

Dialogue design – transformation of identity and local practice: An open-ended story on net-worked learning

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Abstract

This paper reflects the experiences with Dialogue Design for cross-cultural collaboration and product development in relation to local transformation of practice(s). The paper presents a methodology for transnational learning using Dialogue design on deliberate ideals and continuously evaluation as principle for guiding the process. Dialogue design is based on experiential phenomenology taking the point of departure for design and evaluation processes in the experienced practitioners themselves. The methodology has been developed in relation to the research and development project Making Online Path to Enter new Markets- MOPEM. It is an EU-research project with partners from different Educational Institutions of Technology and Business in five European Countries. The results of this transnational project suggest that in the development of net-worked learning environments, infrastructure cannot be reduced to technical solutions, as the cultural aspects of the educational infrastructure, teaching traditions and student expectation also play their role.

Keywords

Dialogue design, transnational learning, net-worked learning, international marketing.

The plot

The new trading conditions in Europe and the entering of the new member states are challenging marketing enterprises, demanding ongoing upgrading and development of marketing skills and cross-cultural, communicational competences. The virtuality of e-learning platforms, the grounded-ness of Marketing Research Schools and the practical experiences of marketing workers make blended learning environments desirable to ground the experience of a changing market and the need of life-long learning along-side with new communicational media and solid marketing knowledge. In the MOPEM projects five partners from different European Countries are developing a blended learning environment on international marketing. Bringing curriculum specialist and designers from the five countries together has in itself challenge the subject of international marketing. Within the MOPEM project twelve courses has been developed in total. The various topics have been decided in collaboration. Each Marketing School has been developing and providing three courses. The courses are all available to the partners as an assembly with different learning paths for the students to follow. The courses reflect the learning goals and methodology of the partners. The challenge for the MOPEM project has been to establish a shared language to discuss the overall learning goals and academic achievements within each module, to translate these to meaningful blended networked learning environments, and to implement these into the existing regulations within each country and institutions, as well as accommodate to the organizational culture.

Identity transformation from learning

Hegel, the great philosopher of dialectics frames the story line of the modern man as a movement from home to abroad and home again (Hegel, 1973). The protagonist of the modern novel is therefore not the 'same' person coming home, as the person who left home. He, and with feminism, she, has changed, undergone a development, a maturation were (s)he after various controversies comes to terms with the world, and find her

place in the established society. This self-development and learning process, also called *Bildung* are described within the phenomenology as dialectics of synthesizing new experiences into the old understanding, and thereby gradually widening the horizon of the world, and the possible acts within it. The underlying question of modernity, understood as changes in traditions, is whether the home culture accommodates the homecoming members by acknowledging their new knowledge of the world. This is also a crucial issue to the MOPEM-project's members, returning to their home educational institutions with e-learning products to transform their educational infrastructures and practices.

The experiential phenomenology of David Kolb frame this dialectics as a syntheses between the experiences we make through our sense by means of reflection and abstract concepts in order to act and participate in concrete practices. Practices that are transformed by acts, as well as transform the actors. Contradictions and tensions between our cognitive knowing and new experiences are therefore the continuously drive to overcome by synthesising them into new words and possible acts. Taking the point of departure in *Dialogues Design* (Nielsen, Dirckinck-Holmfeld, & Danielsen, 2003) the experiences of five partners from different cultural background are articulated and synthesis into twelve e-learning course on marketing. The following case tells about the methods used for articulating the partners' expectations, identifying contradictions between them and synthesizing them into e-learning solutions on marketing.

The storyteller in this case (and of this article) is the fifth, Danish partner, whose part in the project was to facilitate and test the pedagogical quality of the overall project development and of the e-learning products. Quality was here understood as something intrinsic to action and knowledge (Dunne, 1993). i.e. the four other partners themselves bring in the 'juice', in terms of experience and commitment to the task of establishing networked learning on international marketing. They are in other words skilled and experienced practitioners (Schön, 1983) in marketing research and educational design and as such, carrier themselves of the answer to the question of what 'international marketing' could mean in a cross cultural context. The partners all had different national backgrounds and educational infrastructure for understanding and dealing with marketing enterprises, though. But they shared as relative new member states of the EC a common, 'point of no return' for dealing with new trading conditions in Europe. Conditions that demanded - and still does - ongoing upgrading and development of marketing skills and cross-cultural communicational competences.

The case story of the Leonardo de Vinci-offspring: MOPEM

The following case is an example of trans-cultural networked learning by the methodology of dialogue design (Nielsen et al., 2003). It is a story of EU-research politics to support research and collaboration between EU-members within the Leonardo de Vinci- research program. The participants in the EU-funded project, called MOPEM are partners from different educational institutes of technology and business in five European counties. All of them are concerned with the possibilities of ICT to support learning and develop new educational products to meet the demands of a globalized marked. MOPEM stands for Making Online Path to Enter new Markets. So the core subject of the partners is 'International marketing'. But what does this mean in a cross cultural context?

