

Experiences from Open and Distance Learning
A European Perspective

Vivien Hodgson
Department of Management Learning, Lancaster University
Lancaster, UK

Paper for Businet and ESA workshop
Knokke October 5th 2001

Introduction

In 1995 a number of previously separate educationally focused European Commission programmes were amalgamated into the one SOCRATES programme. Existing programmes such as Erasmus and Lingua all came under the SOCRATES programme and, in addition, new Actions were added including one called Open and Distance Learning (The action has recently been renamed Minerva). Since its inception in 1995 the ODL/Minerva Action has been at the forefront of supporting projects at the EU level that seek to understand the educational and pedagogical issues and implications that are involved in adopting ODL approaches and integrating new technology into educational practice including for lifelong learning.

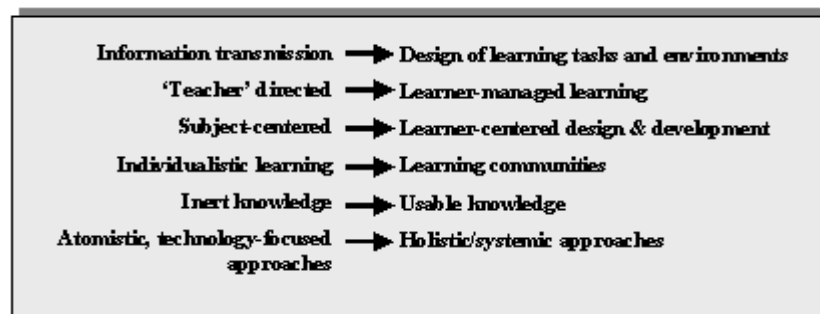
I would therefore like to introduce you to some of the work that has been done in the Action. In particular I will focus on some of the ODL models that have been developed by the different projects and some of the issues and typologies for thinking about ODL and the design of virtual learning programmes or courses that have been identified.

Whilst not many of the projects have worked specifically in the Business/Management field the work that they have done is none the less relevant to this field and to arguably any discussion about how ODL should be used for supporting lifelong learning. Not least because they:

1. They frequently use and develop the Web as a specialist information rich resource
2. They claim to seek to adopt constructionist rather than instructional educational approaches

Constructionist Approaches to Learning

There is much discussion in the educational literature currently about constructionist approaches to learning and in the ODL/ Networked learning literature in particular. The main differences between an instructional and constructionist approach has been summarised as follows:



The above summary is taken from a recently completed project at Lancaster on Networked Learning in Higher. The project produced an extensive set of notes and guidelines for effective networked learning. The guidelines are available on the Web at <http://csalt.lancs.ac.uk/jisc/advice.htm>

It is frequently taken almost as a given that through adopting ICT supported approaches to education more active learner centred educational practice will follow.

This is of course does not automatically follow as is well illustrated in a recent study published in Learning and Instruction where the authors found none of the courses they looked at met all the indicators and /or principles of constructionism that they had identified in a discussion list that explored the concept, process and facilitation of constructionist learning (see G. Tenenbaum, S.Naidu, O.Jegade and J.Austin (2001) 'Constructionist Pedagogy in Conventional On-Campus And Distance Learning Practice: An Exploratory Investigation' Learning and Instruction, Vol. 11 (2) p.p. 87-109)

Tenenbaum et al identified 8 indices of constructionism;

1. ethos/environment (learner-centred; tutor or content centred; neutral or indecisive)
2. authenticity of content (realistic/real world; theoretical)
3. learners' personal experiences (sought or offered and utilised; not sought or utilised)
4. learner-learner interaction (encouraged; not sought; encouraged and tutor participation)
5. learner "thinking aloud" (development of student own line of thinking encouraged; not sought or encouraged)
6. feedback on contributions (positive and encouraged; negative or dismissive)
7. development of thinking skills/understanding (dominant; partial or incident neglected), and
8. learners contributions to tutorials (publicly valued; not valued; not sought)

They conclude that the minimal existence of constructionist principles that they found might stem from a lack of knowledge of these principles and the fact that they are difficult to implement.

