

Campus - On-line: A Hybrid Model for PhD Studies ICT-pedagogy combining face-to-face seminars and web seminars

Abstract

The project idea is grounded in experiences from a project sponsored by Distum, Distance models for national PhD courses in Comparative Literature. We created a hybrid course design combining on-line seminars and boarding-house seminars and tested it with very good results by a pilot course for doctorate candidates from eight universities in Sweden.

We now find it urgent to implement a hybridity model also in the regular PhD education on campus. It is evident that on-line seminars have intrinsic values that in some respects make them superior to face-to-face seminars: increased activity of the participants, more individual feedback, documentation of all discussions. The hybrid form unites the advantages of on-line seminars with those of ordinary campus seminars (spontaneity and warmth of the direct contact, body language, training of rhetoric competence). Moreover, by the integration of the web and other forms of ICT in PhD education on campus the doctorate candidates will get used to new facilities for research and presentation, a benefit in their future carriers as academic teachers.

The integration of internet and campus seminars is to be implemented by a course for doctorate candidates in literature, belonging to the Departments of Comparative Literature, Languages and Theology at Lund University, all having the same basic need for theoretical knowledge and methodological training. Thus the Department of Comparative Literature will be a service centre for all doctorate candidates in literature at the university. This departmental co-operation together with the hybridity model of learning gives every prospect of a new departure for PhD learning in the field of literature. Our basic model should have good chances to be adopted by our colleagues at the different universities in Scandinavia, giving doctorate courses in literary theory and method. We have the ambition of practising our concept in order to export it.

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**CAMPUS – ON – LINE
A HYBRID AND INTERACTIVE MODEL FOR PhD
STUDIES**

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Abstract

Presentation of a hybrid course design combining on-line seminars and face-to face-seminars on campus. Evidently, on-line seminars have intrinsic values that in some respects make them superior to face-to-face seminars: increased activity of the participants, more individual feedback, documentation of discussions. The hybrid form unites the advantages of on-line seminars with those of ordinary campus seminars. The integration has now been carefully tested by a course for doctorate candidates in literature, belonging to different departments at Lund University. In this respect the Department of Comparative Literature has been established as a service centre for all doctorate candidates in literature at the university. We hope our colleagues in Sweden as well as abroad could adopt our basic model.

Introduction

Rational for change

The project should be considered a direct and positively formulated reaction to the changed conditions of PhD studies due to the educational reform of 1998. For Comparative Literature, as for many humanistic disciplines, the reform meant that the traditional models of departmental courses had to be changed, or supplemented. The new educational situation based on a few, but highly qualified doctorate candidates in each department has made the usual forms of continually given courses for groups of students impractical, as to pedagogy as well as to economy. That means that there is an urgent need for recruitment of course participants outside the course-giving department and that the professors as well as the doctorate candidates from different disciplines have co-operated interactively. And we are convinced that the necessity is a possibility of radical reformation.

Questions

We wanted to make a contribution to the reformation of graduate education by introducing an interactive model, combining ICT-pedagogy with face-to-face seminars, mixing doctorate candidates and teachers from different departments and integrating their course studies and their thesis writing.

The project was grounded on a new hybrid model of teaching and learning in the PhD education, called Campus – On line. The pedagogic idea is fairly simple, but contains a good deal of innovating possibilities, challenges and questions. Fundamental are two distinctively new principal problems compared to traditional learning in PhD studies of literature.

The first principal problem is made up by the constant integration of ICT in the regular forms of lectures and seminars, in short the *interaction of on-line and face-to-face learning*. How could this be done to make the two pedagogical forms work together with a maximum of synergetic power?

The second principal problem consists in the *co-operation and concentration of literary competence from different disciplines – doctorate candidates and professors*, together constituting a multi-cultural focalization of the most fundamental scholarly questions concerning text interpretation, literary theory and method. What initiatives had to be taken to connect different learning cultures of different disciplines and individual young scholars in a new mode of collaborative learning?

Importance of the project

The project has convinced us – teachers as well as students – that our Campus – On line hybrid model has potentialities making it the new pedagogical basis of the future graduate education in humanities. And we have made experiences – in co-operation with our doctoral candidates – confirming that the interaction between teachers and students as well as between the students amongst themselves could be radically strengthened and improved thanks to the method.

