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Participation in an Educational Online Learning Community

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the issue of learner participation in a net-based higher education course. With the starting point in recent educational policies formulated by the European Union and the results of an evaluation report from the Swedish Net University, I raise the question of which pedagogical aspects need to be considered in order to support active learner participation in these types of learning environments. Based on analyzed data from 19 semi-structured interviews with trainees on a Swedish net-based teacher training programme supported by Information and Communication Technologies, I attempt to show that in order to become a member of such educational online learning community, each trainee is required to be active and hold an inclusive attitude towards the other members. Further, it seems that the trainees often had to rely on and trust each other due to the sparse communication with their teacher trainers. I conclude this paper by discussing the need for a pedagogical approach that relies heavily on social, collaborative and ethical aspects of learning as a starting point for the design of online learning communities to support the kind of education needed for the 21st century.

Keywords

Distance Education, Learning Community, Participation, Pedagogy, Teacher Training

Introduction

In Lisbon, the European council stated that the European Union (EU) should become the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy (EU legislation, 2003a). The field of education has been identified as one of the target areas for the implementation of this declaration, thus demanding an elaborate educational strategy. In response to this demand, a number of tangible goals for how the educational system in Europe should be carried out in the future (EU legislation, 2003b) have been identified. These goals have been defined as follows; first, to improve the quality in the education system, second, to facilitate the access to the education system for members of the European Union and third, to open up the educational system in the European Union to the rest of the world.

Sweden has been actively working in this field focussing on the creation of an extended number of university programmes and courses following the EU recommendations. Programmes and courses which are provided off-campus, using the internet as means for participation, collaboration and dialogue have increased significantly during the last decade (Lindberg & Olofsson, 2006).

Recently, The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (2005) stated in an evaluation of the Swedish Net University, that net-based education could be understood as an educational form that contributes to widen the base for recruitment to higher education. Higher education in Sweden has traditionally had problems recruiting students that do not have middle and upper class backgrounds. Additionally, the evaluation stated that the students' geographical location was less important within this educational form. This is claimed to be due to the possibility to attend university programmes and courses all over Sweden, using the internet. It seems for that reason no longer necessary for the students to physically attend the university campus a number of times each semester. Higher education today appears to be open for people from every walk of life in Swedish society. This trend within higher education is however not revolutionary and has for example, according to Berg (2003), been present in the USA for quite a long time.

Nevertheless, one issue that probably needs to be noted as an area for re-thinking is how to organize such higher net-based education. How is it possible to convert the net-based education into a venture characterized by active participation, collaborative learning, negotiating and sharing of meaning (Wenger, 1998)? What kind of pedagogy could be used to support and sustain the knowledge-building process of each student, and at the same time guarantee that education does not become merely a question of transferring information? How can social aspects of learning be included in the design of net-based education and what are some of its pitfalls? This paper intends to investigate some possibilities within a net-based teacher training programme in which the students are organized in smaller study-groups, which here are understood as Educational Online Learning Communities (E-OLCs) (Carlén & Jobring, 2005; Olofsson & Lindberg, 2006). I wish to especially shed light on issue of values underpinning all activities

within the Educational OLCs. The overall research question is formulated as; what is required from each teacher trainee to become a member of one of the Educational OLCs within the programme?

Additionally, I will describe in further detail how the understanding of distance education has moved from being a question about transferring knowledge, towards being a question about learning together in an E-OLC. Thereafter I describe the results of a study conducted with 19 trainees on a Swedish net-based teacher training programme supported by Information and Communication Technologies. I will conclude by discussing the outcomes of the study in connection to ideas discussed in section two and the challenges that might be present in the design of Online Learning Community (OLC). The paper concludes with stressing the importance of including pedagogical issues, firmly based in an ethical view of people and education, when educating online.

From Individuality to Community – Net-based Learning in Transition

Traditionally, distance education has been an educational form with limited possibilities for the students to learn with and from each other (Howard, Schenk & Discenza, 2004). This means that the students often were reduced to using technology that only, more or less, made it possible for them to download ready-made educational material within the programme or course they attended (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998). If the students wanted to collaborate with their co-students, for example, in order to gain a deeper understanding or to collaborate they had to use ordinary letters, telephone or even to psychically attend the university campus.

Today this picture has changed. A new movement within higher education is present, which is also expressed in legislative documents regarding education in Europe. For example, the recommendations "eLearning – Designing tomorrow's education" (EU legislation, 2003a) states the need for establishing virtual forums and campuses that will promote the development of distance teaching and learning and the exchange of best practice and experience. This call for virtual forums can be seen as a result of research investigating the concept of community within education, teaching and learning.

