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The modern research University in a pluralistic society should provide a privileged space for fostering disciplined dissent. "We few, we happy few," who work in them, owe a responsibility both to our students as well as to society. Idols stood in Bacon's way as he fostered the New Learning of the seventeenth century. Our standards-based world which sanctifies objective tests fails to recognize that true learning needs time. Teachers should not be mere passport control officers busy checking off lists but rather be agent provocateurs inspiring students to change the world. Braudel and other French historians of the Annales School evoked the notion of the "longue durée" where they went beyond events and looked at deeper structures of the past. We too, should teach our students to look not at the near future but the distant one (l'avenir distant, pas plus proche). This is not easy as Society sanctifies the bottom-line. About a decade ago, I took part in a panel discussion at the CBC discussing schools and universities. Pushed to give my vision of the future, I quoted an old poem by James Elroy Flecker:

I care not if you bridge the seas
 Or ride secure the cruel sky,
 Or build consummate palaces
 Of metal or of masonry.

But have you wine and music still,
 And statues and a bright-eyed love,
 And foolish thoughts of good and ill,
 And prayers to them who sit above?

W.H. Auden once wrote feelingly that "As biological organisms made of matter, we are subject to the laws of physics and biology: as conscious persons who create our own history we are free to decide what that history shall be. Without science, we should have no notion of equality; without art, no notion of liberty". To that end, I have strenuously sought to give my students a glimpse of the wonders of the natural world and help them reflect on their own responsibilities to blend harmoniously the world of the sciences and the humanities so that both cherished notions, equality and liberty, can be well preserved.

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Teaching is about sharing information, motivating young minds to explore endless possibilities, creating a classroom environment that is safe and challenging at the same time. Teaching is about posing questions and offering tools so students can find the answers. Most importantly, teaching for me is about passion. Passion for the subject at hand, for the topics presented: passion for teaching. If we teach with passion, students feel it. They sense it. The most rewarding experiences occur when students respond with the same enthusiasm and commitment that the instructor has shown them. I feel privileged and honoured to be able to live my life doing something that I profoundly love. This is a path where rewards are presented to us daily: a student leaving a book of poems that he has written after leaving the university; a journal created by another student with quotes from my classes (apparently she had been writing them on the margin of her class notes through the years);

and those who keep in touch, even years after graduation. Their accomplishments and life experiences are the unexpected rewards that keep on giving.

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As I reflect at the end of my career, I see that I more or less tumbled into teaching by default. In my youth, I always considered teaching as a career alternative to Medicine, but in the end decided on Medicine, never dreaming that eventually I would be able to combine both paths in a very satisfying way. It is that combination of praxis and theory that has been at the heart of all that I teach since I constantly crave to see ideas translated into action and results. I have discovered that most of my students do, too. The result is that I thrive in small group settings where I can ask questions and get students to teach me what they think and how they plan to put their thoughts into action in the medical setting. The queries "what," "where," "when," "why," and "how" have stood me in good stead over the years and I think have helped students to get past the temptation to learn simply by rote but rather search out the reasons for what they see and what they do. Such learning "conversations" often have the effect of blurring the boundaries between teacher and student and have led me (a decidedly "small c" conservative) to engage in activities that I would not have considered on my own. Ask me sometime what my tutorial group and I were doing in a "hot yoga" class this past winter and you will see what I mean.

eCole

Individualiser le développement des compétences

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Le projet eCole a pour objectif de soutenir le développement des socles de compétences visés dans l'enseignement primaire et secondaire de la communauté française de Belgique. Il propose une plateforme en ligne reprenant par compétence des tâches susceptibles de les servir (<http://www.e-cole.be>). Environ 430 tâches y sont jusqu'ici répertoriées. Les deux premières années (2006 et 2007) ont été consacrées à la conception de l'outil, à la sélection et la création de tâches utiles au développement des compétences « lire » et « écrire » en français à destination des enfants de 10 à 14 ans. La troisième année (2008) est dédiée à son expérimentation et au déploiement d'activité au service du développement de compétences en mathématiques.

Nous décrivons dans les paragraphes qui suivent une brève description de l'outil, de sa mise en œuvre et des perspectives qui en résultent.

