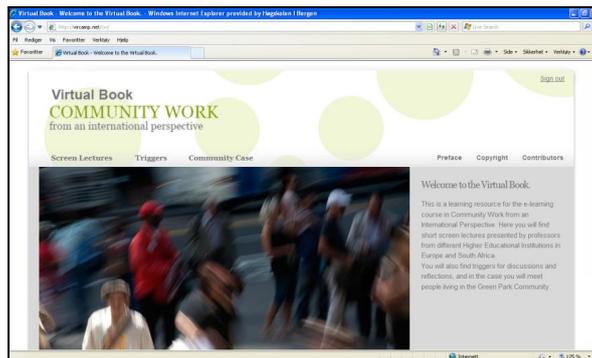




Development of an E-learning Course in Community Work from an International Perspective

Evaluation report from the pilot course 2010

SW-VirCamp project (deliverable 2.3)



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International co-operation in
higher education and training

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Development of an E-learning Course in Community Work from an International Perspective

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WP 2.3: Evaluation Report from the Pilot course

This report is deliverable 2.3 in the Social Work Virtual Campus (SW-VirCamp) project –the evaluation of the pilot course “Community Work from an International Perspective”. The report will present facts and figures from the pilot –both what was planned in the application and what happened during the course. This will be supplemented with data from the process-evaluation of what happened during the course, as well as an evaluation of the products when the pilot-course ended. The voices of all target groups will be presented, and the report will conclude with didactical recommendation for further SW-VirCamp work. Deliverable 6.3, the Program Evaluation of the Pilot from the external evaluator was presented at the teacher meeting in Liepaja, September 2010, and some of those findings will be included in this report.

Background

The Social Work Virtual Campus¹ is an Internet-based international pedagogical project. The project has three main goals: The first is to develop a virtual campus for comparative international studies in social work, the second is to develop a new e-learning module in Community Work and the third is to arrange a pilot course. SW-VirCamp as a project started 2008-10-01 and terminates with the implementation of the pilot course and the delivery of the final report, 30 September 2010.

Many of the partners in SW-VirCamp have earlier collaborated in VIRCLASS (The Virtual Classroom for Social Work in Europe). The VIRCLASS consortium has since 2005 offered 2 different e-learning courses (one of these with 3 alternative modules, awarding students 5/10 ECTS credits) in comparative social work for BA-students in Europe (Larsen and Hole, 2007a & b; Larsen et al, 2008). In total 250 students have followed these courses with 194 passing the final exam in the years 2005-2010.

In addition to the student online courses, an e-pedagogy course (10 ECTS credits) designed for teachers in the project had been arranged twice, educating 10 new e-teachers.

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The experience from VIRCLASS inspired several of the partners to become the core partners in the SW-VirCamp consortium and project, thus benefiting from the achieved knowledge during the earlier collaboration. This common understanding has clearly been very important regarding the partners' work related to the SW-VirCamp project and the deliverables connected to the creation and delivering of the pilot course. Only a committed group with strong ties is willing to devote so much hard work during the 24 months to achieve such an array of different outcomes as shown later in the report.

Brief outline of the project

Before a more detailed report of the pilot course a brief overview of the project as well as the connected deliverables is provided here.

	2008			2009									2010										
	Oct	Nov	Des	Jan	Feb	Ma	Ap	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Ma	Ap	May	June	July-Sept	
Del 2.1	*		*		*																		
Del 2.2												*	*		*		*	**	**				
Del 2.3					*										*			*				*	
Del 3.1	*				Course*		*	Workshop*															
Del 3.2												*	*										
Del 6.1							*				List		*				Draft*						
Del 6.2																							
Del 6.3																							

* Meeting with Minutes

WP 2 Deliverables: 2.1= Curricullum Plan , 2.2 = Course. 2.3 = Evaluation av Pilot Course

WP 3 Deliverables: 3.1= Course for Media Staff, 3.2 = Virtual Learning Material

WP 6 Deliverables: 6.1 = Quality Guide, 6,2 = Internal Evaluation Report Series, 6,3 = Program Evaluation the pilot

Table 1: Timeline



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Pedagogical view

SW-VirCamp is founded on a socio-cultural learning perspective intending to develop a community of learning among students from different countries (Biggs, 2003; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Participation in the e-learning courses gives the students an opportunity to look at commonalities and differences in Social Work practice from different countries and compare their own knowledge and tradition to that of students in other countries.

The Community Work course intends to stimulate creativity in project work as social worker/ community worker. Through interaction between students from different countries working with the same assignments in a transparent classroom, the aim is to stimulate new methods and strategies in community work. Within a situated learning perspective one uses many of the principles from problem-based learning. The students meet problems from “the real world” and work with these together in groups. Portfolio assessment is used which means that all tasks are collected in the students’ own e-portfolio. Having received feedback, students are encouraged to further elaborate what they have done before submitting the task(s) that will be assessed in the final exam. This takes place in a “transparent” learning environment; all students’ tasks and teacher feedback are visible to their peer-students. Reflection on their learning experiences is seen as an important part of both the learning process and professional social work practice. Students are expected to write their reflections in a blog.

An additional challenge for the new course were the specific themes of Community Work; the students needed to learn how community workers act from a “bottom-up” perspective, involving participants within a framework of democratic and open processes and by this means helping each other to co-construct opportunities to change their situation (see below). How to ensure that the students learned the necessary skills through the e-learning course was carefully considered. Early in the project the teacher group decided that the course and the learning material must reflect these principles and an arena for knowledge-building among the participants was developed. The teachers needed to take the “guide-on-the-side” approach, helping the students to discuss issues and encouraging them to bring in their own ideas. Since one of the main challenges in online courses is known to be the cooperation and communication among students during their learning process, special consideration was given as to how to make this possible. Careful planning, adjustments and



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commitment were needed and the optimal consideration regarding students' different time schedules, different holidays and times for exam within the time limits of the SW-VirCamp project were taken.

Participatory Action Research/Participatory Action Learning

The partners decided that the framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Action Learning (PAL) (Reason and Bradbury, 2008) were suitable for the development of a course in Community Work (CW). The reason for this was the fact that community work is based on “*assisting people to improve their own communities by collective action*” (Twelvetrees, 2002, p 1). Continuous feedback and action, based on evaluation is a central tenet of this way of working. The main desired outcome of the competence-based curriculum plan for the Community Work course is that students develop *Competences in theories and methods in community work, Cooperation, and Professional development*. One of the aims of Community Work is to make changes possible and this should be reflected both in the curriculum plan and in the way the students should work with the study-material and actively participate in the development of the course and sharing experiences.

By using the dialectical and reflective methods² of PAL, focusing on ‘shared knowledge and learning’ during the process, the participants get a hands-on experience, and are better equipped to work in accordance with Community Work principles.

Data-sources

There are a large number of data-sources for the evaluation of the pilot course. Briefly one can divide these into data regarding “Expectations” and data about “Experiences”. The first are the written objectives as they are stated in the application, the statements regarding expected outcomes in the Curriculum Plan and statements contained within the Tasks and Assignments given to students during the course. The participants “experiences” are articulated through open-ended questions in the surveys (see below), reflection notes and material in the various blogs used during the course.

² The Action-Research spiral: the “*spiral of self-reflective cycles of planning, acting and reflecting..., then planning..... etc*” (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, pp 596-597).



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Minutes from the meetings are important, covering both Expectations and Experiences. The twelve minutes from WP2 (the Course) were supplemented with minutes from four WP3 (Learning Material) and two WP6 (Quality Guide) meetings.

Datasources	Students	Teachers	Written	
	3 surveys	Reflection notes jan 2009	Objectives in application	
	Task 2 Reflection over learning	4 group interview	Curriculum Plan	
	Exam:	23 students	Teacher blog	Task and assignments
245 ECTS credits		8 teachers in partner survey	Minutes:	12 teacher meetings
Marks				3 WP 3 minutes
				3 WP 6 minutes
WP reports and summaries				

Table 2: Data sources

Surveys

The students were presented with three surveys—one after the first three weeks, the second midway in the course and the final survey at the end of the pilot-course. These surveys were developed as a part of WP 6 (deliverable 6.1, the Quality Guide). The Work-Package leader of WP 6 worked in close collaboration with the project leader, the research group and the teacher group. The surveys addressed both process- and product evaluations and were created with a mixed-method approach, using both quantitative mapping questions and statements evaluated with a Likert scale as well as many qualitative open questions eliciting students' views upon different issues related to the course.

All three surveys addressed ICT facilities, skills and competences in some ways, but each with a different focus. Students' experiences regarding cooperation, use of learning material, and previous knowledge about Community Work were also topics in all surveys. The first survey focused also on the intake procedures and students were asked for suggestions for improvement. This was also addressed in the last survey, as students were asked for recommendation for the next course. In the second and third survey the students were asked about their experiences with the pedagogy of the course, using the principle of transparency, reflection on learning and collaboration in the learning



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process. The second survey aimed mainly to cover the students' thoughts about their learning process in the course as well as mapping how they experienced the course. They were asked to state the three most positive and the three most challenging things so far as well as their comments regarding different issues related to the course. According to the "process-evaluation principles", adjustments were made after both the first and second survey after the students' valuable comments. In the last survey the students were also asked about their overall experiences and satisfaction with the course.