Community, however, has been a concept used for different purposes within research for a long time, but the renewed interest stems from the work on communities of practice initially carried out by Lave & Wenger (1991) and further developed by Wenger (1998). Learning is to be understood as the movement or trajectory, in which a process of legitimate peripheral participation is developed between people in a certain context. People, or members, in a community are being fostered into the core of the practice by processes characterized by negotiating of meaning. Processes that not only include aspects of how something should be learnt and understood but also aspects of inculcation of values, assumptions and beliefs that are underlying the practice (see also Sergiovanni, 1999) ensuring a common ground for the activities within the community (Bauman, 2001).

The concept of community has lately been used in relation to aspects on education and learning located on the internet (Sorensen & Ó Murchú, 2004) which is referred to as OLC (Jaldemark, Lindberg & Olofsson, 2005, Lindberg & Olofsson, in press; Lock, 2002; Olofsson & Lindberg, 2005; Palloff & Pratt, 2005; Seufert, Lechner & Stanoevska, 2002). An OLC is said to cross geographical borders and the aspect of time as a barrier is reduced (Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins & Shoemaker, 2000; Lewis & Allan, 2005). According to Carlén and Jobring (2005), there are different types of OLCs depending on their focus. The first type is the so-called Professional OLC, which focuses on work-related questions. The second type is the so-called Interest OLC, which focuses on different topics related to the members' leisure activities. The third type is the so-called Educational OLC (E-OLC) which focuses on different educational issues.

The concept of community seems to be very promising in relation to higher net-based education, not only today but also tomorrow. However, when considering the concepts of community and OLC, the impression is one of a rather un-complicated process of both becoming and being a member of a community, regardless if the community is located on the internet or not (compare Söderström, Hamilton, Dahlgren & Hult, 2006). The rationales behind the use of community seems to be that it is only necessary for people to connect to each other (perhaps through the internet) for a process of bonding, building a community, and a process of collaborative learning by means of active participation and dialogue to appear. Is it that by interconnecting people in a forced or fictive community, in this case, teacher trainees in an E-OLC, a joint learning enterprise is apparent and learning occurs? What aspects of the moral underpinnings and the ethical considerations underlie a membership within such an E-OLC?

Etzioni (1993) points out that an important aspect of a community is shared morality. The community speaks to its members with a moral voice, restricts and sets demands on its members. Within a community there are always, according to Etzioni, possibilities for negotiations between members; negotiations that may decide which activities, behaviours, opinions, values etc that should be considered right or wrong within the community. If any violation or obstruction in relation to the negotiated meaning of being a member occurs, the community will respond with power in order to stop the un-wanted, non-sanctioned activities.

Bauman (2001) describes in a similar way the double-edged character of the community; how it cuts both ways. On the one hand, a community provides connotations to a state of being-together, and living side by side in harmony with others. On the other hand, Bauman continues, the demands for conformity with the community undermine the rights to one's freedom and self-assertation. The continuous struggle between individuality and the desire to be included in the community and sharing a feeling of togetherness with others is by Elias (1991) called "the I/We – balance". This balance could be tilted in either direction depending on the meaning of the negotiated understanding of being a member within a certain community.

If membership in a community is about sharing values, negotiating values and creating shared meaning, it requires research to investigate and to try to understand how these processes work in educational settings. In the next section, an empirical study is presented aimed at these aspects of membership in the context of an E-OLC, positioned in net-based teacher training in Sweden. The analysis shows how the trainees perceive the programme as a venture characterized by active participation, collaborative learning, negotiating and sharing of meaning, and some of the potential pitfalls in taking theses process for granted.

The empirical context is a net-based teacher training programme and for that reason, the type of OLC considered here is the E-OLC that "…relates to learning activities in schools, colleges and universities. An institution or faculty promotes and structures education programs for learners in which the students get credit for what they know and what they do." (Carlén & Jobring, 2005, p. 275). By using tools like blogs, chats and e-mails the members of an E-OLC can connect with each other and central features within net-based higher education, like active participation, collaboration and dialogue, can take place (Schwier, 2002; Sorensen & Takle, 2004).