Some years ago now Richard Boot and myself developed a framework that examined the different assumptions behind what we termed a dissemination and development orientation to open learning. The two orientations that we identified were based on examination of two different open learning courses and arguably the categories we developed then help us to see more clearly the differences in both theory and practice between a more 'instructional' and more 'constructionist' approach to learning

Dissemination/Instructional Orientation Development/Constructionist Orientation

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE	Knowledge as <i>valuable commodity</i> existing independently of people. Can be stored and transmitted.	Knowing as <i>process</i> of engaging with and attributing meaning to the world, including oneself and ones own position.
ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LEARNING	<i>Acquisition and addition</i> of facts, concepts and skills	<i>Elaboration/reflection and change</i> of meaning making processes. Enhancement of personal effectiveness
PURPOSE OF EDUCATION	<i>Dissemination</i> of stored knowledge	<i>Development</i> of the whole person and personal knowledge/practice
MEANING OF INDEPENDENCE	Individualism	Autonomy
BASIS OF LEARNER CHOICE	<i>Cafeteria</i> Selection from a set range of carefully prepared dishes	<i>Self-catering</i> Planning menu's, deciding raw materials required and experimenting with ways of preparing
COURSE STRUCTURE	<i>Based on syllabus</i> The organisation and sequencing of course materials	<i>Based on collaborative process</i> of planning, deciding and experimenting
CONCERNS FOR RELEVANCE	Consideration given to problems of <i>application and transfer</i>	Participants <i>own working lives</i> regarded as prime source of learning material
TO ENGAGE SUCCESSFULLY WITH COURSE	Students encouraged to improve <i>study skills</i>	Participants encouraged to <i>learn to learn</i>
THE SOCIAL ELEMENT	Other people seen as source of <i>moral support</i> , encouragement and comparison for individualised learning task	Other people seen as <i>inherent part of learning</i> venture, providing challenge and collaboration in the construction of knowledge
TUTOR'S ROLE	<i>Subject expert</i> Guardian of knowledge Responsible for teaching or instructing May delegate to course media and materials	<i>Facilitator</i> , resource person and co-learner. Offering personal and social assistance. Meanings he/she attributes to events no more valid than anyone else's
ASSESSMENT	Measure of proficiency against <i>externally recognised standard</i> Tutor as subject expert best person to judge quality of work	Part of learning process Based on <i>collaborative</i> assessment against <i>mutually agreed criteria</i>

Adapted from;
 Boot, R. and Hodgson V.E. (1987) in OU/SRHE publication *Beyond Distance Teaching Towards Open Learning*

Examples of practice from ODL/Minerva

I will now describe some of the models and approaches that Socrates projects have developed and then go on to discuss the issues and implications of working in technology supported learning environments at the European level

In selecting examples of practice from ODL/Minerva I have tried to use those projects that are either intended to include or have value to more than only undergraduate students or which have a clear well articulated educational model that is targeted at students working at least at masters level. I will first give 3 examples and then discuss some of the issues etc. that are reflected in the projects.

1. Euroliterature - <http://www.euroliterature.uib.no/>

Euroliterature is an extensive project that is related to several other Socrates/ODL projects and uses a model that was first developed in an earlier project called Humanities. The objectives of Euroliterature are given as to integrate virtual mobility into the day-to-day practice of students, tutors and teachers in literary departments and to develop permanent institutional links encompassing curriculum development, credit recognition and exchange of teaching resources.

The project is typical of a number of Socrates projects on a number of accounts in that it is in an area that is both claimed to be of European interest and relevance and is a subject that is considered to be increasingly threatened in terms of resources and departments.

The model that Euroliterature has followed is also a fairly common one amongst Socrates projects. Courses or sub-courses/modules are organised around a series of video-conferences which are introduced before hand by a position statement and suggested references (available from the Internet). Each course has demonstrations and/or presentations that are provided by scheduled videoconference sessions as well as by e-mail and the Internet. The teaching staff are from specialised centers conducting relevant research and, in addition, guest academics as well as Ph.D. students from several countries participate by video and e-mail interaction. Thus the approach tries to encourage a vibrant and active learning community that works together on the theme of each course/module.

The courses/modules themselves start first in the different centres/universities participating, and also on the Internet, which is deemed the meeting place for the courses and as already explained each module has a regular sequence of 2-3 scheduled video conferences.

2. EuREX - <http://shiva.uniurb.it/eurex/>

The aim of EuREX is to establish a seminar series on the processes of social transformation and social exclusion impacting on cities and metropolitan areas in Europe. The seminar series claims to addresses crucial issues on a comparative and European perspective and bases its interaction process on ODL technologies allowing a cross-country dissemination of recent theoretical and empirical findings.

The intention in EuREX is to use a complex mix of procedures that involves the use of new IT and an international team of scholars, tutors and students. Professors from 11 Universities in Europe located in six countries are responsible for writing 11 online lectures to support the seminar series and for moderating live chat sessions for 2-3 students from each Partner University. The project aspires to achieve the following as a result of adopting ODL technologies:

- to group leading European urban sociologists, social and urban geographers from different countries, who will provide reading material and lectures on specific sub-issues related to the overall topic of the seminar and to their own research activities; debating also in the forum which will be created on the web sites
- to disseminate among students in the final stage of their diploma, or among Ph.D. students in their early years, the most recent findings of ongoing theoretical and empirical research on the issue
- to use innovative technologies to overcome the time-space gap allowing a more effective access to up-to-date information from ongoing research at a European level to future élite (decision makers, professionals,...).

