow educators to see information that is hidden from the other users. One can argue that this creates another level of trust: neither the educators nor the students are able to hide any information from their peers. In such an open environment, all users are able to see their peers' work and the responses from tutors, other students and even from persons "external" to the learning environment. An open environment stimulates the students' interest in developing a positive presentation of their work, and encourages

the students to contribute, share and refine information through what can be characterized as collective knowledge-building.

As part of the course, the students were introduced to some "Web 2.0" tools. Few educator use Web 2.0 tools as an integrated part of their pedagogy. Many students do, however, use this kind of tool quite extensively. This represents a largely untapped potential in higher education. The instructors, therefore, introduced the participants in the course, most of them HEI teachers themselves to essential Web 2.0 tools. Weblogs (Blogger.com) were used to publish the students' reflection upon their own work and their progression. The course instructors also introduced the students to social bookmarking (delicious.com and Google Reader) to facilitate both the collection of online resources and the sharing of these resources. Finally, the students learned to work with shared documents (Google Documents) to be able to collaborate on texts and presentations. The blogs were also used as a "hub" where the different elements (bookmarks and documents) could be presented.

International collaboration

As mentioned above, one of the challenges that international e-learning courses face is the students' holidays, exams and other duties at their own university. These variations make it hard for the online course to follow a strict schedule. It is critical, therefore, that the weekly programmes are structured with assignments going over a period longer than one week, which makes it possible for students to find time for collaboration. Giving them an overview of all the weekly programmes, tasks and readings in the beginning of the course is also helpful. Because of these small amendments, the students get a chance to plan their work.

Audiovisual triggers or a short video case can provide a "common starting point", and results in deeper reflection and better discussions among the students. Mandatory comments from peers can be planned by letting students comment upon each other's work. Following the principle of "transparency" in the classroom, the students present their products and assignments in e-portfolios that are open for everybody to read and comment. The teachers' feedbacks to each student are also available for the others to read and learn from.

When planning the tasks for the students, it is important to be aware of the difference between collaborative learning and cooperation.
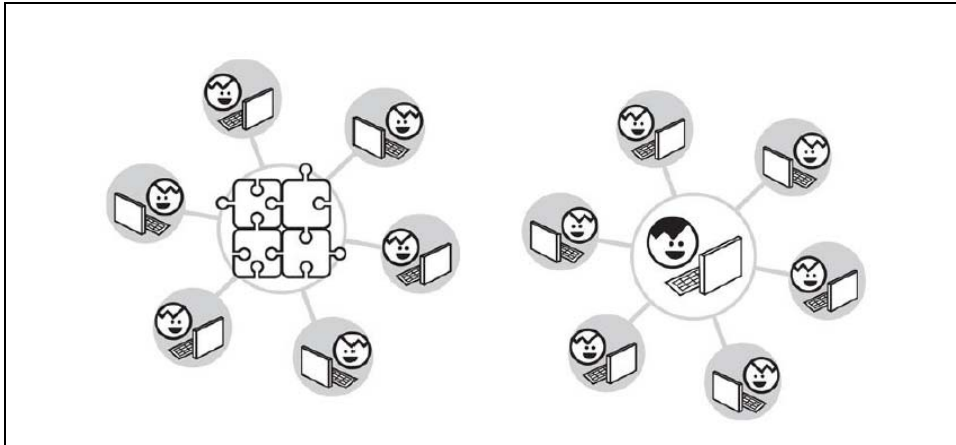
Figure 5:[viii] *Cooperation/Collaboration (VIRTUAL BOOK e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education)*

In the picture on the left in figure 5, the students cooperate; they are solving small tasks on their own, as parts of a jig-saw puzzle. Here, they only learn from what they have done, but not from other students' work. If the students have to solve 'authentic' tasks where they have to share knowledge, discuss, and create a new understanding, their knowledge will be increased through collaboration within a community of learners.