According to the principles of PAR/PAL the results of the first survey were communicated back to the students. The project-leader made a summary of the findings' and presented it for the students on the Learning Management System (LMS). She also expressed her thanks and the students were invited to provide further feedback.

This way of including the students as central actors within the development and refinement of the pilot course might be the reason that the subsequent surveys had a very good response rate, and that the students really put a lot of effort into giving detailed responses to the open-ended questions. These answers were important both for the adjustment of the course during the pilot, as well as for necessary changes to be made regarding intake, partners' responsibilities, tasks and other content related aspects of subsequent courses.

Teachers feed-back

Teachers' views upon the process come from a many different sources. A survey, group discussion/interviews, reflection notes and a blog were all used during the 24 months of the project. Eight teachers answered the Partners midway evaluation in November 2009, giving useful feed-back including their experiences to that point.

There were four group interviews with the teacher group. These group interviews were created as an important part of the "dialectical process" of Community Work in the project. They showed themselves to be an arena for discussion and reflection upon how to make and carry through the course as well as an opportunity to share more practical aspects of teaching Community Work online.

The first group interview was conducted in February 2009, at the first meeting related to the development of the Curriculum Plan and the course and the second group interview in January 2010, just before the course started. The third interview was undertaken in April, halfway through the pilot-course, using the VITERO online conference room. The last interview took place at the final teacher



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meeting in the beginning of September; two months after the first course had ended. After the first interviews a summary was written, and the results were presented for the participants asking for further comments or suggestions for revisions.

Before the first meeting all involved partners were asked to write a brief reflection note on core-elements in Community Work. On their own initiative a teacher blog was set up as a common arena for sharing reflections on experiences during the course. From 23 January 2010 to 1 May 2010 there were 21 postings and 16 comments in this Teacher blog, covering different aspects and challenges when teaching in an online course in Community Work .

Other data-sources

As stated earlier many issues are important when evaluating a pilot course like this—the statements about the student’s expected learning outcomes, the phrasing of tasks for students, the products of the course, the output of students final assignments, reflection notes and the interaction between the students and the teacher during the course.

The curriculum plan and the tasks and assignments given the students during the course are available at the project website and in the LMS. These “first-hand data” are on hand for the evaluator. Data regarding the collaboration between the students and between students-teachers, as well as the reports’ from the students’ answers in the assignments and their reflections in the blog are however only reported through “second-hand data”. That is, all data regarding these issues stems from minutes of the different meetings as well as from the teacher blog and open-ended questions in the surveys. Even though all students and teachers have given their consent that findings from surveys and group-interviews can be used for evaluation and research, a close surveillance of the collaboration among all the included partners in the course would be regarded as a breach of confidentiality between students and teachers in the teaching-and-learning process, even in a transparent classroom.

Results

Here a brief outline of the different outcomes regarding the pilot course will be presented. A more in-depth discussion of the consequences’ of these will be given later.



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The Curriculum Plan

At the end of September 2009 a competence-based Curriculum Plan was approved by all partner Universities. Due to illness in the teacher group, there was a slight variation in the timescale from what was stated in the application, but this had no untoward consequences for the future progress of the programme.

Product: The Curriculum Plan

The curriculum plan gives a brief introduction to the course, describes the contents and objectives, learning outcomes and competences, study-methods and necessary pre-requisites (e.g. Internet access) and information about assessment, credits and certificates, readings and the target group for the course. The Curriculum Plan is available at: <http://vircamp.net.show.php?id=345>.

Developing a competence-based curriculum plan, in accord with deliverable 2.1 had consequences for the collaboration among the partners. Some partners had long experiences with this; and could lead the development process.

Process: The creation of the Curriculum Plan

As a part of the Bologna declaration and the European Qualification Framework (EQF) there has been a trend to focus on Learning Outcomes for students instead of on the content of the course. Learning Outcomes is a clear statement of what the learner is expected to achieve and how he/she is expected to demonstrate the achieved competences. This is still not implemented in all European Higher Education Institutions (HEI). While some of the partners, for example Inholland University of Applied Sciences and K.H. Kempen University College have long experiences with this outcome-based approach to curriculum plans, it was quite novel for other partners. Creating the Curriculum Plan necessitated a fruitful collaboration around the process of defining the necessary expected Learning Outcomes, the competencies needed for these and the indicators/descriptors for those competencies. This work had spinoff benefits for teachers beginning to engage with an outcome-based approach in their own HEI.



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The Study program

A detailed and carefully structured programme for each week of the course including Learning Outcomes, tasks, learning recourses and suggested reading was finished by November 2009 before the course started on 25 January 2010.

Product: The Study program

A complete study programme and the weekly programmes gives the students an overview of workload and tasks during the specific period of 19 weeks (the last two weeks being their final assignment period). Having this information at the outset enables students plan their course work.

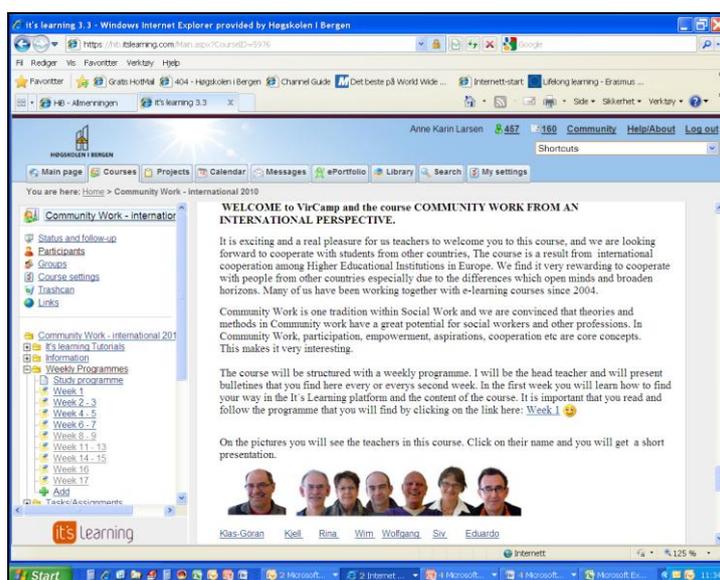


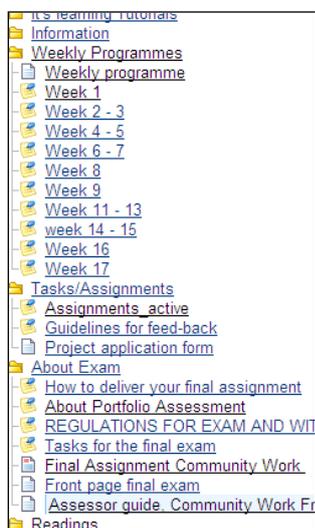
Figure 1: an overview over the course structure and first message on the bulletin-board.

The tasks are carefully structured and deliberately begin with quite simple tasks to familiarise the students with the Learning Management System. Students write a personal presentation and upload a photo of themselves. In this way they create their “social presence” in the virtual classroom which is important for their further collaboration. After this, step-wise tasks related to different topics in Community Work are given, building upon what was done earlier and aiming towards the desired learning outcomes and competencies.



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There is an intentional mix of individual and group student activities. There is also an intentional mix of asynchronous and synchronous communication tools. In the first students can contribute to a discussion forum when it suits them to be online. A 'chat' or a Skype discussion, however, demands that the students are present at the same time.



For the portfolio assessment, students are told which task(s) they need to deliver for assessment in their final assessment portfolio

The required tasks must be completed before students are eligible to continue to the final assignment. The specific tasks required for the final assessment are announced at the beginning of the exam period, at which point students have two weeks to improve their work before it is submitted.

Figure 2: The outline of the course as presented at the LMS

The required tasks must be completed before students are eligible to continue to the final assignment. The specific tasks required for the final assessment are announced at the beginning of the exam period, at which point students have two weeks to improve their work before it is submitted.

Early on it became clear that for some of the tasks it was unclear where students should deliver their responses and this caused some confusion. This was most evident in the first week. The issue was immediately resolved and communicated to the students. There were also several files and folders that had different names in the bulletin board from how they were named in the task and this too caused some confusion for students, as noted in their feedback. In a complete online course it is extremely important to have clear and consistent guidelines to help the students understand what they are expected to do.

Overall, students were quite satisfied with the weekly program at the midway survey; 95, 5% of the students agreed that *the information about the weekly programme was clear* and that *the weekly program makes it easy to know what to do*. Nevertheless, when students were asked to suggest



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improvements for the weekly programme (Q 21, midway survey) they gave some quite clear and focused comments for future work.

Process: Carrying through the pilot-course

The students were divided into three groups, supervised by two teachers. In addition, the main teacher was responsible for setting up the course on the LMS, writing messages to the students on the bulletin board and activating the weekly program and the relevant learning material. He was also the leader of the teacher group and therefore, responsible for writing minutes after meetings and ensuring that decisions were carried through.