Method

Students

In Lund the Department of Comparative Literature has special requirements both for the ICT pedagogy and for an extra departmental widening of recruitment and interaction. Since many years we have excellent co-operative relations, departmentally and personally, to the departments of modern languages, of classical languages and of biblical exegesis. All of them gave us their enthusiastic support of our project. In this multi-departmental perspective we had a fairly many-headed corpus of potential participants in literature and other text-oriented disciplines with comparatively the same basic need of theoretical knowledge and methodological training. To our great delight we could accept 18 doctorate candidates from 10 different departments: Comparative Literature, English, French, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Islamology, Biblical Studies (Old and New Testament), History of Christianity, Systematic Theology. 10 female participants and 8 male, some of them rather young and in the beginning of their doctorate studies, others more experienced and about to finish their thesis.

Innovation

The key word for the innovative ambitions of our model was interactivity. This interactivity we have tried to promote on five pedagogical levels:

1. between different disciplines
(the interdisciplinary level)
2. between teachers and doctorate candidates
(the teaching level)
3. between the doctorate candidates amongst themselves
(the student collaboration level)
4. between net seminars and face-to-face seminars
(the methodological level)
5. between course studies and thesis writing
(the tutoring level)

In this way the model gave the students quite new experiences of their graduate studies, aiming at interactivity and integration between departments, teachers, students and their course reading and thesis writing activities. The interaction of on-line seminars and face-to-face seminars was the practical primus motor of all these interactive benefits.

Before the course started the teachers and the participants came together to coordinate and harmonize the basic ideas of the project with the individual wishes and needs of the students. Thanks to the web seminars and the teacher's possibility of establishing a direct and personal dialogue on the web with all and each of the participants, the opinions of the students could be registered and responded to immediately.

Procedures

A new evaluation program – most effective, handy and smart – has been developed in Lund at CITU. It is called e-Val. During the whole process from the planning via

the realization to the summing up of the project we have used e-Val to get a continual evaluation of the progress of our work and – moreover – a detailed documentation of the students active part in the process, registering their proposals, their reactions to advantages and disadvantages of our hybrid model. All participants filled out every evaluation questionnaire and formulated step by step of the course their praise and blame to encourage and correct us.

Results

The project was intended to test two pedagogical innovations and their applicability for graduate education in Comparative Literature: a multidisciplinary constitution of the student group and a course design built on a mix of campus seminars and on-line seminars. The results of this test have been documented by two enquiries, one in the middle of the course and another after the course was finished.

The multidisciplinary group of students

We were prepared to meet certain problems of integration and sense of meaningfulness in such a large group of participants from so many disciplines. As a matter of fact we got very few negative answers to our enquiry question: “What advantages/disadvantages do you find in the multidisciplinary composition of the group?”. The differences in research culture between the disciplines appeared very clearly – as somebody expressed it: “The scope of theories is enormous. Different disciplines obviously have very different theoretical grounds.” All the same, multidisciplinary seems to have been experienced as something profitable in itself, since almost 50% of the participants explicitly say that it implies only advantages.

Disadvantages

The following two observations show that the difference in earlier literary studies may create conflicts concerning the content level – as is shown by two answers:

- The only disadvantage is that the course content sometimes seems too basic for certain groups of PhD students
- As I have no basic training in Comparative Literature I have had certain difficulties with the terminology, but the course literature was of good help to me.

That sort of differences sometimes create problems of communication:

- Some participants are better informed concerning typical research problems and terminology and that may make the dialogue a bit unequal.

Advantages

The interaction between participants from the two faculties, theology and humanities, has been explicitly commented upon:

A theologian’s opinion:

- It has been great fun and very useful for me as a theologian working with text interpretation to study together with people who know this from the ground. A really inspiring and fruitful course for my part.

Opinions from students of literature:

- It has been very profitable for me as a student of literature to see how a theologian or a student of comparative religion works with texts. The type of interaction between us has widened my view of scholarly text studies.
- Advantages: to get to know new angles of approach, new concepts and new ways to deal with literature and text; to consider how theologians approach the Bible and ancient texts which generate other questions and problems than

contemporary literature; to notice the points in common and participate in discussions different from the ordinary discourse of comparative literature; to open perspectives towards the Bible and ancient literature.