The e-pedagogy course makes the students aware of the theories of Garrison & Anderson's (2003) model, "The Community of in Inquiry", which gives useful hints for the planning of an e-learning course.
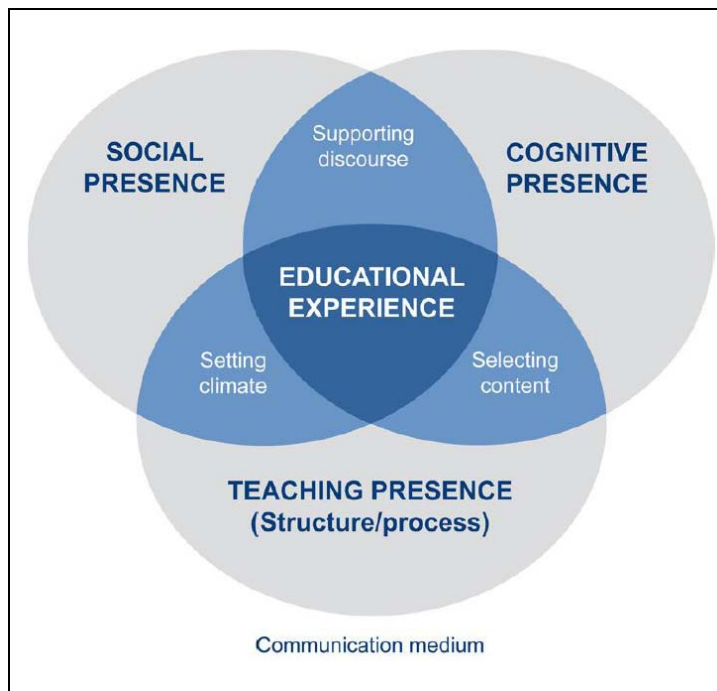
Figure 6: Community of Inquiry[ix] *(VIRTUAL BOOK, e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education)*

As one can see from figure 6, *Social presence*, C*ognitive presence* and *Teaching presence* are equally important for the students' learning process. By letting students and teachers present themselves in the VLE and to share professional and personal experiences, social presence is created. A well structured course, facilitated discussions and chats, and the use of open

commentary to students support the teaching presence. Authentic tasks for comparative work create a cognitive presence and challenge the students to develop and co-construct knowledge. This element is important in order to achieve deep learning (Marton et al. 1986/2000). Peer support among students and open feedback from teachers make a bridge between social and cognitive presences, and thus support dialogue and critical reflections.

A virtual Book: the e-pedagogy course ac Creative Commons

One of the goals in the e-pedagogy project was to create an online learning resource. With the help from the staff at the Media Centre at HiB, the educators started to develop the content for the Virtual Book in between the two courses. The material was presented to the students of the second cohort, and their reactions and comments were taken into consideration when the book was finished.
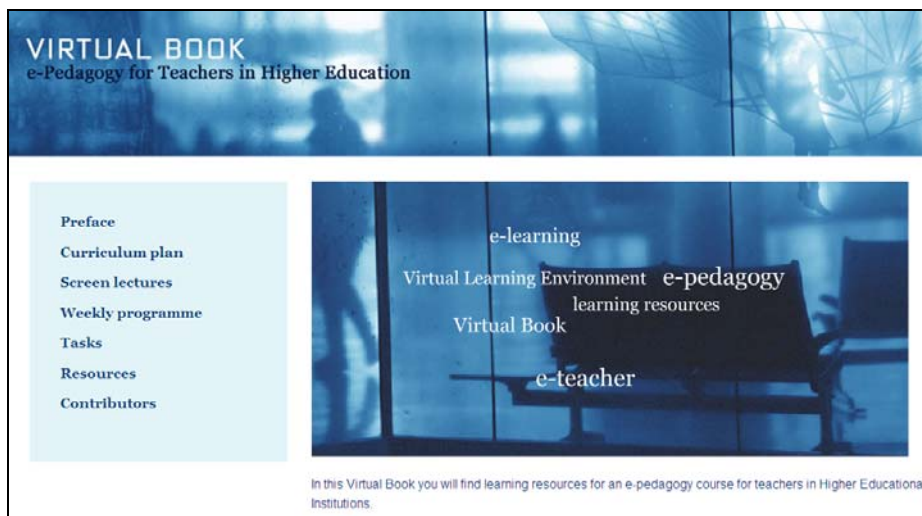

Figure 7: The front page of the virtual learning material (VIRTUAL BOOK e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education)

Here the Curriculum Plan, an overview of the main readings, an outline of the 12-week programme and the tasks is presented, along with 5 screen-lectures (figure 8).

