

Are We Ready to Move Towards a New Type of Teacher Training?

Case Study: The WETEN Project

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Abstract—To assure a quality learning process in Higher Education, continuous training of teachers is a priority. This paper is a case study about the training of trainers organized in the WETEN project, presenting how the topics were chosen, how the educational technologies and facilitation contributed to the building of learning community.

Keywords—Higher Education, HE, teachers training, web 2.0, social media, WETEN

I. INTRODUCTION

Bologna process changes have as consequences the increasing demands made on academic staff to contribute to life-long learning activities and to put the focus on restructuring of teaching and learning, on student centered learning. Thus, professional development of the academic staff has an important contribution to make in the realization of the Bologna objectives. A quality education requires teachers, who are better and continuously trained, who assume the responsibility of improving continuously their own knowledge and skills, who are motivated, enthusiastic, e-mature, who collaborate, sharing their experiences and learn from the others, from their students too, who innovate, improving support for learners through new educational technologies [1].

This education paradigm implies reform of the initial and in-service training of teachers and trainers to prepare them for their new responsibilities, in particular by highlighting the requirement and the opportunities for continuous professional development of academic staff from Higher Education (HE) Institutions.

Among European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within HE Institutions published by European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) [2] are mentioned that institutions should have ways of verifying that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent for these tasks (quality assurance of teaching staff) [3].

In this context, this paper is a case study about the training of trainers from HE organized within the framework of the WETEN (definition: see Section II) project [4]. With a focus on how the topics were chosen and how the educational technologies and facilitation contributed to the building of learning community, the paper presents:

- a short description of the WETEN project (aims, objectives, key activities).
- the current situation of teachers' experience in using new educational technologies from two partner countries (Moldova and Ukraine).
- two models of the integration of new technologies in teachers training (approaches from Sweden and Romania).
- the potential benefits of these type of training through highlighting some of the problematic issues - and barriers we encountered.
- a proposed agenda for future research and development of teachers' training scenarios for the HE sector.

II. THE WETEN PROJECT: SHORT PRESENTATION

Western-Eastern Teachers education network (WETEN) is a three years project funded within the EU TEMPUS

Programme. The project started in 2009 and is coordinated by Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania.

The HE Institutions from Moldova and Ukraine are characterized by a limited use of digital services, limited ICT integration in their on-campus teaching, and a very low proportion of e-learning courses.

The provision of formal retraining for teachers from HE Institutions from Moldova and Ukraine for ICT implementation in the curricula is seldom and uncoordinated.

In the framework of the WETEN project, a network of university teachers from European HE Institutions is built to share expertise on effective learning and teaching in universities. This network for pedagogical innovation in HE aims to bring together experts from universities from Europe, to share good practice, materials and new teaching methods with teachers from five HE Institutions in two eastern countries, Moldova and Ukraine.

In order to redesign their own courses, teachers from the universities in Moldova and Ukraine who are partners in WETEN will take part in five courses [5]:

1. Student centred learning.
2. Curriculum design.
3. Quality of teaching.
4. ICT enhanced learning.
5. Technologies of e-learning.

These 5 courses are developed by domestic faculties trained by the EU partners (Lithuania, Portugal, Romanian, and Sweden). The training sessions in Sweden and Romania are presented below.

III. TRAINING OF TRAINERS

The experience of EU partners in methodology and methods of mapping and enhancing education, in promoting new teaching methods, in creating eLearning systems, as well as application of methods of effective management in this field would be extremely useful for partner universities. The project has achieved this goal via training domestic faculties to propagate EU values, advocate for Moldovan and Ukrainian universities.

The training for trainers' activities of faculties from the participating partner institutions (Ukraine and Moldova) at EU member institutions has given insights into pedagogic practice at HE and has identified good and innovative practice.

There has been in total five such training activities in the EU member countries: Belgium, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Sweden.

We will here exemplify with the training activities at KTH in Stockholm and at Timsoft Ltd. Romania.

These activities imply short-term training for trainers in mastering and use of eLearning environments and new educational technologies. The training sessions have been organised to update and enhance the needed competences of teachers: how to use the eLearning platforms for sharing content, for promoting action learning, for management of learning activities.

□ Training in Sweden: Blended Approach Using LMS

The training at KTH (Royal Institute of Technology) took place for one week in January 2010. From Moldova there were eight and from Ukraine three participants. They represented university presidents, university vice presidents and faculties.

The aim was to inform about generic staff training of new employed faculties, their specific training in web based learning, KTH use of LMS, blogs, videos, podcasts. Also to give input to the five training courses for partner universities' staff developed in the project.

The titles were:

- Good elearning design: What to think about? Learning by practicing. Self-reflexion. Blogging. The course is never finished.
- Elearning academic staff training. Basic communication and teaching.
- From PLATO global education networking to mash up global university. Historical overview of net based education at KTH from 1979 to 2009.
- Web 3.0: Remote and virtual laboratories.
- IPR, copyrights and Creative Commons licenses.
- Plagiarism, cultural differences among international students, use of Urkund [6] web based system for text matching.
- Interactive HDTV via fiber networks in Sweden and globally.
- Bridging net based introductory course in physics.
- Resource Center for Net Based Education an KTH Virtual Campus Project.
- Support resources: Learning Lab, librarian on duty, math mentoring.
- Net based coaching in mathematics for grade 6-12 pupils by KTH students.
- Moving media, video recording of lectures, streaming server.
- Academic staff training in Sweden and at KTH historically from 1970 to 2010.
- Elearning K-12 staff training.
- Online assessment.
- Accreditation of elearning.
- Benchmarking of elearning.