Research Related to the Present Study - A Swedish Perspective

An increasing amount of research has been carried out in Sweden related to the study presented in this paper. In that body of research, it seems possible to identify at least four different themes relevant for the ideas presented in this study. One of these themes is related to teacher training. Recent studies conducted by Lindberg (2002) investigate the discourses of teacher training and analyze contemporary discussions of teacher training as it has taken shape in relation to the present teacher training reform in Sweden. Bernmark-Ottosson (2005) investigates teacher trainees' conceptions of democracy and this is another example of current efforts in this direction. A second theme relates to distance education. Thórsteinsdóttir (2005) has investigated information seeking behaviour of distance students and Rydberg Fåhræus (2003) has been studying collaborative learning and how this approach can be applied and supported in distance education. A third theme is ICT and the internet. Keller (2005) has carried out analyses of students' acceptance of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in a mixed learning environment, and Stigmar (2002) investigated how students used the Internet for information seeking. A forth, and final theme relates to research aimed at the concept of community. Karlsson (2004) has explored the concept of community in order to gain an understanding of how a teacher team functions as a vehicle for the development of competencies in the pedagogical use of ICT, and Svensson (2002) uses the concept of community as a theoretical tool in order to understand and support IT-mediated communities of distance education.

The ambition here is not to present a synthesis containing all research conducted in Sweden that can be related to the study presented in this paper. Rather, the themes mentioned above are to be understood as attempts to identify what already has been researched in Sweden regarding research objects such as teacher training, distance education, ICT and the internet, and community. According to Bransford, Brown & Cocking (1999), it is important to conduct extensive research on teacher learning, teacher training and how to develop learning opportunities for teachers, in order to teach in line with new theories of learning. Further, they claim that research evidence points out that successful professional development activity for teachers are extended over time and characterized as encouraging for development of teachers' learning communities. They also stress the importance of providing teacher trainees with a chance to form teams who stay together in their teacher training. In net-based teacher training such an idea

could be to give the trainees a chance to create an E-OLC that is characterized by active participation, collaboration and dialogue. Furthermore, according to Lankshear & Knobel (2006) there is a demand for new ways to train future teachers that will face new teaching and learning challenges with young children and students that are growing up with mobile devices and new media. To conclude, in net-based teacher training all these ideas and challenges are intertwined. It is therefore important to continuously research and develop net-based teacher training programmes if teacher trainees of today shall be able to meet the demands from young children and students of tomorrow.

The Context of the Study

The context of the study was a net-based teacher training programme provided by a university in northern Sweden. This study is a follow-up investigation from a larger case study concentrated on the issue of training teachers through technology (Lindberg & Olofsson, 2005). The participants in this study were teacher trainees in the aforementioned net-based teacher training programme. The programme investigated was three and a half to four and a half years long, depending on the teacher trainees' choice of degree. The programme was mainly aimed at training teachers to be able to teach in sparsely populated areas in Sweden. The programme was mainly conducted via a net-based learning environment and only a small number of on-campus gatherings were included. The trainees were divided into smaller study groups and the net-based learning environment enabled, throughout the programme, collaboration and communication both synchronously and asynchronously without meeting physically. The net-based learning environment used in the programme was WebCT and examples of learning tools are email, chat, discussion groups with threaded discussions, electronic portfolios, study-group conferences, and students' café.

The study group in this paper should be regarded as an E-OLC. The trainees were continuously encouraged by the educators to actively use the net-based learning environment. This was for example stressed in the study-guides provided for the teacher trainees. The teacher training programme was aimed at educating future teachers with the competence of both handling ICT and on using it in order to get in contact with other persons in the surrounding society that could enrich their own practice.

Data Gathering and Procedure

The total number of teacher trainees enrolled at the time of data gathering was 77. All trainees were asked to be interviewed. A group of 22 trainees volunteered, but out of these, three were unable to take part and the interviews were carried out with the remaining 19. The trainees that were interviewed were between 20 and 50 years old, 13 of the trainees were female and 6 were male. The interviews were semi-structured and each interview was conducted in relation to a pre-specified interview guide. The study was conducted in spring 2004. The interview guide was divided into 4 different themes, containing 15 questions in total. Before the interviews, each trainee was given an interview guide with the intention to allow the trainees to prepare. Each interview lasted for approximately 25 to 60 minutes.

For this paper, analysis was conducted on data from the theme concerning educational issues. This theme included four questions and was constructed with the intention to function as a basis for an open discussion. All answers were recorded on tape, transcribed and analyzed. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to comment on the transcripts before the analysis. The questions included in the theme were as follows:

- A student in your study group is having difficulties keeping up in the programme and therefore needs help. What are your thoughts about being involved in and taking responsibility for the situation?
- There is a new student in the study group. What are your thoughts about being involved and taking responsibility for helping the student to feel at ease in the new group?
- What are the important issues that you discuss in the programme?
- What have you learnt in the programme that is especially important for the future?