The collaboration among teachers was good throughout the course. Teachers used both the teacher meetings (VITERO) and the Teacher blog to support each other. The teacher group consisted of all experienced teachers and could offer quite a range of different in-depth knowledge of Community Work which they shared with each other during the course. One of the teachers became ill and could not follow his group to the end of the course, so his peer-teacher had to finish alone. Unfortunately he neither informed his fellow teacher nor the students about this at once, and students were waiting for a considerable period for feedback from the teacher which they of course were not pleased with.



Figure 3: The teachers' blog

Another problem students addressed in their survey comments is the fact that the other 'VIRCLASS' teachers at their home university, not directly involved in the Community Work course did not have sufficient information about what was happening during the course.

To teach and supervise in English in a virtual environment was a major challenge for the teachers. None of the team members was a native English speaker. However, one of the partners from Swansea University acted as an English language consultant during the whole of the project. While some of the teachers had followed VIRCLASS from start, and were therefore quite used to being an e-teacher using English in their teaching and tutoring, others were doing this for the first time. In this pilot course including all 12 partners' collaborative knowledge of the best and most important resources in Community Work, even the most experienced teachers acquired new knowledge to integrate into their teaching.

There is a big difference between teaching a subject in your own language and doing it in English. To achieve an overview of the listed readings, for example, was a challenge even for those teachers very familiar with Community Work.

'It is all the literature, I printed it all and I had to read it because the students delivered their tasks going into the literature and I had to give them really good answers, give them tips, show how to go on, ask them questions.' (T 5: Teacher midway interview)

It is clear that the specific challenges of tutoring the reflective skills related to Community Work online were huge. Having a PAR/PAL approach in the course, one wanted to create an including and democratic arena where all participants were heard and where feedback and suggestions for changes were taken into account. But an online course also holds quite firm time limits in a tightly constructed schedule and all tasks and assignments were developed accordingly. When some students were delayed in their tasks the teachers had to remind them of their duties towards their peer-students:

'In my role as a teacher... I'll try to act a bit more like in that way (~as a Community Worker) too, because I do not want to give too much structure or too much instruction to the students. I want them to give the examples, to find the project, search for information, - to talk about it, - chat about it. But it is not so easy to have that role, as they don't always see what they have to do.' (T 7: Teacher midway interview)



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Supervision in English is demanding and very time-consuming. All teachers stated that they used a lot more time in the course than was allocated in their time schedule. Both the external report and the interviews with the main teacher made this very clear.

“The work load is much too heavy. The proportion between input (workload) and output (examined students) are unbalanced.” (Main teacher’s presentation at the last teacher meeting)

The Virtual book

Deliverable 3.2 is a Virtual Book with screen lectures, triggers and a case.

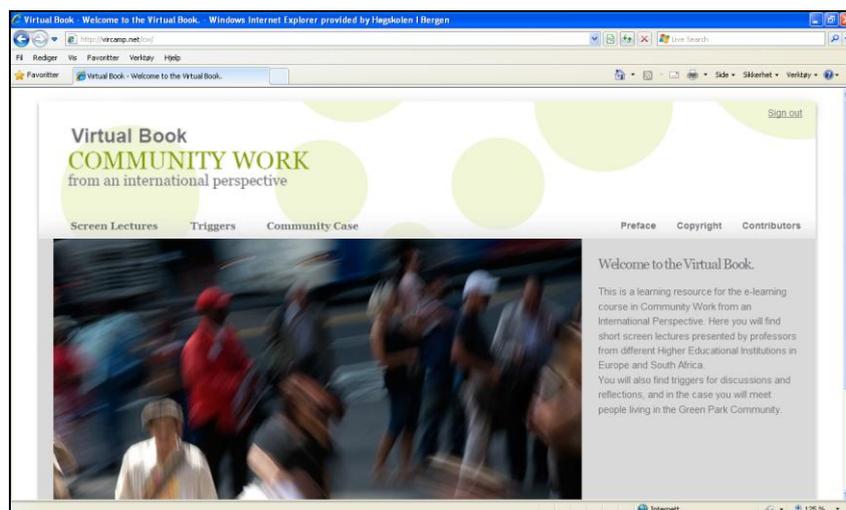


Figure 4: Front-page: The Virtual Book

Product: The Virtual Book

This new virtual book is in many ways quite similar to the books made earlier in the VIRCLASS collaboration, the *Virtual Book – Guide to Social Work in Europe* (<http://virclass.net/virtualbook/login>) (Larsen, 2006): and the E-pedagogy for teachers in HEI (Larsen and Hole, 2009) (<http://virclass.net/eped>). The interface, the “skin” of the book, is in accordance with the layout decided in deliverable 5.2, promotional material for SW-VirCamp. In January 2010 the book included



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10 screen lectures and 9 triggers as well as the community case with its introduction trigger. The design allows more learning material to be included later if wanted.

At the start of the course the following lessons were available for the students:

- Introduction to Community Work
- Community, Self and identity
- Community Work 1 and 2
- Appreciative Inquiry and Community Work
- Project Work
- How to compare theories
- Art as a tool for social change
- The use of PhotoVoice in community work.

All lessons are short and focused, between 10 - 15 minutes long, and the students can also download the text and read it. There are nine triggers found under the heading Triggers; the tenth trigger- *the Gardeners Speech*- is related to the Case. The triggers are made with different audio-visual techniques (e.g. videos, pictures and voice-overs) and the underlying idea is that these short impressions shall promote reflection and discussion among students.

The case in the Virtual book is the link between the more theoretical knowledge the student acquires during the course and the practice part of being a community worker. Early in the project the teacher group decided to make “... a project, very broad, so every student can have an own choice about what he/she wants to construct. The case must be so every country can use it” (Teacher meeting December 2008).

The challenge was to give students a learning arena that provided a possibility to explore the different issues related to Community Work within a virtual community. Limited time and money made the process even harder. Fruitful collaboration in workshops with teachers and technical and media staff developed the metaphor: *the Green Park Community*. The students are introduced to a park located in a city somewhere in Europe (i.e. wherever the student lives). A young girl, Maja, has started the Green Park Community blog and in a short video she invites others to participate. In this blog



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students meet all kind of people: young skaters, elderly ladies, drug users, homeless people, families, young mothers and their children, immigrants and young activists.



Figure 5: Maja's invitation to the blog.

These people, and what happens in their lives, are presented in a blog following events in the park over the last six months. The blog presents an event and people comment on this—letting many 'voices' be heard. Video-clips (YouTube), pictures and other audio-visual elements are found in the postings in the blog.



Figure 6: A map of Green Park

The blog format was also used as the common collaboration platform for the participants in WP3, and their work is documented here: <http://vircamp.net/index.php?action=static&id=143>

Process: the creation of the Virtual Book

One of the outcomes (deliverable 3.1) of SW-VirCamp project was to develop competences among partner institutions in developing virtual learning material (WP3). Earlier in the VIRCLASS project all productions had been made by the Media Centre (HiB), but now a central tenet was that partners should participate in the production themselves. Therefore, several workshops were arranged with the support of the Media Centre, resulting in the production of screen lectures and triggers at several of the partner universities. The original plan was to include only the media staff in the training workshops, but during the process the partners realised that the teachers as well had to participate if the intentions of the learning material should be related to the Curriculum Plan and to the tasks given to students. Therefore, in the workshops teachers, technical and media staff worked together and competences in the making of e-learning material were developed. After the workshops the partners continued to work on the products at their home institution and in the end the final production of the Virtual Book and the Green Park Community blog were produced by the Media Centre at HiB.

The mix of different professionals taking part in these workshops was seen as very important for the final product. The minutes from WP3, from March to November 2009 show many important



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in-depth discussions that relate the development of the learning material to the CP and discussions of how these can be used to promote the students learning processes. This could be one of the reasons for the very good collaboration from the first day when the collegium of 7 teachers from 7 different Universities all over Europe started to teach a completely new online course, promoting hands-on Community Work methods.

Another unexpected result of WP3 was the extra lectures produced. In the application the outcomes of WP3 deliverable 3.2 were stated as 6 screen-lectures and 10 triggers. During the process of developing the CP and creating the learning material, it became clear that the participating teachers could give in-depth knowledge of different important topics regarding Community Work. The partners became so involved that they invested a lot of their time in this process and decided that 10 screen-lessons were needed for the course.

During the course the students very much appreciated the course material. More of this will be presented under Learning Outcomes below.

Students

The number of students planned for the pilot course was 55. When the application deadline was reached 51 students had applied for the course, and 50 persons started on the 25th of January 2010. Diagram 1 and 2 shows the age-span of the students and their universities.

