e-Learning Promoting International Cooperation in Art and Design Education

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The University of Art and Design in Helsinki has carried out several years a master degree e-learning programme Virt@ for teachers of visual arts. The Virt@, based on the use of the net (1), has been a great opportunity to develop and promote new methods and models for e-learning and e-pedagogy in art and design higher education (HE). In addition the Virt@ has generated a number of interesting e-learning projects, which are premised on international cooperation of teachers, experts and students in different degree programmes and institutions.

The presentation focus on sharing models, results and conclusions of the international projects beside the Virt@ and discuss the necessity and potential to rethink and renew teaching and learning in art and design HE by promoting and studying the innovative use of the net in education.

The following cases will be presented more detailed. In the Interface project (2005-2007) we developed international e-learning modules and courses of fine art and visual communication design. Courses and modules were organised simultaneously to students in three of the partner sites in Finland, Ireland and Latvia. The Art-Edu projects (2006-2009) are focused on community art. The projects consist of two parts, a working process in the net and an intensive project period on one of the partner sites. Teachers and students are working in international teams and use VLE and ICT tools to carry out a multidimensional planning and learning process. The participants are from Finland, Netherlands and Switzerland. The key element of these projects is to generate functional and flexible practices and methods to integrate local studios and contact lessons with international working process in the net.
It is evident that the use of the net emphasizes on new, alternative methods of learning and teaching, and changes to curricula too. The net as a tool, environment and matrix in education, interlinks both technology and social aspects. The status of e-learning in art and design HE should be discussed from the viewpoint of professional competences and identity process. This will pick up important themes to discussion: sense of community and social interaction. These include e.g. methods to explore and emphasis on visual communication and artistic working and to find new means to make the existence of a profession community visible, vivid and inspiring.

At its best the shared planning and production of e-learning modules or courses can be an effective tool to reform the working culture and leadership of an educational institution, from individual work to collaborative, inspiring knowledge sharing and building. It will also open new creative ways of cooperation in teaching and research. The concept of working community will become more near to the flexible network of professionals. In addition you may ask, if there are something teachers could learn from their students, and this question is more generally connected with the innovative use of social media in education.

(1) The concept illustrates elements, which are the basis of e-learning and e-pedagogy. The net can encompass the use of Internet, virtual learning environments (VLE), information and communication technology (ICT) tools and the idea of a matrix to integrate different kind of contents and activities.