Analysis

The analysis used an approach inspired by hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1976). The approach intended to preserve the complexity of the educational setting that was researched. In the analysis, three different categories were constructed and presented. The categories emanated from the interpretations of the transcribed data. The categories should not be seen as objective truths or as categories capturing actually existing practices within the net-based teacher training

programme. They are rather constructions of the trainees' discuss aspects of studying, learning and bonding together in a programme mostly carried out via the internet. The aim of the analysis is to put forth some aspects of what appears to be required from each trainee to be member of an E-OLC in terms of active participation and collaborative learning and how this can be understood as a process of negotiating and sharing of meaning with other trainees.

The categories and the analysis are based on interpretations of the data collected from all four questions included in the theme concerned with educational issues. In the process of analysis, each question within the theme has been analyzed separately and in the light of the other three questions. The process of interpretation is reflexive in the sense that the interpretation of the teacher trainees' discussions consisted of the interplay between the whole body of data collected within the theme and discussion of each trainee. This corresponds to the idea of relating parts to the whole and back again in an ongoing circular or spiral of interpretations, all in an order to construct an understanding of the data (Gadamer, 1976; Risser, 1997). Further, the interpretations are not to be seen as categorizations into mutually exclusive categories but rather a way of describing differences in how teacher trainees viewed participation in the programme. Consequently, quotations used in each category can emanate from data collected within all four questions included in the theme. The quotations provide specific accounts from the data from which the interpretations are made and typical accounts for the trainees' discussions about being part of a net-based teacher training programme.

Category 1 – The Importance of Contributing to the E-OLC

In order for teacher trainees in a study group to be able to graduate from the programme, or just pass a single course within the programme, they are individually expected to continuously contribute to the learning activities in the E-OLC. To the trainees, it appears that they have to be able to adapt to the norms defining how to participate in the study group. For instance, this could involve to take an active part in the collaborative process of solving a group-related task provided by the teacher trainers on the programme. A trainee when discussing co-trainees that do not do what is expected expresses this:

"…if the problem comes from the co-trainee's lack of pre-knowledge's, or that they just don't manage the studies, or aren't able to assimilate their understanding, the question is if we, as a study group should help her or him to pass the test. If so, you can question if we in the study group are doing something morally wrong…"

Furthermore, the contribution should not only agree with what is formulated as a productive contribution in relation to, for example, how the task is conceived within the study group, but also when the other members in the group expect the contribution to be made. Failure to fulfil what has been negotiated seems often to be referred to a single trainee's lack of individual qualities for studying or lack of self-discipline. When discussing co-trainees not delivering what is expected on time, one trainee states that:

"…I think that you shall take responsibility when you get involved in something, is it [the student's failure] because this person has problems because she or he has 1000 other things besides the studies, I think that you should confront them…"

Additionally, it seems as if the trainees are not interested in acting in the role of a teacher for their co-trainees, but rather reflects an understanding implying that each single trainee, and her or his individual contribution, forms the collective that together can solve, for example an examination task. Another trainee relates to the same issue by saying:

"…if someone in the [study] group didn't understand, the others tried to explain. That is something I think works well. However, to be the one who tries to help all those who have a problem in understanding could mean that you don't have enough time to manage your own studies and instead, like Florence Nightingale, you flutter around and try to help everyone …".

The overall understanding within this category seems to be that the valued way to participate in the E-OLC is characterized by, for example, individualization, activity, self-regulation and goal-orientation. Being a teacher trainee, in terms of membership in an E-OLC in this particular programme, means being part of a collective of individuals.

Category 2 – The Importance of Being-Together

The meanings embedded in this category seems to be in rather strong contrast to category one. Instead of being built on an idea in which the individual teacher trainees have to take personal responsibility for their own learning and educational success within the programme, another aspect of membership of an E-OLC seems possible to present. Following a net-based programme and only having a few physical on-campus gatherings seems to call for another way of fulfilling the social dimension in the educational programme. One way of realizing a social dimension without meeting face-to-face (f2f) appears to be to use ICT to form an E-OLC. This time, however, it does not primarily seem to be the learning process and the goal of graduating from teacher training that is the reason for connecting with co-trainees but instead the search for a feeling of being-together. In relation to being separated in space and in need of someone to discuss with one trainee says that:

"…in distance education you are so isolated. The teachers are far away, so you are far away from each other. We have learnt to give and take from each other and that we need each other…".