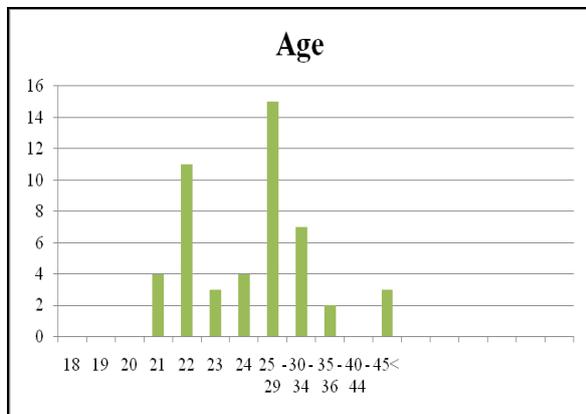


Diagram 1: Age range of students

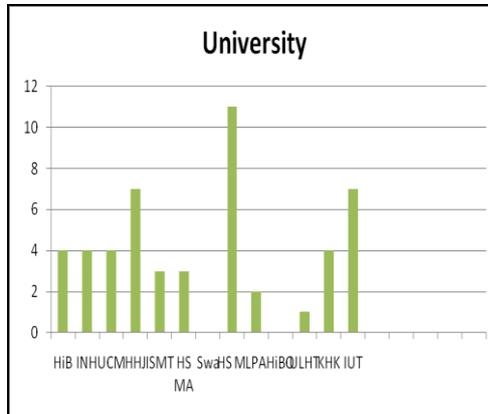


Diagram 2: Students' universities



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There was a rather high drop-out rate of students very early in the course. Several students “disappeared” from the platform within the first two weeks and by 1 March only 35 students remained. By mid-April, 24 students were still in the course and 23 of them had delivered their final exam.

The students who continued to participate were all highly committed as their grades (Diagram 4) shows.

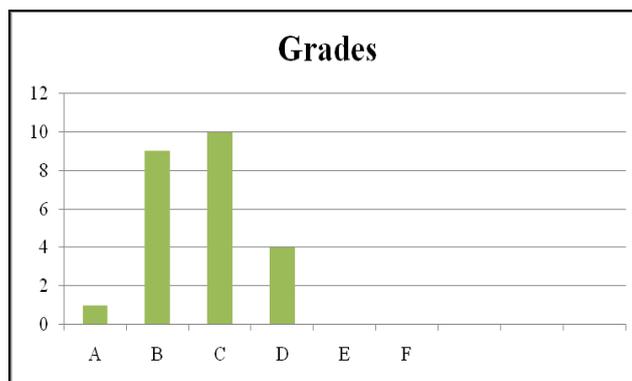


Diagram3: Overview of student grades,

The student grades in this course contrast with their statements regarding the grades they usually get at their home universities. In the last survey 85% said they were at average or above average level. But they also commented that they had worked hard throughout the course hoping that this would give good results in the end. One student expressed it like this:

'I've been working hard to get through each week's assignments and feel that much of what I've been through these weeks stays with me. Also I believe that it is easier for me to learn through written assignments through the whole semester instead of only having one exam at the end of the semester. In the way VirCamp has been I have a steady learning in progress from the beginning to the end'.

(Final survey F INH 11)

A closer look into the group of students that finished the course might explain some of these very good results and the dedicated students who stayed the course. Diagrams 4 and 5 show the students who answered the final survey at the end of the course (19 of 23 students).

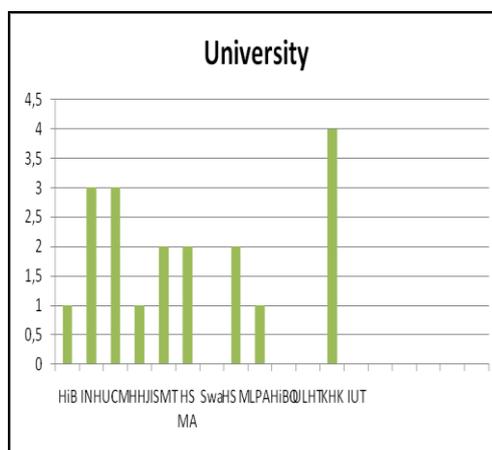
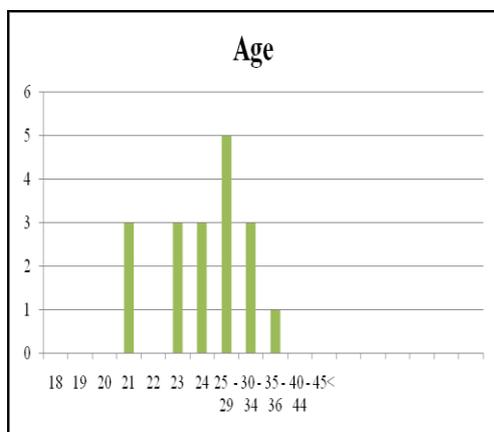


Diagram 4: Age range of graduating students Diagram 5: Students' Universities

In the first survey the students were asked about the intake process. The information they gave is interesting in light of the number of students that left the course at an early stage. It became clear that many students had not received sufficient information about the demands of this course. They did not have a clear picture of the workload connected to following a 15 ECTS credits course over 19 weeks. Only one third of the students met the expected requirements from their university before sending the application even though it was decided that all students should write a short letter about their expectations for the course in English and that their teachers at the home university should have a brief English interview with the students before they were accepted to the course.

Students from two new partners' universities HS Mittweida and UIT³ had problems with following the course due to other obligations in their study program, and there was a large drop-out

³ IUT-Paris Nord 13, became a partner in VIRCLASS in 2009 and since the only course their students could participate in was the Community Work module we invited their students to participate. However for different reasons, according to the university, students at this time went to other continents for practice placement and were planning to do the CW course as well as the placement. They had not calculated on the time differences and the difficulties with cooperating with European students in chats and role playings online. A further explanation is that the English skills of the French students were insufficient as they struggled with the language. We had offered the university a two days introduction course for students and teachers about the e-learning platform, but this was not possible to arrange because the students had already left France. After this the IUT-Paris decided not to continue their partnership with VIRCLASS because they thought it was too mature and they felt they would need more time to more carefully integrate this into their curriculum.



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from these. For example 100% of the students from the French university disappeared within the first two weeks. Probably these two elements, a) intake procedure and b) adjustments to home university program are crucial to how many students will manage to pursue the course successfully.

A closer look into the students who remained on the course shows that many of these students are mature, both regarding their age and their work experience. Many of the 23 who remained were either professionals taking the course as part-time further education while others had fulfilled other education earlier and worked some years before going back to university to study Social Work. One eighth of the students were working as a social worker or (or allied professional work) in parallel with their studies. Further, many of the younger BA students have either had earlier experiences with Community Work or with other kinds of non-profit and voluntary work. Thirteen of the 19 students answering the last survey mentioned this kind of experience.

Learning outcomes and Learning process

Learning outcomes are listed in the Curriculum Plan. In the first survey students were asked to list their three main expectations for the course and to keep a copy of these for later use. In the last survey they were asked to list them again and to indicate to what extent these expectations were met or not met. The students were also asked if they had some unexpected experiences. Before we consider the students comments on the different competencies of the curriculum plan (the expected “outcomes” of the course), let us briefly consider these student expectations.

Students’ expectations were mainly related to ICT skills, English skills and collaboration across borders. First let us consider the students’ views on ICT competencies and the different learning tools they acquired and used during the course. This will be followed by a consideration of the English skills and international collaboration before the specific competences related to Community Work are explored.

ICT tools and ICT communication skills

The student were expected to use ICT tools for collaboration and communication within the course by using Skype with headsets, Google.doc, discussion forum and other synchronous and asynchronous programmes. The plan was that students in the same groups should “meet” each other online at the



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same time ('synchronous'), preferably using Skype. One group had problem with the Skype access, and used mainly the chat forum instead. All groups were able to use Skype for setting up a role play, inviting "the park-people" to a meeting with the community worker to take part in the development of a project plan. To increase flexibility asynchronous tools (e.g. theme discussion in the LMS and shared documents such as Google.doc) were used when students were preparing their project plan.

In the first survey the student were asked about the available computer-facilities and how skilled they were in using them. Nearly 100% of students were familiar or very familiar with ordinary Microsoft Office tools such as word-processing, power-point presentations and e-mails, and 88% regarded themselves as skilled or very skilled in the use of Messenger (MSN or other chats). They were less familiar with different tools for creating their own materiel (Graphics, creating web-pages etc.). In this respect more than 50% indicated that they were little skilled or less. Five students spent between 6-9 hours per week at the PC, while 16 students spent more than 10 hour per week.

The midway survey also addressed collaboration between students by the use of different ICT-tools. The aim was for the main-teacher and the teachers/ supervisors to ascertain if adjustment were needed. Here the students were quite satisfied and no significant adjustment was needed. The students had solved the problems either with help from their peer-students or from other sources. Asked the question of what the challenges had been, one of the students answered:

'... to manage it with the technique (My husband had to explain Skype and Google.com to me. I could only respond on Wednesday because my husband was working and I didn't know how to find the teenager group on Google.com although it was not very difficult).' (Midway survey F HSMA 13)

In the list of challenges in the midway survey it became clear that it was quite novel for the students to discuss and solve problems in a virtual discussion. The main problem was that many of the students with whom they were meant to collaborate had left the course, not with the virtual collaboration in itself.

'Some people haven't introduced their blog yet. I am not sure if they want to get e-mails or comments or questions. I do not know if they want to take part in this course. Perhaps you could ask them and find a solution? Others write very much and are presented in the theme discussions so I am able to get an impression



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what they want. If some people don't write, I don't know how they feel or what they want/need. (First survey F UCM 3).