The training was organized with an introduction by an expert of each subject followed by discussions. A specific problem during these discussions is that not everybody is fluent in English so translations into Romanian and Russian must be done; this hinders somewhat the smoothness of the discussions.

All the materials were published in a LMS, the teachers having to participate in online activities after the face-to-face training. These activities were facilitated and contributed in building a real learning community.

□ Training in Romania: Blended Approach Using Microblogging

The learning community was consolidated during the training organized in Romania, by Timsoft, a company specialized in eLearning and mobile applications.

The training was organized in a blended manner, using the microblogging platform Cirip.eu [7], implemented by Timsoft.

Besides the facilities of a microblogging platform, Cirip.eu provides the following:

- *Embedding multimedia objects in notes:* images, audio and (live) video clips, live-streaming, presentations, files, google docs and forms, cognitive visualizations as diagrams, learning designs as mindmaps etc.
- *Sending and receiving messages* via the web, mobile, SMS, IM (Yahoo and Jabber), e-mail, Firefox/Chrome extensions, API, Twitter, RSS, desktop and other 3rd party applications, etc.
- *Creating public or private user groups.* Collaboration groups can be created between the participants in an event, members of a class or university year, for a course enhancement or in order to run an entire online course. Groups have an announcements section (*Group News*), where moderators can post notes and materials such as SCORM/LOM objects, for group activities.
- *Domain specification for microblogs and groups.* This simplifies the search for microblogs or groups of a certain domain, for example educational microblogs or groups used for online courses or workshops.
- *Monitoring RSS feeds* for sites, blogs, social networks or search feeds.
- *Tagging the content.*
- *Creating and conducting polls and quizzes,* (which can be answered online or by SMS).
- *Visualizing statistics and representations of the users/groups interaction networks.*

Cirip.eu integrates a wide range of Web2.0 applications and social networks organized around educational resources, many of them in Top 100 Tools for Learning 2009 [8].

The training was focused on the following topics:

- Social learning in HE.
- Web2.0 in HE.
- Open Educational Resources (OER).
- Moodle LMS.

There were also examined different solutions for delivering online courses, for learning enhancement, for integrating social learning in formal learning provided by Timsoft, and by three Romanian universities:

- University Politehnica of Timisoara.
- University of West Timisoara.
- University Vasile Goldis Arad.

The materials of the training were prepared by teachers and trainers from Timsoft and the three mentioned universities; this way bringing a wide experience and perspective.

On Cirip.eu a private group dedicated to training was opened [9]. The aims of the group were:

- To gather the materials, interactions and collaborative multimedia exercises during the training;

- To livestream the presentations during the meeting that could be watched and commented by the partners and teachers who did not take part in the training;
- To offer an environment for practicing new educational technologies, such as microblogging and the social networks whose resources are embedded in cirip notes;
- To integrate future reflections and interactions with other teachers who did not take part in the f2f training.

The content of the group was enlarged with *feeds/search feeds* monitored by the group members using the platform corresponding facility; they are delicious.com feeds on project topics, but also with the *_weten* tag [10] corresponding to the collection built by the group members.

The interaction in the group and on the platform continued after a face-to-face meeting. In this way the learning community was enlarged with Cirip members such as students, trainers, teachers, practitioners, becoming a real community of practice.

Almost all of the group members built her/his own Personal Learning Environment on cirip, which can include:

- Connection/ communication with the followed users.
- The groups they participate in, according to the topics of interest.
- The site/blog/network/search feeds.
- The social networks providing educational objects, which can be included in messages.

In the group dedicated to learning designs, the trained teachers could discuss, validate and improve the scenarios of the new courses they have developed, formalizing them as mindmaps embedded in cirip notes.

All the interactions on Cirip constitute also an important dissemination activity of the WETEN project.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

During the last years, there exists a growing interest in social media, both in society and in education, with tools such as blogs and microblogs, folksonomies, RSS feeds, wikis, media-sharing applications, networking applications, and other social artifacts. When applied to higher education, these new Web2.0 technologies enhance students' learning experiences through customization, personalization, and rich opportunities for networking and collaboration [11].

In this context, the trainings presented above were designed such as to offer complementary topics, and also complementary technologies, consolidating a real learning community. Besides the knowledge on the proposed topics, the trainings have given the participants knowledge and experience:

- In online communication and collaboration.
- In collaboratively using of Web2.0 technologies and applications.
- In creating Personal Learning Environments.
- In participating in communities of practice.

Participating in the blended training programs have allowed teachers, themselves nontraditional students, to

learn experientially under the same conditions as their future students.

Trainings have provided an opportunity to learn about new learning technologies, but also models for best practices.

As we mentioned above, the approach proposed by the WETEN project tries to fill a gap between the theoretical and practical aspects of blended learning for trainers.

Developing an important number of courses for different target groups, using new technologies, the WETEN project could become a real pool for research, for experimentation of blended learning techniques.

However, we believe it is necessary to reconsider the role of educators. Thus, teachers need to

- Assume a new attitude (without going to extremes);
- Set themselves up as innovators in education, by promoting new pedagogical objects: courses under an audio/video form (podcasts, videocasts), books/manuals in the shape of a wiki, communicating with our students through blogs, etc.
- Try to bring arguments in favour of a taking a correct stand when faced with these realities.
- Plead in favour of renewing our psycho-pedagogical tools.
- Enjoy the pleasure offered by the act of knowledge.

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