Other answers concern the general advantages of multidisciplinary:

- Multidisciplinary group composition generates a dynamic process of a special sort... There are certainly differences in the way of thinking and approach to research questions but they enrich more than they create problems.
- The advantages dominate strongly. It is important to discover that we work with similar methods and questions in different disciplines and also to come into contact with other PhD students and to get glimpses of ongoing research at our section of the university.
- The greatest advantage is that the discussions become more fruitful when there are many angles of approach, which force you to modify your own opinions in view of other people's perspectives.
- Multidisciplinary gives the opportunity to mirror your own work in the work of the others and to reflect on a broader theoretical applicability than the one actualized by a limited individual task.

A proposal

One of the participants expresses a wish that is worth considering in view of future courses:

- Perhaps it would have been a good idea to present our different areas in the beginning of the course, to describe typical research questions, method problems etc in order to facilitate an understanding of each other's reasoning.

The Campus-On-line model

The net seminars

A basic drive in our project was the hypothesis that a campus course for PhD students could be enriched by on-line seminars. The answers in our two enquiries are unanimous in confirming this hypothesis. The net seminar has once more shown its great potential. We find it well documented that this type of study can be used with very fruitful results in many contexts, in many disciplines and on many levels, now that we have tested it in three projects and three different courses.

The specific form for our net seminars, with their precise problem formulations and their strict timetable, was regarded as an important condition for a favourable result:

- It was an advantage that we all had to respond to the same questions in a restrained way – a condition for our discussions to be so fruitful on an interdisciplinary level.
- Meaningful and inspiring tasks.

Advantages of the net seminars:

- Everyone participates in the discussion and all have the opportunity to prepare their input carefully.
- You can organize your work so that it conforms to your own interests.
- In an ordinary seminar only a couple of voices are heard. In a net seminar everybody has to say something, and everyone can choose which opinions to concentrate on.
- The net seminars give the opportunity of raising specific problems, for example questions concerning one's own thesis work.

- It is especially in the net seminars that we have made applications of different theoretical perspectives in our own research, something that I regard as one of the many profitable elements of the course.
- The net seminar makes it possible to put questions to each other. We learn very much from each other. In view of time such an exchange could never take place in an ordinary seminar.
- The net seminars made possible varying activities: publishing, getting feedback from the teachers and from the other participants, communicating in various manners and utilizing very fine web resources.

It is interesting to notice that even the contact with the teacher can appear to be more intense on the net:

- The teacher feedback is very good. I don't see any other possibility of such a discussion with a teacher.

Our organization of the participants in two discussion groups of 10 persons each was regarded as a problem by one of the PhD students:

- Unfortunately the opinions are not always thoroughly discussed. Perhaps it would have been better with smaller groups in the net seminars.

All in all the net seminars, compared to ordinary seminars, seem to give better possibilities for well prepared utterances, for discussion with teachers, for penetration of specific problems, for reactions the contributions of other participants and for intellectual exchange in the group.

The mix of campus seminars and net seminars

Concerning the model as such the participants mention only advantages:

- The model is good for long-distance commuters
- An ideal combination: the net seminars give time for well prepared contributions; the campus seminars give personal contact.
- The net seminars give a possibility for time-demanding problem discussion; the campus seminars bring a personal flavour to the course.
- The campus seminar gives good preparation for the net seminars.
- The campus seminars function as a necessary complement when they actualize what has been discussed on the net in a more concrete way

The course organization with three areas for participation – net seminar, campus seminar and project task – was also met with appreciation. A representative answer:

- Without the campus seminars I don't think we would have felt the same inspiration for writing and giving feedback. I think you feel much more of responsibility when you know the face behind the name. It makes you feel loyal towards the other participants and eager to publish your text or give feedback to others as soon as possible. The project task has to be regarded as a good termination of an extraordinary profitable course. It really made it possible to test some of the questions discussed during the course with regard to your own research subject. The individual feedback from other PhD students from other disciplines and faculties is invaluable.

The general applicability of the model is also emphasized:

- The pedagogic advantage is the (unusual) form of change between structured written and oral communication. Profitable use of this model could be made in many other courses.

Our special way of combining net seminars and face-to-face activities was however met with some critical opinions. Rather many wanted better continuity between the net seminars and the campus seminars:

- The discussions on the net were not always followed up in the campus seminar
- It was unclear whether the campus seminars were intended to be lectures on a new subject or a discussion based upon the preceding net seminar
- The model is difficult to handle, since there can easily arise an unbalance between campus seminars and net seminars. The campus seminars have suffered by this lack of balance; they have seemed transient and cursory compared to the scope of the net seminar.