But even for the students who continued in the course there are challenges in demanding so much synchronous collaboration in a virtual study:

'Working together online is effective if the persons working together find enough time to be online at the same time. This was a big challenge in our group. So we spend much time with sending mails to each other to find a common time to do the chat'. (Final survey F HiB 7)

The teachers also noticed that when they participated in the chats and Skype-discussions, they had to be direct and clear to guide the students towards fruitful discussion about the use of different Community Work theories related to their development of the project plan. In the midway group discussion with the teachers the issue of the teacher role regarding the students' collaboration was raised. To what extent should the teacher supervise the process, and how should the teachers promote student collaboration in a participatory and democratic way, without acting as a kind of "controller"?

'I do not feel like a controller... I feel like a counselor, who looks with them into the process. By asking them questions and giving them some suggestions, I stimulate them to find their way. And in the role play I was an observer, not a controller. I observed what they were doing, and I asked them some questions afterwards: "Did you use Appreciative Inquiry?" for instance, and "How did you feel about... "? So the same, I try to think about what they were doing and find their role as a community worker. Like a student working as community worker...' (T 5, Teacher midway group interview)

The teacher group also decided to keep an eye on the collaboration in the groups, so if there was an isolated student in a group they could help her/him to connect with others in the same situation. But they also noticed that the students were helping each other. For example one teacher pointed out that one student had used the discussion forum for recruiting volunteers to join his group chat:

'They see a problem and then they try to find solutions ... and they are independent.' (T 6, Teacher midway group interview).



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Another teacher commented:

'That is the good way to react as a community worker! You'll have to find your solutions yourself, not sit down and wait!' (T5, Teacher midway group interview)

In the last survey the student were asked about how familiar they were with collaboration tools, e.g. Discussion Forum, Chats, Google.doc, Skype and Blog before they started at the course. Some students (3 or less) claimed to be very familiar with these tools before the course⁴ except for the Blog. Twelve of 19 students had never used Google.docs before and none were familiar with it. As Diagram 6 shows these 19 students who answered this last survey found that the tools contributed very well to their learning process. The diagram 6 shows to what extent the participants found the different tools *helpful* or *very helpful* in their learning process.

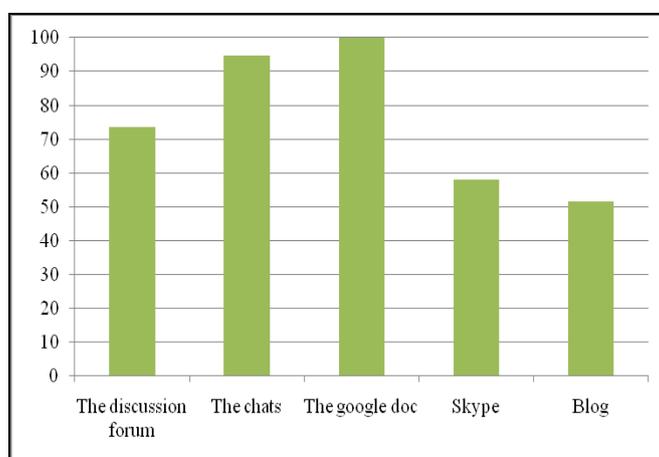


Diagram 6: Tools which are helpful or very helpful (shown in percentage, N 19/23)

There were discussions among the teachers if the amount of different tools would be of a hindrance for the students' learning, and a question related to this was included in the last survey. Diagram 7 clearly shows that the students answering the final survey did not agree upon this statement.

⁴ Except for the Blog, which no one was familiar with

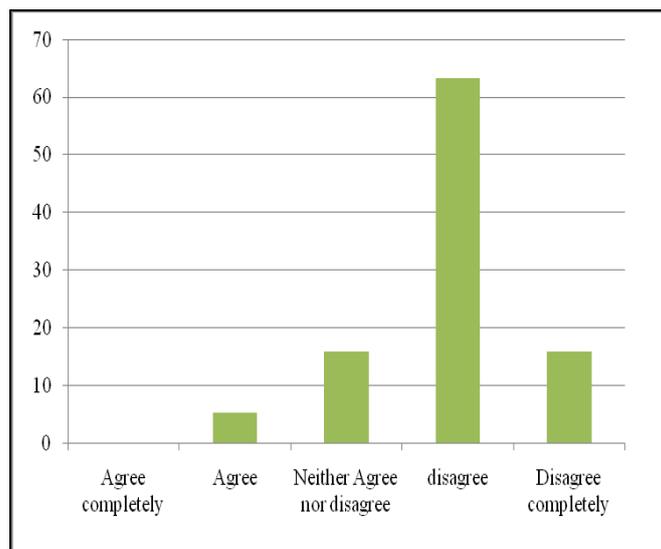


Diagram 7: "The use of different ICT tools made my learning difficult" (shown in percentage, N 19/23)

Of course, the same questions given to the students who left the course might have resulted in different answers. But upon checking the comments from the few students who answered the first survey before they left the course, there is nothing to indicate this. They all had Internet connection back home, were very familiar with the use of ICT, and two of the four had participated in other e-learning courses previously.

But in the open-ended question following this question about experiences with ICT tools, the students came up with very useful comments. For example,

'I think the use of different tools is good in general. But I also made the experience during this course that a lot of tools were on different web-sites. To have an overview about all this was quite difficult, because one also uses a lot of web-sites and tools in private as well (like Facebook, private e-mail etc).' (Final survey, F UCM 2).

Importantly, 95% of the students stated that they would be able to use ICT more efficiently in their work after the course. Nearly 80% of the students indicated that they had developed ICT skills during

the course which would be useful in their future work as a Social Worker/ Community Worker. Some of the following statements show *what* the students think might be relevant.

'A Community Worker could be able to connect people that aren't normally connected to each other.' (Final survey, F LPA 8)

'Google.doc. This application is very helpful to work on the same document from different locations. We are experimenting with it at work now' (Final survey, F HSMI 4)

'I've learned to use Google.doc which is extremely helpful if you work in teams who don't see each other regularly.' (Final survey, M KHK 6)

English skills and international collaboration

Many of the students listed a desire to increase their English skills as one of their three expectations for the course and this expectation was fully met. On a 5-point Likert scale (from *Not competent at all* to *Very competent*) 89,5% of the students stated that they felt "*quite or very competent*" in being able to express themselves in oral and written English at the end of the course. There were also included open-ended questions where the students could comment upon their expectations. Here one student commented that this expectation was fully met regarding reading and writing English but not her ability to speak it. Other students stated that they also had improved their oral English— these differences might be due to the problems some groups had with using Skype as a discussion tool? Another student wrote:

'I could improve my English skills in understanding scientific texts and writing which was a challenge to me. The possibility to practice and exercise my skills were quite helpful. At first, I looked up much in the online dictionary, now I am able to write fluently although my style still can be improved.' (Final survey, M KHK 13)

These new language skills will also make it possible to cooperate in future international collaboration—a benefit that many mentioned. This is clearly stated by this student:



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'I was interested in the other views on community work from people of other countries. These expectations have been met, because of the cooperation for the group-assignments. I wanted to improve my communication skills with the challenge of having to use another language than my own native language. I have improved my English and became very aware of how a small mistake in use of word could mean something that you didn't mean at all.' (Final survey, F UCM 3)

Competences in Community Work: Methods and Theories, Cooperation and Professional Development

The Curriculum Plan stated three core competences students were expected to gain from the Community Work course. These were: *Methods and Theories in Community Work*, *Co-operation* and *Professional Development*. Just over half, 56%, of the respondents in the first survey (N=25 / 38) did not know anything about community work when they started the course. At the end of the course the respondents had not only increased their general knowledge about community work theories but also developed hands-on skills working from a bottom-up perspective and their ability to make project plans.

In the last survey the students were asked 'to what degree they had developed the necessary competencies' as a community worker in these areas. This was graded on a scale from 0-10, (where 0 = the lowest and 10 the highest).

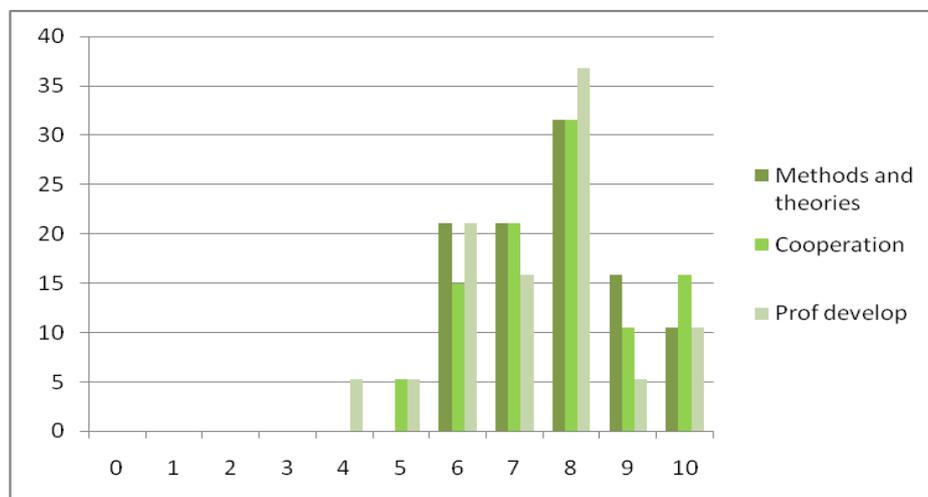


Diagram 8: How students rated their competencies as stated in the CP (shown in percentage, N 19/23)



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In addition to focusing on these more global competencies, the students were asked two questions related to more specific competences development in different areas. On a scale from 0-10, where 1 was *absolutely not agree* while 10 *agree completely* they were asked to rate the statement: “*The course has showed me how to put theory into practice*”. As shown in Diagram 9, the answers were mainly positive (shown in percentage, N = 19/23).

