



This paper is taken from

*Developing Identities in Europe:
Citizenship education and higher education
Proceedings of the second Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2000

Edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 3239

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- Only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- Multiple copies may be made only by
 - Members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - A official of the European Commission
 - A member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

Lerkkaen, M. Kankaanranta, M. Mäkitalo, K. Kupila, P. Poikonen, L. and Yliopisto, J. (2000), The pro-child – constructing pedagogical expertise in teacher education by networked discussions, in Ross, A. (ed) Developing Identities in Europe: Citizenship education and higher education. London: CiCe, pp 417 - 418

© CiCe 2000

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe Central Coordination Unit for both the organisation of the conference and this collection, and in particular Martin Sundram and Cass Mitchell-Riddle for seeing this book through revisions, layout and to press
- The University of North London, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of DGXXII for their support and encouragement.

The pro-child project - constructing pedagogical expertise in teacher education by networked discussions

*Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen, Marja Kankaanranta, Kati Mäkitalo, Päivi Kupila, Pirjo-Liisa Poikonen
Jyväskylän Yliopisto (Finland)*

Introduction

The focus of this research project is to explore the possibilities and constraints of shared virtual environments in supporting learning and interaction in teacher education settings. This study is based on the socio-constructivist theory of learning, in particular the idea of co-construction of knowledge in collaboration with learners. Learning is here viewed as an enculturation process whereby novices and experts together acquire not only knowledge but also other social and cultural conventions typical to their professional community.

Aims

The main purpose of our approach was to merge educational childhood cultures and to enhance communication and collaboration in two dimensions: firstly between teachers and student teachers and secondly between the successive educational levels of early childhood, pre-primary and primary education. The aim was to promote the collaborative construction of professional expertise in teacher- defined interest areas by means of networked discussions.

Methods

The learning context for this study was an action research project, in which participants collaboratively plan the study and content areas. The first phase of the project (1998-1999) was a pilot study, in which the emphasis was on the design and development of a virtual discussion forum for use in participants' pedagogical discussions (www.pedanet.jyu.fi/keskustelu). The project included seminars, network discussion groups, computer mediated conferences, web-based learning and evaluation.

The participants were 134 pre-school and primary level teachers from kindergartens and schools, and teacher training students from the Departments of Early Childhood Education and Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä. The project was a part of the students' compulsory studies (one study week, 40 hours work) in either of the courses 'Toward Professional Growth' or 'Integration of the Pre-primary and Primary Curriculum'. The teachers' participation was voluntary. Five researchers also participated in the virtual interaction of students and expert communities.

Our data collection was simply assembling the web-based discussion data and questionnaires (traditional paper form/e-mail/web-based).

Data analysis followed, examining quantitative data (which included the nature, time, and volume of participation, as well as the distribution of communication among users) and qualitative data, including text-based messages and documents.

Results

The quality of interaction

The discussion was mainly pedagogical. The interest areas were curriculum development, language and literature pedagogy, drama pedagogy, mathematics and science, self-assessment and the self-esteem of children. Collaborative discussions concerning professional expertise came alive between teachers and students during these networked sessions. Discussions were most frequent between student teachers from two different departments – the teachers' participation was limited due to lack of time.

Self-confidence and motivation

This was the first time of taking part in virtual discussions for almost all the participants. Gaining sufficient self-confidence to start the virtual networked discussion was a problem, especially for teachers but also for some students. Also the motivation to study through networking differs.

Easily accessible and technical help

The participants suggested that computers and technical assistance should be easily accessible in both time and location. Because of technical problems the experience of virtual environments could be one of frustration.

Future plans

The Pro Child -project will continue next year. The important objectives for the future are:

- to build common ground for all participants
- to develop the web-based environment to be more the place to learn
- to set up clearer tasks and give more initial help
- to support teachers' and students' participation and motivation
- to include web-based discussions in in-service teacher education
- to make material available in the environment