Teacher feedback

The opinions concerning the great amount of teacher feedback were very positive:

- The teacher feedback has been very important. The reflections of the participants were taken into consideration; they did not vanish in a vacuum, as could easily have happened. That is why many, probably all of us, are very grateful that Anders took pains in responding to every one in a personal, carefully critical and inspiring manner.

Some of the participants could well understand the amount of work invested from the teacher:

- The feedback was very good in all regards, but perhaps it was too ambitious seen from the teacher's perspective.
- Very fine feedback (it must have taken a lot of time to give us so exhaustive answers!!)

An alternative for the future?

The participants are decidedly in favour of the multidisciplinary and hybrid course model as a viable alternative in the future:

- Definitely a form which must continue
- For this level the model is perfect
- The model makes possible a fruitful contact between different faculties and disciplines. It is of utmost importance that such a contact can be established.
- I think this model has good prospects. It could certainly be developed in new directions to reach participants in the whole country and eventually be utilised between several countries in co-operation.

Discussion

Analysis and Implications

We have seen that our project has been successful in that the two innovations tested, the multidisciplinary group and the campus-on-line model, both have had a favourable outcome. A condition for this result is certainly the great work invested in anchoring the project in the group of supervisors at the faculty, in structuring the course work, in the stress on communication and social contacts, in the importance given to feedback to the students.

Some problems actualized in the enquiries are well worth to reflect upon, regarding the possibilities of institutionalising the model. For example it seems important to strengthen the continuity between the net seminars and the campus seminars. The intense activity during the net seminars provokes a demand for intense participation also in the lecture room. It seems urgent to give room for the initiatives of the participants. They have given us some interesting proposals, which have also been discussed in our reference group:

1. Increase the number of campus seminars

The “unbalance” mentioned in one of the enquiry answers could be handled by a greater number of face to face-meetings, where the great lines, problems and questions could be studied as a complement to the net seminars.

2. Add separate lectures to the course

The model with net seminar followed by a campus seminar is a good idea, but in practice there has been a lack in time for the full development of the campus seminars. The presentation of theoretical views could be given in the form of downright lectures, and the campus seminars could then be designed for discussions.

3. Give room for discussion during the campus seminars

The campus seminars could better serve the interest of deep learning if they could always include discussion of what has been said during the net seminars. Possible alternatives:

- The participants could gather in small groups during the campus seminar to recapitulate and comment upon the net seminar discussions.
- If the campus seminar was given three hours instead of two there would be time for a two-partite organization of the seminar, for example
 - o 1) Overview and conclusion of net discussion 2) Discussion of new questions

- 1) Group discussion based in the questions of the net seminar 2) Introduction of the next course module

Another problem is the teacher work load in this model. Both the net seminars and the campus seminars have demanded a great amount of work from the teachers, considerably more than what is necessary in an ordinary campus course. In a net-supported course the teacher has unlimited possibilities for enthusiastic involvement and can reach great pedagogic fulfilment. From earlier experience we know that feedback from the teacher is always wanted and appreciated, and it is likely to influence the learning process in a favourable manner.

It remains to be seen what the element of intense teacher activity means in view of the sustainability of the model. Perhaps it may have a deterrent effect on teachers who otherwise are willing to try out the model. It ought to be said that the intense teacher activity ought not to be regarded as a necessary element of the campus-on-line model. Alternatives that could increase the chances of preservation is

- to handle over the course management to a team of teachers
- to delegate a greater part of the feedback responsibility to the participants
- to let the campus seminars be dominated by discussions based on presentations of the participants.

The latter proposal would probably also strengthen the continuity between net seminars and campus seminars.

Conclusion

Our own conclusion is that the test of the model Campus-On-line has reached a positive result. The idea of creating a richer ground for course giving in Comparative Literature by enlarging the basis of recruitment to literature students from several institutes and faculties turned out to be more than a practical adjustment to reality. It likewise appeared to bring forward pedagogical values and research qualities that we could not have foreseen in the beginning.

The idea of the net seminar as a quality raising complement to ordinary seminars has been confirmed, just as we had reason to believe after having tested this pedagogical form in the model Internet – Internat.

Still there is much work to be done to make the mix of net seminars and campus seminars completely functional. The opinions delivered in our enquiries and the discussion in our reference group has shown ways to ameliorate the model. The sustainability of the Campus-On-line model also demands that we make our results well known in the faculties of humanities and theology. It is important that a larger group of teachers get involved in testing it. Next time it is essential that the course can take place in a teacher team in near dialogue with the reference group.