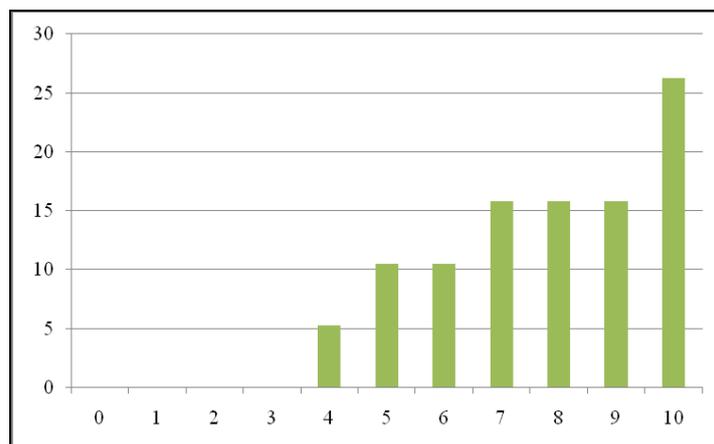


Diagram 9: “*The course has showed me how to put theory into practice*” (final survey, Q 15 c)

Comments from the open ended questions give further insight into what the students mean.

‘The theories offered insights that helped during my internship, where I worked bottom-up. I also linked my internship organization with the tasks we had. This link boosted my learning process.’ (Final survey, F UCM 3)

‘Through the exchange during the tasks there were good suggestions from many students. I enjoyed reading what the others are working or in which fields of social work they have experience. I think it has shown that you needn't be an expert, a group can be very strong in working if the roles are clear and everybody does what he / she can best, e.g. someone had difficulties in English writing, it didn't really matter in group work because you could help each other. As well as in transferring a theory into practice. Another student explained a theory in his / her writings and then I understood it perfectly.’ (Final survey, M KHK 13)



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The Community Work course aimed to stimulate creativity in project work as a community worker, by promoting interaction between students from different countries working with the same assignments in a transparent classroom. One of the main challenges in teaching and learning through online courses is to promote cooperation and communication among students (Salmon, 2004). The special challenges of giving students the ‘hands-on’ skills needed in Community Work were addressed during the planning process. The tasks related to Community Work in the green Park Community allowed students to practice as a Community Worker. At the end of the course the students answered a question related to Community Work skills.

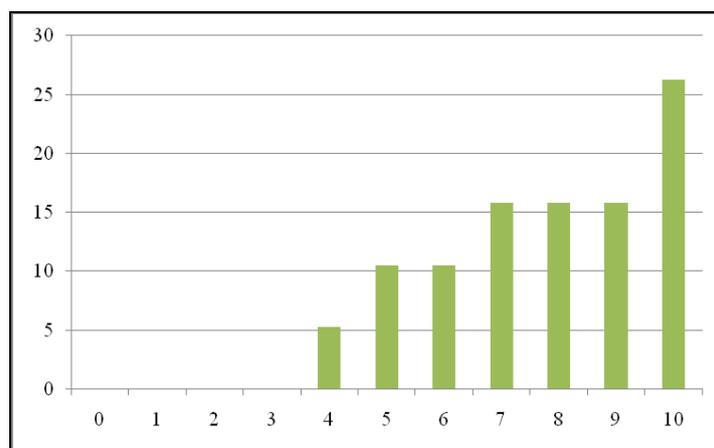


Diagram 10: Number of students rating their new skills in how to do CW on a Likert scale from 0-10 (final survey, Q 15f (shown in percentage, N = 19/23).

From students’ answers to the surveys it became clear that the case study, The Green Park Community, succeeded as a good arena for practicing community work and made the link between theory and practice. Students expressed this experience as being as near as possible to the “real world” being in an e-learning course. The mapping of what happened in the park was as complicated as in ordinary communities.

‘The Green Park Virtual Community is nicely portrayed with the video and the blog, it really gives the feeling that the place really exists.’ (Midway survey, M KHK 4)



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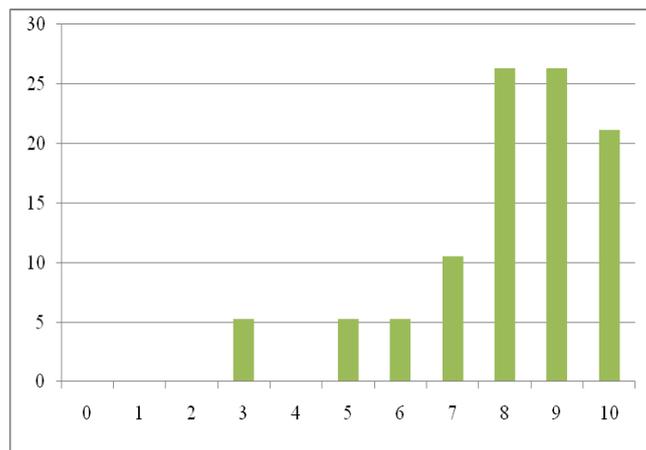


Diagram 11 “Mapping the Park gave me a methodological experience that can be useful as CW” (final survey Q21 a)

A bachelor student stated:

“The theories offered insights that helped during my internship where I worked bottom-up. I also linked my internship organization with the tasks we had. This link boosted my learning process”. (Final survey, F UCM 3)

Also the professionals appreciated the learning material:

“I am currently a social worker in a community development project. The situations were very similar to what I faced every day. Actually the Green Park portrait very well the community where I work.” (Final survey, M INH 1)

Another student expressed:

“The practical part was great. The Green Park Community appeared totally real. Also, the Skype role play made it more realistic. Furthermore I think it has been a great case for working. In my opinion, it could be a real situation.” (Final survey, M KHK 6)

How the students experienced their growth in knowledge was explored by giving the same question related to these issues in both the first and the last survey. The Diagrams 12 -15 shows the development. (The graphs are shown in percentage. For the first survey N 25/38, in the last N 19/23).

The first question was: “I am able to reflect on the understanding of a specific situation and able to justify the chosen methods for community work” represented in Diagram 12 while the



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statement *I am able to collect and analyse relevant information about CW and report the findings* is represented in Figure 13.

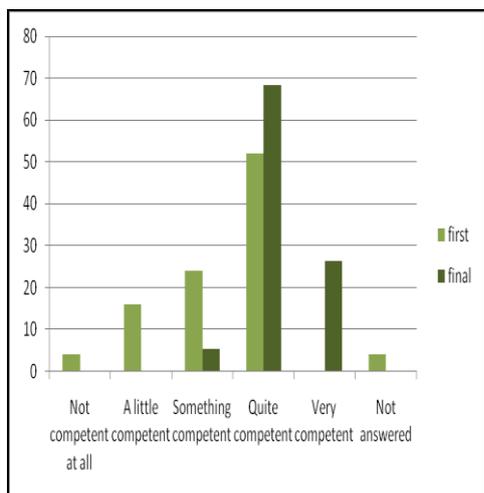


Diagram 12: "I am able to reflect on the..."

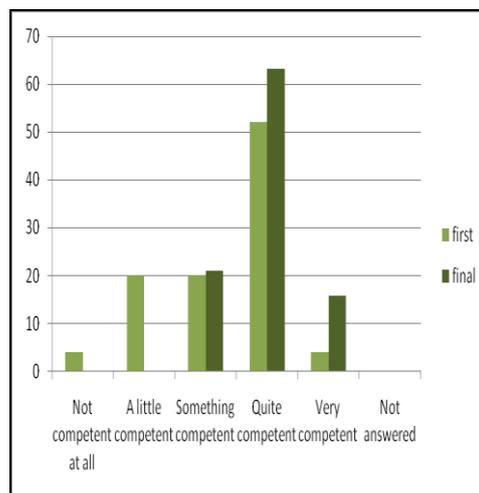


Diagram 13 "I am able to collect and analyse".

Diagram 14 represents the statement *I am able to see opportunities on macro-, meso- and micro-levels in communities and to create a plan for a community work project*, while Diagram 15 shows the answers to *I am able to reflect on my own continuing professional development*

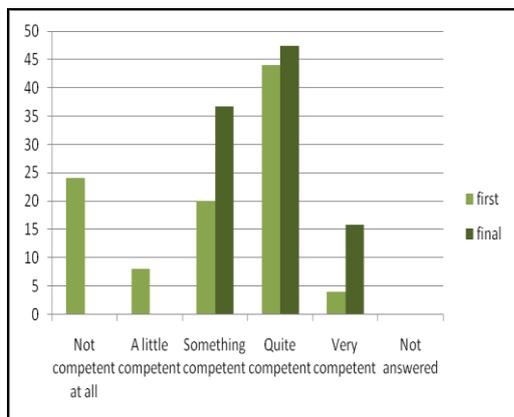


Diagram 14 "I am able to see..."