There are several trainees that underline the importance of everybody feeling at ease in the group and that it is every member's responsibility in the E-OLC to make this happen. This could be due to the risk that something could happen to you and then you would be in need of support within the study group; a study group that mostly is accessible via the E-OLC. One trainee expresses such an understanding when stating:

"Of course I would take responsibility for that [everyone feels welcome in the study group]. Everyone has the duty to push each other because you, yourself, could be in a low phase when everything feels difficult. It could be, for example, that you have problems at home or something else that makes you need support. It is our [the study group's] mission to support each other".

Another aspect of the teacher training programme that seems to require a continuous dialogue between the members in the E-OLC is concerning the trainees' future as teachers. Not specifically how to solve problems related to a certain course or task but instead, for example, what courses to chose within the programme and how it will be to work as a teacher in "the real world". One trainee says:

"…yes, we discuss a lot. Which attitude to have in the classroom together with the pupils and how to handle different situations, which working methods to use and of course the salary we will get after completing the education…"

Another trainee discusses the issue and says:

"…we discuss study loans, economy of course. How to act in order to get through this training and of course how you will work afterwards…"

An overall interpretation within this second category seems to be that the trainees are in need of the possibility to have continuous access to each other. The trainees are located in different geographical settings not able to meet physically on a regular basis and therefore their solution is the E-OLC. The contrast with the first category seems to be that when discussing issues more related to everyday life or the future life as teachers in school. The norms of how to contribute to activities and dialogues within the E-OLC are not so restricted as when contributing to activities and dialogues concerning tasks that are more specific and examinations within the programme.

Category 3 – The Importance of Bridging Distances Between Trainees and Trainers

It seems that the teacher training programme in question requires continuous contact between both trainee-trainee and trainees-trainers. These can be carried out in diverse ways as seen in category 1 and 2 of having dialogues concerning different issues related to the programme, and not least to be able to receive response to their completed work or to obtain additional perspectives on the discussed issues. It seems, however, that the trainees, more or less, lack support from the trainers and instead have to rely on one another and each trainee's individual capacity to move forward within the programme. Sometimes they do not know if they have passed the previously tasks or assignments. Students feel the programme lacks support and possibilities to influence communication, which are required in order to achieve a secure and improving teacher training in collaboration with the staff at the university. The norm seems

to be that each individual trainee must take responsibility and be motivated to keep up their studies even if they receive no feed-back or support from the trainers. One trainee expresses this by saying:

"…they [the trainers] just wait, and wait, and because I haven't received anything back I assume that I have failed the test… The same thing happens when we post questions on the net, and it takes three weeks before we get any answers, or even worse when we don't receive any answers at all, and the trainers says that they have seen us discussing these questions on the net… I hope that I will remember that feeling when I teach my pupils in school and when we talk about democracy. It [democracy] is non-existing in the university…"

Furthermore, it seems as if problems needing to be solved and questions are related to when the trainees attending the university physically. The trainees put forth that they use the E-OLC to support each other between on-campus gatherings and, as one trainee puts it, that:

"…we write e-mails to each other and when, during on-campus gatherings, we try to straighten things out…"

Another aspect of the importance of bridging distances between trainees and trainers relates to how the on-campus gatherings are carried out. The gatherings are mostly built up around lectures and seminars during which different content matters are problematized. The analysis suggests that trainees would like more social activities during on-campus gatherings, which would provide opportunities for bonding and strengthening their relationships. These relationships could thereafter continue to be strengthened via the E-OLC. Additionally, there seems to be a wish for more occasions for trainees and trainers to collaboratively discus the complex task of being a teacher. One trainee states:

"…a thing that I have thought a lot about the social dimension in the teacher profession. We are becoming so much more than just a person that has to transfer blocks of knowledge's to them [the pupils]. We have to actually be there and foster them and give them [the pupils] values and every thing. We think that many damn fine words have been written, but there is a great distance to the pupils. It should be so much better if some time was spent on trainers connecting with the trainees instead of writing fancy papers…"

Within this third category, the overall understanding possible to put forth, is that there is a lack of continuous contact between trainees and trainers. For example, a dialogue in which the two parts could negotiate around issues like how to meet the pupils in the classroom and the meaning of the constitutive values underpinning the Swedish school system. Furthermore, it seems as if trainers, to some extent, reject using ICT in order to report results from different assignments and refrain from joining the discussion taking place within the E-OLC. The trainees put forth that they want a social dimension in the programme, despite their separation in space, but that the staff at the university does not appear to share this progress.