Through a Creative Commons license[x] , the teaching material is presented in the web resource the *Virtual Book, E-pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education* (http://www.virclass.net/eped/ (Larsen & Hole 2009).
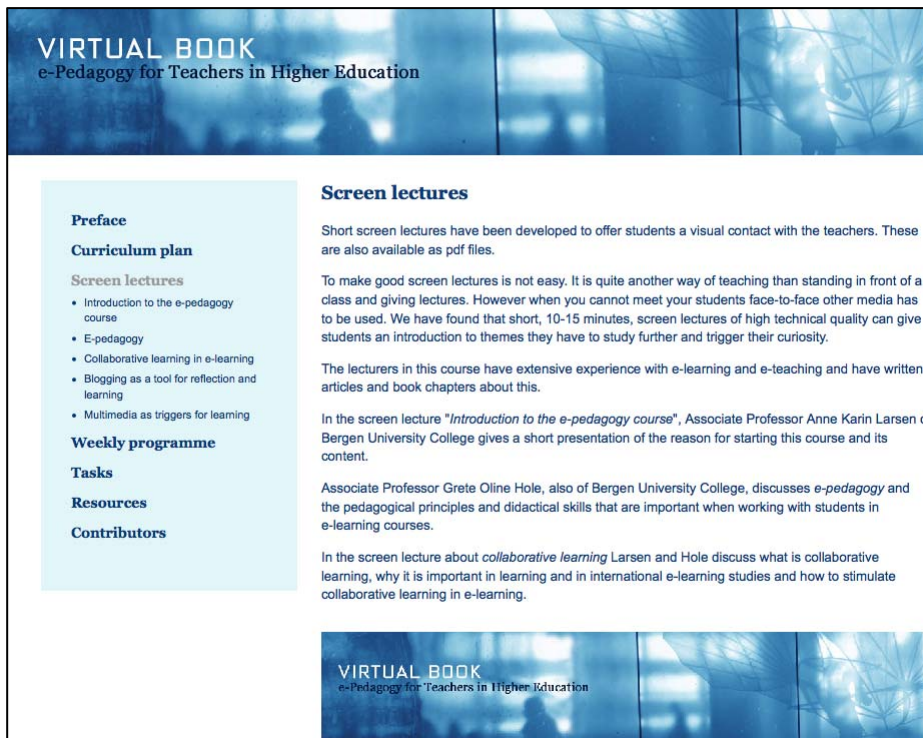
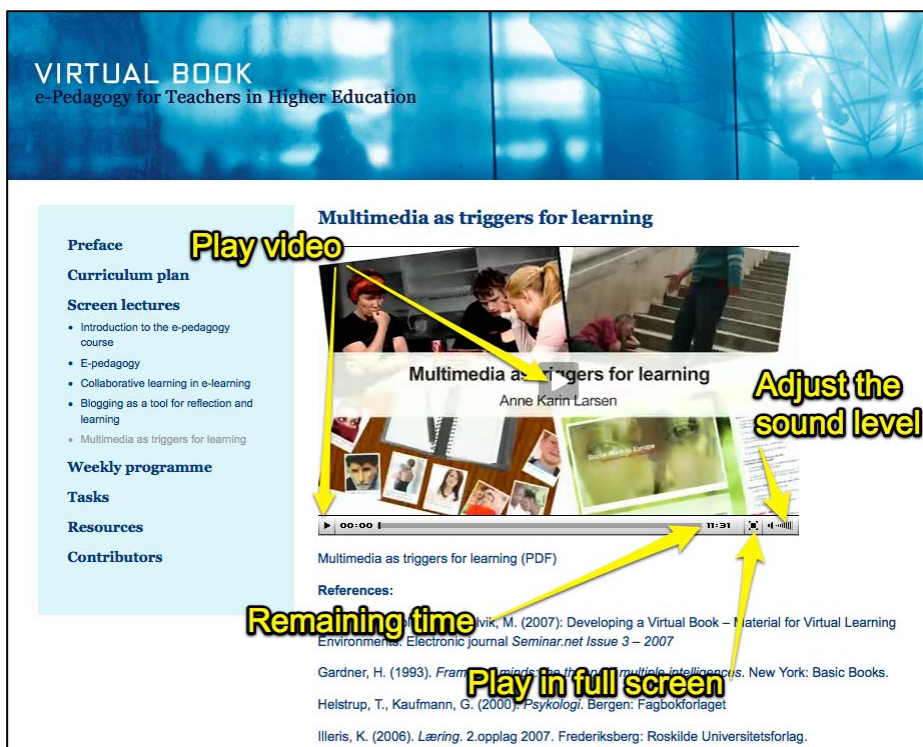*Figure 8: Screen lectures (VIRTUAL BOOK e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education)*

