



elene-TT: e-learning network for Teacher training Teachers are lifelong learners too

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1. Introduction

The creation of the European Higher Education space is bringing about a major evolution in the learning environment for both teachers and learners. Lifelong learning and increased mobility, both physical and virtual, mean that both teachers and students will need to constantly update their skills, making the best possible use of the available technology within sound pedagogical and didactic frameworks. As students become more and more familiar with learning in a virtual environment, they ask more of their teachers, the teaching process evolves and consequently the learning process itself. This phenomenon has already been noted by many of the eLene-TT partners, whose will is now to accompany this process through the application of the results of recent research into e-learning and e-teacher training.

2. Background and rationale

A recent survey of e-learning in Europe notes the distinct need for universities to focus on improving the skills of teachers to implement ICT in pedagogically sound ways, «...using ICT as a tool to redesign educational programmes, content and curricula on the basis of novel didactic frameworks».¹ Furthermore, this report notes the «...need for the exchange of experiences and good practice examples...» as well as the «...shortage of high-quality ICT-based teaching material.» A second report draws attention to «...the lack of pro-active teacher/trainer development programmes [...] and educational philosophy that the training of future trainers could be based on».² The eLene-TT project addresses these needs directly

and aims to provide a concrete practical response, backed up by the necessary research and analysis, which can serve as a basis for the improvement of teacher training, teaching and learning throughout Europe, with specific reference to Higher Education.

The ever-increasing use of e-learning and ICT in Higher Education places teachers in a position of having to learn and implement new skills and pedagogical strategies. The traditional academic model of university professors as «the source of knowledge» with a mission to transmit this knowledge through lectures and publications is undergoing profound change. Learning to use ICT in teaching practices is less about mastering the technology than about adopting new pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of e-learning students. Multimedia course design, tutoring, managing collaborative work groups and problem-based learning are all aspects of the new teaching and learning paradigm, facilitated, but not dictated, by available and emerging technologies.

However, in order to motivate Higher Education teachers to integrate these new approaches effectively, their learning and professional development needs to be directly related to their work. Recent ideas in the literature on transfer and on-the-job training³ suggest that learning and working have to be combined in order to support employees' professional development effectively: in learning situations - teacher training actions in the case of the eLene-TT project - the workplace has to be incorporated and attended to, as do the work learning situations (objectives, and activities such as employees' reflections). ICT can help bridge the gap between learning and working as it can be designed to meet the individual needs of the teacher as learner/worker, thus enabling the training actions to address all combinations of work settings, learning needs and learning styles.

Taking into account intercultural differences in both e-learning and e-teacher training, the partners are fully aware of the fact that the context in which Higher Education teachers are trained in each European country is very different, some countries possessing centralised teacher training institutions, others requiring specific academic qualifications in pedagogy and still others where the ability of a teacher to use ICT with students in pedagogically sound ways is not yet recognised in terms of career or financial incentives. The project thus takes a systemic approach, taking into account socio-economic and institutional factors based on the firm belief that teacher training cannot be considered an isolated pedagogical action. While the partners accept the fact that they are not in a position to dictate national or European policy, it is hoped that the results of eLene-TT will go some way towards helping policy makers make informed decisions on this matter.

3. eLene-TT: European collaboration for improving teacher training

eLene-TT (e-learning network for Teacher Training) is a project funded by the European Commission *e-learning* programme and runs from January 2005 to December 2006. The driving idea behind eLene-TT is to improve the ability of Higher Education teachers to make pedagogical use of ICT, through the development of a Virtual Learning Resource Centre providing guidelines and resources for both teacher trainers and teachers themselves and through student-driven teacher training actions, pooling and testing tools and approaches developed by each of the partners in the wider European context.

eLene-TT brings together a number of HE institutions who may be considered front-runners in the field, covering a wide range of ICT-based learning contexts from total distance e-learning to on-campus support and mobile solutions. They are:

- The CANEGE consortium (France)
- METID – Politecnico di Milano (Italy)
- ZMML – University of Bremen (Germany)

- Universitat Oberta de Catalunya – UOC (Catalonia, Spain)
- University of Umeå (Sweden)
- IVLOS Institute of Education, Universiteit Utrecht (the Netherlands)
- Marie Curie Sklodowska University in Lublin, on behalf of the Polish Virtual University (Poland)
- FVU/University of Helsinki

4. The eLene-TT approach

The project starts from the assumption that the most effective way of fostering the take-up of new pedagogical approaches is to involve teachers in the process right from the beginning. Seminars and discussion groups give teachers the opportunity to express their needs both in the type of skills they need to acquire and the way in which they wish to acquire them.

