LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Technology Supports Cross Cultural Education

LEARNING

TUTORING IN ELNET

This case study incorporates a report and paper presented by Manfred Langhorst, tutor in languages, Kollegschule des Kreises, Minden, Germany to the 1991 ELNET conference in Würzburg. It explores the experiences of a single participating German college in implementing a range of tutoring techniques associated with ELNET.

Objectives

One of the key objectives of ELNET was to explore how the IT environment could be used to promote cross-cultural learning in groups.

The ELNET team categorised the group teaching/ learning methods possible within ELNET, focusing on:

- the management of the whole teaching group and of sub-groups

- student roles within these learning groups.

Learning Groups and Group Methods

MANAGEMENT OF THE GROUP		
	Whole	**Sub Groups**
Similar	1. Whole Group Activity	2. Small Group Work
ROLES		
Differing	3. Role Play or Simulation	4. Gaming/Simulation Simulation

LEARNING METHODS CASE STUDY

The College

The Kollegschule des Kreises in Minden is a college catering for about 5,000 students with 220 tutors. It offers pre-vocational training, basic vocational training and professional examinations (e.g. for educators, assistants) as well as final technical school examinations. It also offers Polytechnic entrance exams and Abitur ('A' Levels). This means that students with a vocational training can at the same time gain an academic qualification.

The Kollegschule specialises in the sciences, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, textile engineering, traffic engineering, construction, food technology, home economics, education, community care and design. Each specialism combines the related vocational training with a series of core subjects so that each of the different educational routes within a specialism shares a common basic training.

Class Organisation and Methodology

Seventeen electronics students were chosen to work within ELNET, all of whom were also studying English and Business for the Abitur. The students working within ELNET were volunteers who used the system after the end of the school day.

The groups were split into two and one group went online whilst the others prepared material offline. There were two teachers supervising the operation, an English teacher and a vocational teacher. Individual students were given IDs to access ELNET.

Accessing ELNET

There was a single telephone point for telecommunications which sometimes caused a log-on bottleneck. Some students were lacking in experience and had to learn to use the computer beforehand in the computer laboratory. In order to minimise costs, text was first saved to disc before uploading onto ELNET.

The Kollegschule worked on a number of areas within ELNET, primarily the IUT Conference, the news simulation module 'EURODESK' and its own online conference.

The IUT Conference

This was a conference that already existed which meant that students had immediate access and were able to contribute easily. However, it was felt that for future projects, new contacts between schools should involve the creation of separate conferences with their own items and questions.

The following shows the topic areas within the existing IUT conference:

Item 1   Personal details

Item 2   Geographical, historical and political details

Item 3   Sports and leisure activities

Item 4   College courses

Item 5   Local computing businesses

Item 6   Aspects of business practice

Item 7   Joint questionnaire

Item 8   Proposed exchange in May

Operation of the Conference

In order for learning via telecommunications to work well, the contact between the schools must be lively and must be directed by the teacher. There was considerable opportunity for interesting language learning when students set the questions themselves on themes that interested them. They were thus able to learn at first hand rather than from a text book. Private messaging enabled students to learn about each other on a personal level.

Online Conference

This conference was planned and organised by the Minden Kollegschule itself. It proved highly successful and over 40 responses were received within a short space of time. The topics covered were wide-ranging, from the use of ELNET in classes to the status of Berlin as a possible future capital of Germany.

EURODESK Simulation

This module proved popular with students, though it was also hard work. Most worked on it in their free time. The simulation approach was particularly successful in promoting inter-cultural learning.

Results of the ELNET Initiative

Minden Kollegschule was enthusiastic about the project. As a student-centred learning tool, ELNET was effective in stimulating interest in language learning. It also enabled pupils to increase their confidence in working with computers. Finally, tutors found that it could also be used effectively in the context of vocational training, although longer texts sometimes posed problems of understanding.

Conclusion

The success of the project was such that the Kollegschule was eager to cultivate further contacts with UK schools. Tutors felt that the project was particularly successful in promoting cross-cultural understanding, something that was felt to be especially important in the context of the Single European Market.

The interactive approach required by ELNET increased student motivation in the various subject areas addressed and also improved confidence in working with computer and other communications networks.