L'outil

La plateforme présente une carte de navigation (type GPS) dans laquelle sont affichées sous forme de rond-point les compétences, les sous-compétences et leurs ressources. Via chaque rond-point, l'apprenant accède à une série



d'activités complexes, semi-complexes et simples. Pour chaque tâche, l'élève peut consulter une fiche descriptive à partir de laquelle il peut évaluer et commenter l'activité. Le rond-point donne également accès un dossier de suivi dans lequel sont reprises les activités qui ont été consultées. À partir de ces informations, l'élève est invité à rendre compte à son enseignant

de sa perception de son niveau de maîtrise de la compétence travaillée et d'en apporter la preuve. Un débat peut dès lors s'installer entre l'élève et son enseignant. Si la preuve est à charge du premier, l'apport d'informations diagnostiques et formatives revient au second.

Premiers usages

L'outil a été testé sur 360 élèves répartis dans 18 classes différentes, dont 6 de sixième primaire et 12 de première secondaire. Il suscite un grand enthousiasme auprès des enseignants comme des élèves. Trois types de scénarios ont été éprouvés. Les

premiers proposent des parcours individualisés conçus par l'enseignant et/ou l'enfant (3 enseignants dans 3 classes). Les seconds proposent un même parcours pour tous les élèves d'une même année (2 enseignants dans 13 classes). Les troisièmes laissent à l'apprenant la liberté d'utiliser ou non l'outil. Aucun parcours n'est imposé (2 enseignants dans 2 classes).

De ces premiers usages, nous constatons tout d'abord une forte satisfaction des enseignants, qui souhaitent d'ailleurs poursuivre leur usage de l'outil les années ultérieures. Cependant, seule la fonctionnalité d'exercitation a été réellement exploitée. Les enfants ont bien réalisé les tâches, mais n'en ont pas analysé les résultats pour évaluer leur niveau de maîtrise de la compétence et en rendre compte à leur enseignant. Trois hypothèses expliqueraient cet usage restrictif de l'outil. La première relèverait du contexte, la seconde de l'outil et la troisième des acteurs. La première n'est autre que le manque de temps. L'usage de l'outil s'est restreint à en moyenne deux séances collectives organisées sur un même mois. Le développement des compétences demande du temps et ce n'est pas en l'espace de 100 minutes que l'on peut prétendre atteindre un niveau supérieur de maîtrise de la compétence visée. La seconde hypothèse relève de la nature des activités en ligne. À l'époque de cette première expérience, sur les 200 activités en ligne, seule une petite dizaine était semi-complexe ou complexe. L'outil ne permettant pas aux enseignants de déployer une réelle stratégie couvrant la carte des compétences « lire » et « écrire » dans son entièreté, ils ont donc opté pour une stratégie plus minimaliste. La troisième hypothèse est liée à l'absence de développement de certaines compétences des élèves parmi lesquels l'autoévaluation. Ce constat nous renvoie aux manques de compétence de l'enseignant à soutenir la réflexivité, mais aussi au manque de compétences des accompagnateurs pédagogiques à les y initier.

Perspectives

L'outil a été conçu sur base de modèles qui tentent de soutenir le développement de compétences. Force est de constater que sans formation ad hoc, les enseignants restreignent l'outil eCole à un exercice. Pour pallier ce manque, nous avons repensé l'accompagnement des enseignants sur 2 mois. Nous prévoyons des formations de 3 journées. Si la première est axée sur une rapide prise en mains et une réflexion sur les principes pédagogiques sous-jacents aux usages de l'outil, les deux suivantes se centrent sur l'analyse par l'enseignant des traces objectives d'apprentissage de ses propres apprenants. C'est en tentant de comprendre les trajectoires de chacun de ses élèves que l'enseignant se donnera les moyens de réguler son action, de maximiser l'usage de l'outil et, en conséquence, de développer chez ses élèves à la fois les compétences « matière », l'autonomie et la métacognition. Par cette étude des traces de leurs élèves, les enseignants deviennent aussi des praticiens-chercheurs réflexifs. Ils se professionnalisent par une recherche constante de l'amélioration de l'apprentissage de leurs élèves.

eCole est aussi une occasion de partager entre collègues. Ainsi, l'outil est gratuit et nous sommes ouverts à tout souhait de collaboration, à condition de recevoir sur cet outil les avis critiques qui nous feront progresser.

Le projet est coordonné par le Laboratoire de Soutien à l'Enseignement Télématique (LabSET) de l'Université de Liège (ULg) qui y œuvre en partenariat avec la Haute Ecole Mosane d'Enseignement Supérieur (HEMES). Il est coordonné par Valérie Vreeswijk et piloté par un comité composé de représentants du ministre de l'Éducation et des inspecteurs issus des divers réseaux d'enseignement subsidiés par la communauté française.