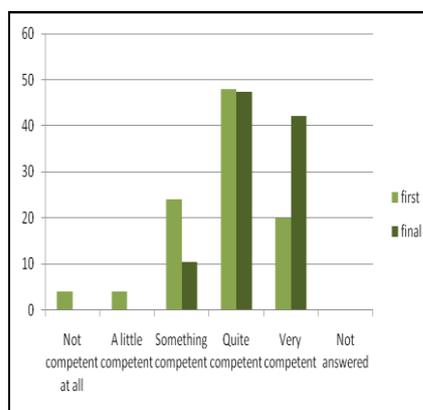


Diagram 15 "I am able to reflect..."



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The contribution of virtual study material to learning

As explained earlier the Virtual Bok presents e-learning material as short screen lectures, audio-visual triggers and a case study. The fundamental aim is that this audio-visual material should not only be the common frame for the students' collaboration but that it should also support the individual students' learning process. The human processing of the different visual elements (texts, pictures or film) can trigger learning in different ways as well as supporting the students' various learning styles (Gardner, 1993). In the surveys one sought to get the students' views of how this virtual learning material is important for the students learning outcomes. The answers here are rated from 0 = *Not at all* to 10 = *Absolutely right*:

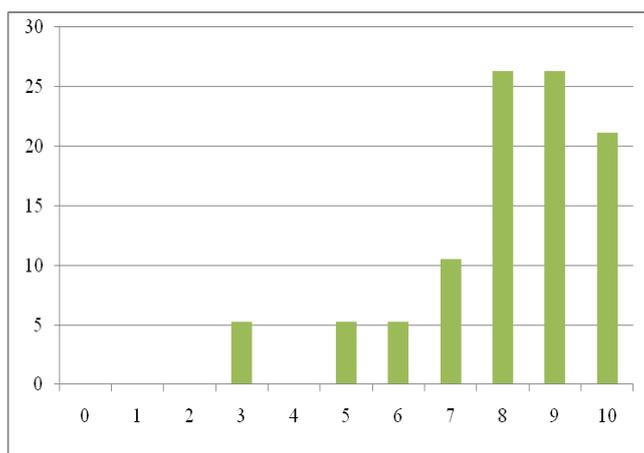


Diagram 17 "Mapping the Park gave me a methodological experience that can be useful as CW" (final survey Q21 a)

In the open-ended questions the students gave more in-depth answers.

'I am currently a social worker in a community development project. The situations were very similar to what I face every day. Actually the green park portrayed very well the community where I work.' (Final survey, M INH 1)

'The practical part was great. The Green Park community appeared totally real. Also, the Skype role play made it more realistic. Furthermore I think that it has been a great case for working because, in my opinion, it could be a real situation.' (Final survey, M KHK 6)



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There were also questions checking to what extent the students had seen all the lectures and triggers presented in the book. As might be expected the lessons and triggers presented early in the course were the ones that 100% of the students had found time to see in their entirety. But no single lecture had less than a 68% response.

All the lessons were presented both as a screen-lecture and as text in a pdf-file. Nearly three-quarters, i.e. 72,7% of the students both followed the screen-lectures and read the text. Only 9,1% were just looking at the videos, and 13,6% preferred to read the text.

'I found the video lessons quite good and well made. But honestly it takes much time to look at them and you're quicker if you only read the text. Or if you only watch the video and only read some parts of the texts. If I had time left I read and watched them. But when I was running out of time I preferred just to read them. But videos worked well- no problems and the quality is good.' (Midway survey, F UCM 4)

Tasks and assignments

Both in the midway and the final surveys the students expressed that they enjoyed the course. When asked how satisfied they were with different aspects of the course, 74% were satisfied or very satisfied with the *course processes and practices*, while 85% were satisfied or very satisfied with the course content and tasks (Q 29 final survey). It is nevertheless worth noticing that there were three students who were very unsatisfied with *teachers' supervision and feed-back* as well as the *learning community*. This might be related to the problems which arose due to peer-students leaving the course and a teacher who fell ill, but this clearly shows how important the collaboration and feedback are.

Several students stated that the structure of the course supported their learning:

'Even though it was theoretical, I really appreciated the way this e-learning course was. Especially with the weekly task, so we had the opportunity to learn step by step, what we don't usually have in normal programs. Also, because we learned so much in between, we could compare the theories with the practical life around us. (regarding to communities)' (Final survey, F UCM 2)

The students were asked how satisfied they were with the portfolio exam. On a 5-point Likert scale from *Disagree completely* to *Agree completely*, 79% liked having a portfolio exam. Even though 36% of the students stated they preferred to work independently, and admitted that *I find it difficult to*



International co-operation in
higher education and training

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present group work as a part of my exam, 86% disagreed with the statement: I rather would like to have another exam. Nearly three-quarters,, 73,4% found that The final tasks for the exam was interesting to work on, and only 5,3% agreed upon that The final exam was too demanding.

One student commented on the process during the course as follows:

"I feel the structure have been good for my learning process. Yes, it has been challenging but by completing each week's assignments I've been climbing the steps for the next weeks assignments. In this way my learning increased each weeks and I got the tools needed for next week" (Students final survey, F HiB 7)

Summary of the overall target group evaluation

Having a competence-based curriculum plan, the integration of theories into practice is an essential learning outcome. One of the answers in the midway survey stated:

"It's better than most of my courses at the university, because we have both: practice and theory and are pushed to work with it" (Midway survey, F HSMI 4)

At the last meeting the main teacher presented his overall view from the students who completed the course and he concluded that the students had acquired new knowledge from the readings in the course, from the lectures, and very importantly from the cooperation among students. The feedback from teachers was appreciated. The use of the Park was a way to link theories with practice and the work on a project plan was enriching for the course.

But there is a need for improvements, an important one of which relates to the number of tasks and the need to spread some tasks over a longer period of time.

Conclusions on didactical improvements

From analysis of the data presented here and from the report by the external evaluator the conclusion is that, in general, there is no need for a radical change in the concept. In the next chapter the different issues discussed during the course and in the external evaluation will be presented. The teacher group has already considered some of the problems raised and their suggestion for solutions will also be presented.



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'This being a pilot course with an experimental set up gives good opportunities for adjustments. At the same time it is claimed that only small differences are necessary in the pilot. New teachers joining the course must be given the opportunity to find their way of doing it. The interviewed, though very enthusiastic about the course, thus points out some concrete details or issues worth discussing and/or adjusting in future courses' (Edmark, H.L., 2010, p. 30)

As we look into the students' responses in the surveys we can state that the learning outcomes we have put forward were met. Almost 90% of the students were satisfied or very satisfied with their learning results. Having a look at the different sources—the teacher meetings, teacher blog, the students' survey and the external evaluation report—there are four actions to address for a future course:

- The use of tools.
- The course program.
- The course content.
- Criteria for assessment.

The use of tools

As the external evaluation report state, the use of different tools was a point to discuss.

'Some of the interviewed though pointed out that it is a risk that the big amount of websites, tools and information causes confusion rather than clarification. It might be too much. A discussion would be desirable on the possibility to reduce the amount of Internet tools use' (Edmark, H.L., 2010, p. 30)

Looking into the final survey we can see that the chats (94,7%) and the Google.doc (100%) are seen as helpful to very helpful in the learning process. The score for the discussion forums is a little less (73,7%). Skype (57,9%) and the blog (52,6%) are helpful or very helpful for more than half of the student group, as Diagram 6 shows. For Skype, we must take into account that not all the groups have used this tool.

Due to the fact that this was a pilot, the teacher group wanted to try out different ICT tools for communication and collaboration as well as two tools that are not integrated in the LMS. In the last survey the statement *'the use of tools made my learning difficult'* scored 3,89 of 5, where five is totally



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disagree, (as shown in Diagram 7). As discussed earlier, even though the students answering this question did not find this a hindrance for their learning, one should take care to address this issue for the future courses.

It is obvious that Google.doc will be used in the future. One of the main issues in this course is cooperation, as it is one of the most important aspects of community work. That is why we let students work together on a project plan. Google.doc is the most efficient tool to work together on a text.

Carrying through a role play in an online course was a complete new thing for everyone. Doing this by using Skype was quite challenging for students and teachers, but the effect was beyond all expectations.

'The possibility to talk together gave more "real life" to the role play for the students as well as the teachers' (Vitero teacher meeting 12/04/2010)

This is also supported by statements from the students, as the quotation from student "M KHK 6" in the final surveys (p 34) shows.

Although Skype is used worldwide and does not require much technical knowledge or conditions, several students were not able to join a Skype session due to the fact that they were not allowed to download Skype at their University computers or problems with the headset. Concerning Skype, the teacher group wants to keep on using this tool but will check in advance the possibilities the students have to use it. In this way, the possibility to use the chat as an alternative when students have problems with Skype will be clarified.