To date this project has been successful in giving students access to a range of EU specialists/experts but has experienced some difficulties with the implementation of chat sessions and online forums. It is planning to explore video conferencing during the second year as an alternative medium for interaction. Another addition to the second year will be the introduction of visual materials into a 'visual lab' that it plans to establish. The difficulties that the project encountered in implementing successful online forums and chat sessions is not unusual and something I will return to later. Equally, the projects proposed solution to use videoconferencing is not without its own set of potential problems and issues.

3. Transformation in a Comparative EU Perspective

<http://www.soc.lu.se/soc/distans/socrates/enter.html> and
<http://www.soc.lu.se/soc/distans/socrates/mastcourse.html>

In this project the aim is to develop an Internet based Masters course, equivalent to 60 ECTS and accredited according to that system. The title of the course is "Transformation in a Comparative European Perspective – A Masters Course on the Internet". The course focuses on globalisation and social transformation in a comparative European perspective. The course consists of a/ an introductory course common for all students, b/ four optional sub-courses and c/ thesis. The intention is that the introductory course and the different modules can also be used as independent ODL courses after the project has finished

All examinations will take place on the Internet and includes both individual and collaboratively written papers plus active participation online in either virtual seminars or discussion of paper assignments

The course is somewhat different to the previous two examples in that there is an explicit use of collaborative learning. Students from different countries form collaborative learning groups and as a part of the learning process the students sometimes read, discuss and comment upon each other's assignments. A large part of the course is based on a problem-based pedagogy and collaborative learning is one of the pedagogical principles in the course. This means that the teacher in this course mainly has the role of an advisor. In other respects it is similar to the two previous examples in that each module has introductory material and is supported by both compulsory and optional readings.

Overview of Socrates examples and approaches

There are of course many more examples of Socrates projects but the three described are fairly representative of the different approaches and ideas that are adopted by projects. A common feature it will be noticed is they tend to be all either in a specialist area and/or take, not surprisingly, a specifically EU perspective. What is significant about the approach they take and that of many Socrates projects is the use of the Web and/or video conferencing as a means to give access to specialists and/or others working in the same field. Many although not yet all students already use the Web as an information source but what these projects demonstrate is the way it can be utilised to organise dialogue and discussion with both specialists and other students. It is also the case that some projects develop information rich sites in a given subject area e.g. the HERODOT project - <http://geo.eduhi.at/> has developed an information rich resource in several languages for Geography teachers

But as I have just said it is the access to others that is of particular relevance in the three examples just described. The nature of access and interaction utilised by the projects vary from more 'presentational' forms associated with Web based lectures and frequently with video conferencing to more 'dialogical' forms associated with online chat and online forums. These latter however can range in practice from question and answer sessions with specialists to more open discussions that can include specialists, tutors and students or whoever.

Some of the issues or problems (not including technological issues) that projects have encountered in pursuing the approaches/models just described include;

- Use of the English language as the linguafranco
- Insufficient acknowledgment of different approaches and attitudes to UG/Master/Doctoral work in different countries
- Difficulties of integration and academic recognition of work done online as opposed to as part of conventional studies/courses
- Difficulties of coordinating the timing of virtual meetings
- Insufficient attention given to the process and the changing or different roles/responsibilities of both tutors and students

This latter aspect has itself become a subject of a number projects as well as increasingly a topic of interest in the literature. It is recognised in many projects that it is important for

tutors to have the knowledge, skills and experience to facilitate ODL courses and online discussions. Two recent projects have developed online courses and guidelines on this specific aspect and a third has conducted a large-scale survey of students' expectations of the tutor.

See e.g. CEFES - Creating a European Forum in European Studies at <http://www.diff.uni-tuebingen.de/cefes/home.html>, FACILE – Facilitated Open and Distance Learning for Continuing Engineering Education at <http://www.humcap.fi/> and CESOC – The comparison of the expectations of European students on ODL courses at <http://www.norrk.ssv.se/projekt/ceesoc/>

Two other projects that I would like to mention have in one case developed a pedagogical framework for developing ODL courses and in the other a typology for describing and/or benchmarking virtual campuses give particular attention to the role of the teacher in different teaching scenarios.