Transforming e-Communications to Civil e-Learning Communities

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The e-writing revolution, for better or worse, has filtered into academia. And never has the gap between traditional and digital native discourses seemed wider than now. But this gap can be bridged! Through mediation of cultural and respectful differences, instructors can facilitate respectful communities of shared inquiry with students.

The following seven suggestions for enhancing civility in faculty–student e-mail communications are culled from related literature, informal discussions and focus groups with students and faculty, and practical experience.

1. Consider the benefits and downsides of e-mail.

Benefits of student–faculty interaction via e-mail include connecting easily, inexpensively, rapidly, and globally. Others include the development of language fluency and giving students opportunities to take chances they might not feel comfortable taking in face-to-face encounters (Bloch, 2002; Duran, et al, 2005). Finally, e-mail can enhance face-to-face interactions with students and increase students' course-related learning (Duran, et al, 2005).

Of course, the medium (by its nature) also poses setbacks including on-line bullying, hastily composed messages that get misinterpreted, and the erasure of boundaries—namely time, space and status differentials (Epstein, 2006; Bloch, 2002). By recalling one's own mistakes using e-mail, we can help students learn more effective e-communication. Sharing an anecdote or talking through consequences of using the "Reply All" function can be instrumental, as is pointing out that e-mail is not private and can be forwarded to anyone.

2. Make your preferred title clear to students.

One way to thwart tension between social distinctions (see above) is to tell students your preferred title. Let them know if you prefer the relational distance provided by "Dr." or "Professor" versus preference for closeness provided by a first-name basis and that this preferred title should be kept in e-mail messages.

3. Be forgiving of grammatical errors, yet aim for increased professionalism.

Understand that students' attention to grammar and structure decreases in e-mail as they focus more on personal connections (Bloch, 2002). So while typos may seem careless, students generally see e-mail as a more casual and interpersonal medium (Epstein, 2006) than, say, term papers. Instructors might then be forgiving of errors in e-mail, particularly if student engagement out-of-class is a desired outcome. However, instructors also need to help students understand that their professionalism and credibility is tied to e-mail messages.

4. Encourage one-on-one communication and office visits.

While e-mail seems to have usurped office hours, there are some concepts and operations that are too complex for clarification in an e-mail message. Add in language, culture, or even disciplinary differences, and e-mail becomes less helpful in moments requiring enhanced clarity. Telephone also remains another viable channel, so check messages on a daily basis.

5. Create a syllabus statement and gain student input.

Values that will guide in-class and out-of-class communication should be reflected in the course syllabus. Instructors can state which university-sanctioned platforms to use, the frequency with which one responds to e-mail, preferred title, expectations for language and grammar, and the types of communication that should be reserved for in-person contact during office hours. Students should be invited to share their expectations as well.

6. Model e-civility with effective use of e-mail.

Instructors should model e-civility by enacting behaviours that enhance learning and mirror the expectations placed on students. Key recommendations include: 1) consider the audience and impact of messages while composing; 2) include a brief salutation and a closing sentiment to impart relational connectedness and politeness; 3) refer to the previous message and provide a specific, yet brief response; and 4) edit messages prior to sending. The "Signature" option can be used to add a formal title to save time. For large groups receiving the same message, consider using the "BCC" function to limit text. In the interest of efficiency, check e-mail 2 or 3 times daily (not continuously), respond to student inquiries in a timely manner (within 24 hours to meet their needs), and clear out the inbox often to eliminate outdated messages. Also, hold off from replying immediately to any inflammatory messages received.

7. Use explicit e-mail writing assignments.

In-class and out-of-class exercises regarding e-civility can support writing-across-the-curriculum efforts and expose students to more formalized processes for assessing impact, quality, and appropriateness of e-mail communication. Case studies analyzing effective and ineffective e-communication, samples of appropriate and inappropriate e-mail messages, and public domain correspondence (e.g. newspapers and Blogs) can be used to generate group discussion, critical reflection, and possibilities for revision. Students can practice navigating cultural and organizational hierarchies through writing assignments that require communicating with people of different ranks and roles.

CONCLUSION

In order to play the role of translators between digital non-natives and natives, conversations about the connections among e-communication and learning must include all voices. Guided by this spirit of dialogue, the liminal e-space can enrich human relations, understanding, and learning when mediated by instructors and students.

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