Chapter 7.15
Enhancing Phronesis:
Bridging Communities Through Technology

Anders D. Olofsson
Umeå University, Sweden

J. Ola Lindberg
Mid Sweden University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the possibilities to use technology in order to improve the contextual and value-based dimensions in online distance-based teacher training in Sweden are explored. Aristotle's (1980) concept of phronesis is used as a starting point for raising questions whether the Internet, and the establishing of educational online learning communities, can be used to enhance the teacher trainees´ skills of making moral decisions in unpredictable situations. It is argued that active participation, collaboration, and dialogue are vital in order to foster common moral and societal values among the teacher trainees, but that there is a need for rethinking how technology could be used in order to accommodate such processes. This chapter suggests that the development of a shared teacher identity is possible by expanding the scope of online community, and bridging teacher-training practices to teacher practices, thus including already practicing teachers, teacher trainers, and teacher trainees in a joint educational community.

INTRODUCTION

Society is changing. We have become part of a society characterised by multiplicity and globalisation. Teacher training is an institution buffeted by these changes. It must foster societal values such as democracy, freedom, multiculturalism, and equity, as well as ideas about teaching and learning, education, and instruction. However, can it do this within the ICT frameworks that have emerged in the learning society?

Enhancing learning through technology, in this chapter, is therefore conceptualised as a matter of being able to "walk the walk," in other

words, of building bridges between the text-based learning environments of Web-based conference systems and situated practices relevant to teacher training. This can be done, we believe, by using an understanding of knowing in action based on the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, which captures the idea that engaged social practice — doing something "well," — has both contextual and moral dimensions (Aristotle, 1980; Gadamer, 1989).

In this chapter, then, we explore two issues. First, we comment on the work of an ICT-supported distance-based teacher training programme. Secondly, we consider whether online learning communities (OLC) are a valid basis for fostering a practice built around common societal values. Overall, our aim is to problematise the current relationship between online learning and teacher training. In short, can online "talk" be converted into classroom "walk"?

FOSTERING VALUES AS PHRONESIS

Aristotle (1980) used phronesis to denote an aspect of knowledge that he claimed had both practical and moral implications, and he saw it as practiced rather than possessed, knowing rather than knowledge. Phronesis embraces prudence: the moral considerations in doing, the deliberative quest for the wisdom of the chosen actions. Phronesis, for Aristotle, was the knowledge linked to practicing morality.

Following Gadamer (1989), action is linked to practical wisdom and, as phronesis, always interlaced with the application of understanding. Application provides understanding with a direction. It defines the moral, in a specific case, in relation to collective understandings of right and wrong. Application is always present as an open opportunity for seeing things differently. Through the embodied aspects of morality (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), we build on a different rationale

of phronesis (Lindberg & Olofsson, 2005), or practical wisdom, than seems to be present within the reflective practitioner paradigm (Clandinin, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Noel, 1999). For us, understanding is always focused by its application, and by values that frame moral actions, like teaching, and not only by critical reflection and reason.

Transferring this understanding of phronesis to the distance-based teacher training programme in question, the work of the teacher trainers becomes more than, or perhaps different from, ensuring that the teacher trainees develop a theoretical understanding of teaching and learning. If teacher training becomes a question of developing the skill of making moral decisions in unpredictable situations within the classroom, and since this particular teacher training is provided on a distance basis, questions arise concerning fostering and sharing notions of societal values. What are the possibilities for a communication technology to become an educational technology through which teacher trainees can develop these skills?

EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

The use of technology for educational purposes has undergone major changes during the last 50 years. From being primarily concerned with transmission or delivery, the changes have passed a cognitive focus on representation, and later on construction, and have gone towards a focus on social theories of learning and collaboration (Koschmann, 1996). In particular, the Internet has changed the way technology is used for educational purposes (Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Stephenson, 2001).

The idea of being part of an online education marks a shift from earlier views of the learning process. Focus has shifted from outcomes, in terms of students' performances as a product, and more to the view that today emphasises democratic learning, often in terms of participation,

Related Content

Ensuring Usability in International Web-Based E-Learning Systems
Andy Smith (2004). *E-Education Applications: Human Factors and Innovative Approaches (pp. 275-290).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/ensuring-usability-international-web-based/8958

Enhancing Student Achievement, Engagement, and Satisfaction Using Animated Instructional Videos
April Cookson, Daesang Kimand Taralynn Hartsell (2020). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 113-125).*
www.irma-international.org/article/enhancing-student-achievement-engagement-and-satisfaction-using-animated-instructional-videos/252194

Student Success in a University Introductory Networks and Telecommunications Course: Contributing Factors
Robert G. Brookshire, Tena B. Crewsand Herbert F. Brown III (2009). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 53-61).*
www.irma-international.org/article/student-success-university-introductory-networks/2365

Methodologies to Determine Class Sizes for Fair Faculty Work Load in Web Courses
Kathryn M. Zuckweiler, Marc J. Schniederjansand Dwayne A. Ball (2004). *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies (pp. 46-59).*
www.irma-international.org/article/methodologies-determine-class-sizes-fair/1631

On the Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and Distance Education
Utku Kose (2015). *Artificial Intelligence Applications in Distance Education (pp. 1-11).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/on-the-intersection-of-artificial-intelligence-and-distance-education/114437