I will briefly mention the **ODL Framework for Design** project URL - <http://www.ics.lu.se/europe/FRAME-bis/> - and then conclude by describing the typology utilised by the other, BENVIC, project

The first of these two projects then has identified six areas and related sub-areas for evaluating or thinking about a framework for developing an ODL course. The six areas are:

- Policy issues
- Managerial issues
- Ethics, Culture, Social Aspects and language
- Technical Aspects; Course Development and Maintenance
- Design and Delivery Issues
- Technological issues

Between them these six areas (and the sub-areas that each is divided into) cover most aspects that need to be considered across all levels when developing a ODL course or strategy within an organisation

In this short paper I have really focused on design and delivery issues but the others are all-important and must also be given serious attention.

I will conclude then by introducing the work of the BENVIC Project - <http://www.benvic.odl.org>

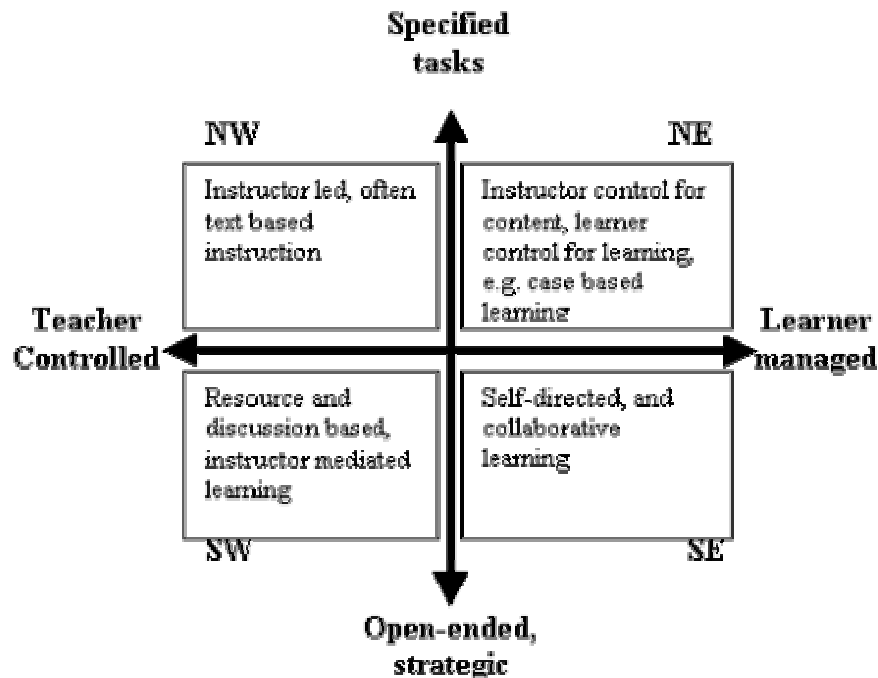
The Benvic project is focused in the establishment of evaluation criteria in order to achieve Quality Standards and/or a Benchmarking framework for evaluating and comparing Virtual Campuses. The concept of a Virtual Campus used in the project is that of distance education and on-line learning in which students, teaching staff and even university administrative and technical staff mainly 'meet' or communicate through technical links.

The project has developed a typology for describing a virtual campus which has altogether 7 dimensions

- The institutional basis and mission
- The scope and offer
- The deployed activities
- The scale of the partnership
- The partnership organisation
- The audiences
- The used teaching/learning scenarios

In looking at the latter dimension i.e. the teaching and learning scenarios that are used in virtual campuses The BENVIC project draws on a model they claim was developed by Coomey, M and Stephenson, J. in Stephenson, J. (ed) Teaching and Learning Online: New pedagogies for the new technologies London Kogan Page

The model has two axis: the locus of control of learning (teacher controlled versus learner managed) and the task specification (specified tasks versus open-ended, strategic learning) as shown in the figure below.



The four quadrants are said to each represent a teaching-learning paradigm:

- teacher controlled, specified learning activities (NW quadrant)
- teacher controlled, open-ended or strategic learning (SW quadrant)
- learner managed specified learning activities (NE quadrant)
- learner managed open-ended or strategic learning (SE quadrant).

Benvic claims that Coomey and Stephenson identified four major dimensions or themes that are discussed in the literature about online learning: dialogue, involvement, support and control. These four dimensions can be considered as major determinants of the scenarios that will be used in a virtual campus. The Benvic report includes a description of each of these paradigms in terms each of these dimensions plus the tutor role. I have included this fuller description as an appendix.

At this point I would like to open up the discussion and see what aspects and projects that I have described feel most relevant to you. If anyone wants additional information on any of the projects that I have mentioned or on the many other Socrates ODL/Minerva there is a database of all projects at <http://siu.no/isoc>.