Figure 9 – Illustration of features (VIRTUAL BOOK e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education)

The screen lectures are supplemented with a pdf file with the manuscript, as well as with a list of suggested readings. Earlier experiences have shown that

the opportunity to listen to the lessons while viewing the teacher, as well as reading the manuscript, makes it easier for non-English learners to understand the content (Larsen, Fahlvik & Hole 2007).

In one of the screen lectures, Associate Professor (PhD) Jill Walker Rettberg from the University of Bergen presents the use of weblogs in the learning process.

Figure 10: Blogging as a tool for reflection and learning (VIRTUAL BOOK e-Pedagogy for Teachers in Higher Education).
(http://www.virclass.net/eped/index.php?action=static&id=29)

Student Experiences

To what extent does the course give the students the wanted outcomes? Did they find the course useful, and has the course influenced the way they teach? In the final survey, 100 per cent of the respondents (six of 12) agreed that what they had learnt during the course had influenced their ordinary teaching. At the open question regarding *how* and *why,* they mentioned:

> "... more focus on how to give feedback"
> "....giving more attention to students"
> "... more student-activity during my course"
> "...and transparency has been an important value in the classes. I have employed participative tools as Google docs, blogs, etc. I use a more ample use of audiovisual resources, among other things"

Both transparency and peers' comments were highly valued, as well as practice-related course content and the strict weekly structure whereby the tasks were addressed on the bulletin board.
The intention of designing the course as hands-on training, where students had demonstrated examples of how to do it, was successful, as far as the surveys tell us.

> "The way this course is structured gives me a terrific example on how this works. During this course I often thought that it is amazing how the

content of the course and the way it is set up contributes to this learning process"

The ones who benefited most from the course were students who already had some digital literacy; lack of basic ICT knowledge was a problem for some. This could have been sorted out by defining a minimum level of ICT competence for applicants. Even though this was an e-learning course, the campus week was highly valued. Both immediately after the course had ended, and at the last survey, all students stated that the F2F week was important. Some even suggested that there should have been more time at the campus.

Conclusion

Experiences from many years of international online courses for European Social Work students have been utilized in developing a blended e-pedagogy course for teachers in Higher Education. With the 'Model of Relation between Didactical Categories' as framework, a Community of Inquiry was created by following Salmon's step of becoming an e-learners within a situated-learning perspective. Even though all the students in the course were experienced teachers, they clearly expressed the need for new skills relating to technical issues connected to e-teaching. They know their topics and how to transmit these to their students in class. But to do this in a virtual environment, they felt that both the confidence through the mastering of the different tools and the competence to choose the best tool for the expected learning outcome were essential.

We find that by using principles and methods for sound e-learning and e-teaching in an online course, the student can reach the wanted learning outcomes. The students' evaluations have demonstrated that a carefully designed hands-on training course ensures that the students acquire the necessary competences to be efficient e-teachers.

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[ii] The commercial VLE *it's learning* is used. But the course has taken care to ensure that all teaching and learning materials are independent from any specific VLE.

[iii] European Platform for World Wide Social Work, http://www.eusw.unipr.it/

[iv] We are grateful for the permission to use this model from Salmon (2004, p 29).

[v] In Norway the European- or German-influenced way of speaking about "Didactic" is used. Wit roots in the German Geistwissenchaft und Bildungstheorie, didactic in this sense relates to the "art of teaching". The concept is used in a more "narrow" meaning within Anglo-American teaching, referring to the "methods of teaching" (Nordkvelle 2004).

[vi] Introduced by Bjørndal and Lieberg in 1978; several Norwegian educational researchers have since elaborated the model.

[vii] From Herring et al. (2004, p. 23).

[viii] After Munkvold et al. (2008, p. 43).

[ix] We are grateful for the permission to use this model from Garrison and Anderson (2003 pp. 28).

[x] http://creativecommons.org/