Regarding the tools which are not integrated in the LMS, it is important that students know why these will be used and what they are expected to do. For example that they need to make a Google account and exchange the address of this with their peer students and teachers. And they must be given enough time in advance to settle these things right. Such instructions were given to students in this course, but the importance of this might be emphasized more in the future.

All the other tools like forums, the chat and blog are integrated into the learning platform. Looking at the students' answers to question 9 of the final survey, one might conclude that the blog could be left out in future. However all teachers agreed that reflection is always a difficult point, even in a face-to-face course. Professional development is one of the three main learning outcomes we want to meet in this course and reflection is therefore very important. The blog has many advantages over



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an ordinary document. It gives a very good chronological overview of reflections at once. You can just type your reflections without thinking of layout. In a way this stimulates the reflective process, because one gets more the feeling of a brainstorm. It is easy to comment on, and to follow up, comments by fellow students and teachers. So we see a lot of arguments to keep the blog in this course. And while many of the students did not recognise that the blog contributed to their learning, their answers to question related to “reflection abilities” were very positive as shown in Diagram 12 and 15.

In conclusion we can state that all the tools used are worth keeping in this course. But the way they are presented might be overwhelming. As stated earlier, for the tools not integrated in the learning platform, the teacher group will ensure that technical aspects are sorted out quickly. This will give both students and teachers more comfort. Further a clear rationale for the use of different tools will need to be explained.

Next time the course will be better structured with improved instructions on the bulletin board and in the tasks on where to find and drop material. It is not necessary to have both a common café and one in each group. And this time there were discussion forums in the different groups as well as one for the whole course. This led to confusion for students. It will be better to keep the café as a meeting place for all students. Here the “small talk”, social discussions not directly related to the tasks or triggers, can take place. All discussions related to tasks can be done in the group discussion forums.

The external evaluator has a statement about the tools we use and their impact on the learning process which can be a very positive conclusion of this part:

‘The communication and cooperation with the other students in blogs, chats and group assignments is even regarded as one of the main gains widening the views opening up for new knowledge, perspectives and understanding, but also being useful when building networks or in social work in general’. (Edmark, H.L., 2010, p. 43)

The course program

Teachers as well as students commented upon the very strict schedule of the course.

In addition some might have found that the pedagogical form was too tied up, unlike the free design at many universities. Being in the pilot requires activity on



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a regular basis, otherwise you tend to miss deadlines or to get behind, making it easy to give up and quit the course. (Edmark, H.L., 2010, p. 31)

To my opinion they have too many small tasks. In one of the chat some of them were expressing frustration about all tasks. One student said (she is not in the course now) that she felt it was like a new beginner course and not an advanced course because of all the tasks they had to do all the time. I think we should try to develop bigger tasks so they can organize more of their time and how to work, themselves by their own or/and in different groups. This is something to take care of.' (Teachers blog, 7 may 2010)

One of the big advantages of an online course is that students have more flexibility in planning the work, because they can do it at any time. But the tighter the schedule is, the more this flexibility disappears. In addition, sometimes the online program interferes with the students' regular tasks at their home university. There were for example students who had a week of exams during the start of the course or a busy week in the internship they were in. In this pilot the program timetable was tight with several task deadlines week by week. So for students, a week with less time to spend on the course resulted in a feeling of getting behind. The solution to this is to divide the program in a structure of two weeks. In this way, students can divide the work more or less over period of two consecutive weeks and the teachers' feedback can also be spread over a longer time.

Another decision made by the teacher group is that many of the tasks will be revised before the next course with the aim of diminishing the workload. This can be done, for example by asking students to write a paper or discuss an item in the theme discussion. Another proposal concerns the blog reflections. These were always formulated as a specific task. Sometimes this is good, but other weeks the students could just be told to reflect on a regular base in their blog, for example every two weeks.

These minor adjustments allow keeping up with the program as it is, because there are also comments that emphasize the importance of a good structured course.

'I found it very helpful that the course was so structured. I found out that I would like this in every course, mostly because I find it difficult to make a course more structured myself' (Final survey, F INH 11).



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The course content

Readings

Before the start of the course in January 2010, there were some choices left regarding the reading list. Two main books were chosen, as well as other readings. The book by Ife and Tessoriero (2006) gives a very good insight into different aspect of community work and the positive evaluation of the book, both by teachers and students, means that it will be kept in the reading list. The book by Borrup (2006) which was in the reading list is a more practical guide with lot of examples from an Appreciative Inquiry view.

But as we can conclude from the comment in the external evaluation report, a closer look into the reading list is needed.

'Although the students express satisfaction with the literature, they also find the amount of literature/pages and reading required quite overwhelming, suggesting cutting down the amount of pages in a future course. The comments on the amount of pages give a hint that far from all is being used. It is worth noting that the literature is available on the it's learning course site, either in full text, links or scanned material. None of the students highlighted this though. In my opinion the reading list could preferably be a part of the curriculum plan, giving interested (potential) students a chance to view the profile of the literature. Today you find the reading list on the course site when already being accepted to the course. And even then a majority of the titles in the reading list lacks information on number of pages, which makes it hard to get an overview on what amount of reading is required. An integrated reading list also could clarify what is requested on the course, something that is explicitly asked for both by staff members and students in the interviews.' (Edmark, H.L., 2010, p. 36)

To address this, the reading list will contain information on which pages to read. Sometimes there is overlap between readings and a choice will be made. Some literature, however, e.g. Borrup (2006), is more like a reference work to look into and see what help it gives regarding a specific tasks. This is another way of using the literature and this must be clarified for the students. Therefore the literature will be divided in compulsory readings and recommended readings. A short introduction will be given for each pdf-file. This helps students to choose what they need the most at the moment. It is also



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useful for students working on tasks and teachers giving feedback to refer back to the readings and use them.

Project plan

Although there were not many comments on the project plan task, the teacher group recognised some problems with this task during the course:

'We, as a teacher group conclude that this task is not easy for the students and that they need to get supervision from the teachers, not only comments. We decide that the teacher will give supervision and in this help the students to link the practical situation that they pick up from the role play and the Green Park Community, with theories and approaches from the course.'

The supervision will be even more important due to a conclusion made by one of the teachers. Many students don't understand how to write a project plan at all. There is a need of clarification; the teachers will help the students to understand by their comments and supervision.' (Vitero teacher meeting, 28/04/2010)

While preparing the pilot the teachers agreed that a 'form' or 'grid' would help students working on the project plan, thereby making expectations for this task clearer. Besides this, they would experience learning how to work with a more formal document, as requested in real life when applying for grants. But during the course it was noticed that due to this form, students got excessively focused on filling in tick boxes rather than on being creative in regards to action as a community worker in the park. To keep the best of both, the form will be redesigned with more open questions, and will serve more as a guideline for the students.

Triggers

Most of the triggers were seen and were scored highly by students even though there were differences. The triggers presented in the end of the course, like '*shrinking cities*' and '*user participation*' is seen by fewer students, only 47% and 58%. (Last student survey Q 32). On the other hand, especially at the beginning of the course, we see a lot of activity on the triggers.

'And I also have to say that I find it very interesting to read all the students comments and reflections on the triggers. For me this is very positive, because for



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some of the triggers I really wondered if they would work by intention. But they do! It seems that students also find it positive to have these triggers.' (Teachers blog, 17/03/2010)

We concluded that the triggers will be related more to the different tasks (for example, the trigger 'user participation' in the task where the students are told to prepare for the role play, meeting the people of the park).

Criteria for assessment

For the assessment and evaluation criteria, the European standards as stated in the Bologna declaration are used. In general they give good and sufficient support for students to know what is expected and for the assessors to have a clear standard against which to evaluate performance. But during this course it became obvious that for some specific tasks, for example the project plan, these standards are not sufficient.

'A thing that the students find annoying though, is what is described as vague and unclear conceptions on what is required or expected to get the different scores. Not quite knowing what the expectations are causes uncertainty. Another aspect is the feeling that different teachers handle the commenting differently, some being more supportive than others.' (Edmark H.L., 2010, p. 41)

'At the same time the amount assignments could be reflected on as well as need to be more clear and distinct concerning demands and expectations' (Edmark, H.L., 2010, p. 30)

Reading the different theme threads in the discussion forums revealed an uncertainty among students, especially in relation to the reason for working on the project plan. This was also an issue in the teacher meeting with the conclusion that the main teacher would read some given feedback from teachers to students and give his reflections over these to all the teachers (VITERO teacher meeting 28/04/2010). For the next course clear and precise criteria for the project plans and the blog article will be made. The teacher group will also look into the different tasks and if necessary develop further specific criteria where the general criteria are insufficient.



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General conclusions

Going through the survey, the external evaluation report, the teacher blog, and minutes from meetings, the conclusion is that almost every person involved in the pilot is enthusiastic about the way the course is set up and the learning outcomes. But maintaining quality means that every single point has to be checked and, if possible and necessary, adjusted. We can summarise that a) giving more attention to the tools used , b) having a two week structure in the program, c) aligning tasks, readings and triggers and d) working out some more concrete criteria for some tasks, like the project plan will meet most of the main issues identified in this report.



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