Two other Web sites that people might find useful or relevant with respect to tutoring online are The Web of Asynchronous learning Networks at <http://www.aln.org/index.htm>

The e-Moderators Home page managed by Mauri Collins and Zane Berge at <http://www.emoderators.com/>

Appendix 1

To illustrate the specific appearances of each dimension in the four paradigms, a longer citation out of Coomey and Stephenson's contribution is given.

The North West Sector (Teacher determined, task specific)

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Dialogue: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher defines /controls online dialogue and interaction• Student responds to teacher questions and mini tasks• Dialogue with peers specified as part of task• Focus of dialogue is usually task oriented problem solving and that problem is set by the instructor |
| Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Little or no scope for learner to influence content• Activity is strictly defined and related to pre-set task• Site is structured to lead learner directly to specific information• Students can access information from a web site before lecture, during• lectures to illustrate points and after lectures to seek support from the instructor |
| Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assumed to come only from the teacher via e-mail or phone calls or• 'traditional' face-to-face meetings• Time-tabled face to face support by teacher or through e-mail• Online tools to help understanding of content• Could involve assignments being posted online and read, with feedback by other |
| Control | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• students but main feedback from instructor• Learner control confined to responses to tasks• Some control over sequencing, and level of engagement• Teacher controls reading materials, content to be learned, deadlines and time required to work on tasks |
| Teacher role | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructor |

The North East Corner (Learner determined, task specific)

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Dialogue: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher sets out the general responsibilities and procedures, but not the participation, content or usage• Scope is confined to the task, but the systems and protocols support student managed dialogue with other students, peers and experts• Much use of asynchronous dialogue and frequently asked questions |
| Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Task focused self-managed groups• Groups can be self-selected and/or self-moderated, |

- deciding own agenda and programme
- Learner able to relate or adapt tasks to own circumstances and aspirations
- Support
 - Online support tools, learning support framework
 - Tutor provides advice on nature of the task, learning goals etc.
 - Tutor feedback available on progress towards task
 - Mainly email contact, or tutor moderated discussion groups
 - Students provide feedback to members of their own groups and others
- Control
 - Conduct of task up to learner
 - Emphasis on navigable links to wide variety of sources
 - Use of resources outside the programme
 - Wide discretion over activities, content, learning outcomes
 - Relates learning to own personal goals
- Teacher role
 - Coach

The South West Sector (Teacher determined open-ended strategic learning activities)

- Dialogue:
 - A combination of dialogue styles found in NW, during the instructor lead segment of the course and SE during the learner managed segment of the course.
 - Could be managed by teacher, focused on the overall direction and purpose of the study
 - Use of asynchronous dialogue but with instructor setting out roles for students, making students participate as leaders or respondents in discussions or asking students to categorise their responses
- Involvement
 - Could start out as solo activity with student learning rules/concepts/theories from online texts and possibly traditional lectures
 - Text may be online but there are also locations for students to write and place their "discoveries", the links that they find, the data and content they discover. Once students have mastered "the basics" , they create something new of their own
 - Group activity mainly confined to course group
 - Discovery, problem solving activities
- Support
 - Tutor support could be online or occasionally face to face
 - Range of support from traditional instructor feedback to assignments in the first phase of the course (NW quadrant), to the instructor reacting as a facilitator, offering suggestions but not answers to student posts during the 'discovery' phase of the course (SE quadrant)

- Control
 - Learner has control of specific learning goals within the generalised goals
 - Manages own unstructured discovery activities within given parameters
 - Free to set own personal goals within the generalised activity
- Teacher role
 - Guide

The South East Sector

- Dialogue
 - *Self or collaboratively (peer-group) directed
 - Wide discretion over choice of discussion groups, from peers to 'public' specialist interest groups
 - Asynchronous dialogue with other specialists
 - External source of specialist assistance, formulation of ideas and exchange of materials
- Involvement
 - Total involvement in the learning activity
 - Could be working alone or in a team
 - Learner relates the learning to own needs - personal, vocational, academic
 - Reflection on progress and meaning
- Support
 - Access to instructor and experts and peers for advice and support
 - Contacts with supervisor initiated and monitored by the learner, facilitated by the system
 - Teacher in background, offering advice on procedures and resources
 - Feedback sought from variety of sources and experts
 - The structure and design of the online learning facilities provide a framework of support within which the learner has considerable discretion
- Control
 - Learner controls the direction and the task
 - Learner determines the goals and outcomes
 - Learner monitors progress
- Teacher role
 - Facilitator