Discussion

The net-based teacher training programme studied in this paper seems to be of a complex nature and it seems to be difficult to be a successful participant. When contrasting the three categories described in the analysis, three issues supporting this statement became particularly apparent. The first issue suggests that the individual trainee is held responsible for their learning. Success appears to be due to each trainee's capacity to contribute to the collaborative work conducted within the study group. Failure, though, seems to be just around the corner for a trainee who has problems living up to this negotiated norm. It appears to be difficult to trust the other members in the E-OLC, and to act as a united community aimed at solving different kind of educational problems or tasks through a joint process of collaboration. Provocatively formulated, if you do not contribute with something or participate in line with what is expected, you had better not contribute or not participate at all!

The second issue suggested how the individual trainee needs others. There seems to be a fear among the teacher trainees, a fear of being the next one with problems and to be in the hands of the cyber space in order to get in contact with co-trainees. This fear seems to promote a more inclusive attitude to other members and how they participate and express their ideas within the E-OLC. Being-together in the E-OLC is important, which is in opposition to the embedded meaning in the first issue.

The third issue suggested difficulties in bridging the distance between trainees-trainees and trainees-trainers. This seems strange, as ICT is the tool to use in order to connect the trainees to the university. This seems to reflect a view that the trainees are supposed to manage on their own in the programme. The trajectory discussion very much becomes a question of the trainees' prejudices of what to expect after graduating and how to handle morally and ethically complex situations when working as teachers. This result is interesting also in the light of a study made by the Swedish Knowledge Foundation (2005) reporting on teacher trainees' attitudes towards ICT. Teacher trainees stress that teacher trainers' ICT competence in education and teaching is poor and that their knowledge of ICT as a pedagogical tool is poor. A majority of the teacher trainees further state that they are positive towards using ICT and the internet in their teaching and that they will use ICT as a pedagogical tool.

What can we learn from the study presented in this paper in order to support learners in this kind of educational programme? It seems possible to claim that a pedagogy relying on being designed for participation, in this case neglects that individuals may need their individual design (as well). The lack of collective solutions to satisfy trainees' needs for others outside the study group may restrict their access to the educational content. Furthermore, the designed participation restricts the trainees' studies, restricting them to wait for trainers to respond, and fellow trainees to react to their needs. Conclusively, if viewed as a pedagogical idea for higher education, designing E-OLCs might bring severe difficulties about.

On the other hand, it seems possible to claim that the need for socializing and support, both from fellow trainees and from trainers, suggests that the E-OLC has an important role to fulfil. The aspects of negotiation of meanings and values to underpin the education in question are not to be taken for granted or merely handed over to the trainees without support. In order to support such a development in net-based teacher training programmes, more research seems to be required to construct an understanding of how the processes of participation and collaboration can be brought about, and at the same time lay an important foundation for processes of negotiating of meaning where the ethical aspects of being-together are in focus.

The educational visions of the Bologna process and policies of the European Union will affect the way teachers are trained in the future. The next step in higher education today seems to build individual knowledge and at the same time build a future citizenship; a membership in Europe. In this process, teachers of tomorrow will play a crucial role for such a development. However, the question remains how people will react to the intentions of being designed to become the Europeans of tomorrow. Will belonging to the future European community of learners be tempting, will it offer such safety, so people are willing to give up parts of their sovereignty and become what they are expected to become? To what extent and towards what ends are the I/We balance (Elias, 1991) to be tilted? In each of the three categories described, different aspects are in focus and different rationales seem to be working.

Conclusions

When being part of an educational experience, in this case being part of a net-based teacher training programme, students transcend the intended use of both ICT and design. A pedagogy in which the being-together is the starting point seems to be called for when designing this kind of educational programme. E-OLCs need to be designed with the pedagogical issues firmly based in an ethical view of people and education. Having to rely on each other in the study-group situated within an E-OLC, simply because this is the designed structure to support the studies, becomes part of a process of negotiation in which the trainees seems left to their own devices. What is negotiated can hardly be designed, it seems. Therefore, it might well be that access to education (the intended way, based on participation, collaboration and negotiation) are denied some trainees if they do not adhere to the negotiated ways. I conclude this paper by emphasizing the need of a pedagogical approach that relies heavily on social, collaborative and ethical aspects of learning as a starting point when designing the E-OLCs to support the kind of education we in Sweden as well as EU need for the XXI century.

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