The main pedagogical concept behind the activities developed within the eLene-TT project is that of «earning by doing». The partners are convinced that training HE teachers in the pedagogical use of ICT is best done by a pro-active approach whereby teachers gain hands-on experience of the tools and methods available to them. Placing the teachers in the position of students themselves, using ICT and collaborative approaches in their own learning, will enable them to better envisage the learning process from the students' point of view and thus to better integrate these methods in their own teaching practice. Furthermore, a project-based approach, with the partners integrating the guidelines in their own day-to-day teacher training, will also ensure the match between the teachers' own needs and the training they receive.

This approach also draws on the notion of the support function of ICT in three types of learning activities: «relate», «create» and «donate», as identified by Kearsley & Shneiderman (1998)⁴. ICT in higher education can enhance the relate-type of learning activities by relating different learners and experts (from different fields, disciplines), by supporting collaboration and communication of learners, by facilitating community building, providing (peer) feedback and by stimulating grouping of the learners. The create-type of learning activities would be enhanced through organising active learning, co-construction of knowledge, problem-based learning, designing and exploring as learning and critically reflecting. The donate-type of learning activities can be supported by ICT through authentic learning, of real-life learning activities, learning by working for a real client or financier, publishing and reporting the results of learning.

The project aims to provide concrete results beneficial to the European HE e-teaching community as a whole (institutions, teachers, tutors, facilitators, teacher trainers and instructional designers). Pooling and building on their experience, the partners are working on creating a set of guidelines for good practice in teacher training and selecting appropriate tools and resources by means of documentary analysis and the review of existing teacher training practices.

These initial guidelines, tools and resources will be tested in real teaching situations, the teachers participating in the experimental phase implementing the methods and approaches with their own students. Feedback from both teachers and students will be analysed and assessed in order to refine the guidelines and make a final selection of resources, all of which be made available to the wider e-teaching community via a specifically designed Virtual Learning Resource Centre. Specific teacher training actions through local, national and European workshops combined with online collaborative work are co-designed, delivered and tutored by the partners, to ensure the results of the project reach the widest possible audience. The added value for the European HE community is thus expected to be a better

understanding of the pedagogical use of ICT in learning, and of the way in which teachers themselves learn to integrate these practices, thus leading to higher quality ICT-based teaching and ultimately better learning.

Student involvement is of course central to this approach and the project pays particular attention to the implementation of new methods by teachers in real e-learning situations. A further driving factor common to all eLene-TT partners is the desire to find a balance between academic freedom and standardisation. Through the Virtual Learning Resource Centre, teachers and teacher trainers will have access to a wide range of carefully selected and tested guidelines, tools and resources, from which they will be able to choose those best adapted to the teaching and learning environments in which they are working.

5. Collaboration and communication

(h)eLene: a (h)uman e-learning network

eLene-TT is a project developed by the universities and e-learning consortia which participated as case studies for the report «Studies in the Context of the e-learning Initiative: Virtual Models of European Universities (Lot 1) Final Report to the EU Commission, DG Education & Culture».

From a loose group of institutions curious to know more about each other but driven by a will to pool their expertise for the benefit of the wider European Higher Education community, the eLene consortium has developed a true identity in which the human dimension is omnipresent. The project has its roots in the initiative of committed individuals and has grown through the development of transnational friendships. Perhaps atypically for this type of project, the development phase covered a period of over seven months, combining three face-to-face meetings and sustained online communication to construct a project in line with needs identified on a European level, where each member brings to the common project their own specific area of expertise in a spirit of human collaboration.

6. Presentation of Work in Progress

The project, which runs from January 2005 to December 2006, has been planned by: WP1: Analysis, WP2: Selection of tools and resources, WP3: Defining guidelines for teacher training, WP4: Teacher Training Action, WP5: evaluation TT actions, WP6: Web site + KM system, WP7: dissemination, WP8: Project management, WP9: General evaluation.

Conclusion

The teacher training activities in eLene-TT fit clearly within the framework of lifelong learning for teachers, integrating the notions of learning in the workplace for higher education teachers, working and learning together on the innovative use of ICT in their education. This kind of learning (and working) is by definition lifelong as teachers will feel the need to learn during their whole career, especially in the field of innovative pedagogy using ICT in teaching and learning. A major feature of eLene-TT is thus about bringing e-learning closer to lifelong learning and the working life of teachers and students, opening up systems and increasing the openness of universities.

The partners are confident that through the dissemination and exploitation of the results of the project, the fostering of a community of practice and the development of a model for teacher training in the pedagogical use of ICT, the expertise developed will be transferable to the wider e-learning community, thus ensuring the sustainability of the project's outcomes. It is to be hoped that the model for a Virtual Learning Resource Centre will

be taken up and adapted by Higher Education institutions throughout Europe, including those from the «co-operating», «self-sufficient» and «sceptical» universities identified by the *Virtual Models of European Universities* report, thus paving the way for a European Virtual Campus for e-teacher training.

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