The point-of-no-return

The MOPEM-project's solution to the growing demands on ongoing and flexible education in international marketing was to develop new educational programs within blended learning environments. The virtuality of e-learning platforms, the grounded-ness of Marketing Research Schools and the practical experiences of marketing workers were expected to make blended learning environments desirable to ground the experience of a changing market and the need of life-long learning along-side with new communicational media and solid marketing knowledge. So within the MOPEM-project the five partners set forward to create a blended learning environment on international marketing. The environment was to consist of different courses in international marketing. The courses were to be developed in collaboration between the partners and by bringing curriculum specialists and designers together. Finally the e-products could be owned collectively between the members.

'The Fifth Business'¹: dialog design

The challenge for the MOPEM project was to establish a shared language between the partners. A shared language to discuss the overall learning goals and academic achievements within international marketing, to translate these to meaningful blended networked learning environments and to implement these into the existing regulations within each country and institutions, as well as accommodate to the organizational culture. Dialog design has continuously been the methodology to articulate and cultivate a shared understanding of international marketing, that was grounded in the curriculum specialists, also called 'the teachers' and the designers, also called the 'it-specialists' knowledge on the learning content and the technical and pedagogical possibilities. The dialogues were moderated by the quality teams by posing the overall questions and problems to be work at in six work-shops where the partners discussed face-to face, and by presenting the partners the analysis and outcomes of the workshops in various designs.



Figure 1: Workshops- the basic setting in Dialogue design

The moderation of the quality group followed a dialectical, evaluative process of: identification of quality in the workshops, analysis of participants' statements, identifications of inconsistencies and dilemmas, synthesis into a shared frame of reference and presentation of outcome.

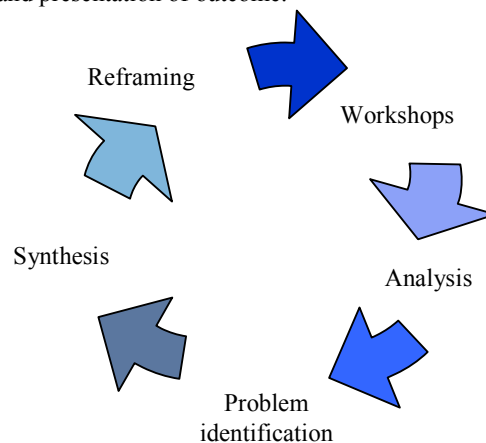


Figure 2: The evaluative process in facilitating Dialogue design

The evaluative circle of dialogue design repeated itself six times, resulting in six workshops and six iterative designs for creating blended learning environments. It was therefore also a transformative process where the quality and knowledge of international marketing unfolded itself into new designs and products of networked learning.

¹ 'The Fifth Business' is a theatrical term, a character essential to the action but not a principal, Tho. Overskou, Den Danske Skueplads in Robertson Davies, Fifth Business 1970, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Business

The six adventures of creating e-learning courses in international marketing

The task of creating a blended learning environment for international marketing took its point of departure in asking the participants of:

The first workshop- Poznan, Poland: *What is your learning goal, and what resources do you have to realize the goal(s)?*

A card method (Nyvang & Georgsen, 2007) was used where the participants brain-stormed on the issues they felt belonged to International marketing. It was possible to identify ten learning goals, and a wide range of technical infrastructure.

Quality facilitation: The workshops discussions and the presentations of the two groups with mixed participants from the teachers group and it-experts were recorded audio-visual. The empirical material was transcribed into text for further analysis. The following figure 3 lists the articulated learning goals that the participants agreed on. The works-shop also pointed to different educational and technical infrastructures between the partners; an issue that keep reappearing, also in the discussions of the analysis of the second workshop at the third workshop in Porto by the Portuguese partner. But first we have to explicate how the differences of the infrastructure appeared in the partners expectations of how to achieve the learning goals, i.e. how and to what extend the students achieve the learning goals.

- Intercultural competence
- Obtain highly specialized knowledge
- Have competence in advanced marketing
- Increasing knowledge and self-confidence in international markets
- Increase mobility on the labour market
- Problem solving and problem formulation
- Learning to learn
- Team working
- Collaborative
- Self-direct learning

Figure 3: Reification workshop #1

This we framed as a question in the second workshop on what learning level the learning goals should be realized by the students. And at the third workshop: what educational techniques could facilitate the specific levels of learning of each of the twelve learning goals. The answers were quite nuanced, also involving contradictions in what the partners expected at the various learning levels, and in what order such learning process could and should be facilitated in an e-learning environment.

The second workshop- Wildau, Germany: *What is the desired learning level of each learning goal?*

But firstly, in order to understand the question of the learning level of each learning goal at the second workshop, we have to introduce the communication and learning theory of Gregory Bateson (Bateson, 1972) in which he discern between different logical types of communication and thereby orders of learning: at the 0 level your understanding of a given phenomena is confirmed, which is a normal way of understanding and interaction in a familiar and stabile world, 1-level learning is when information makes it possible to correct or widening your understanding, i.e. "information that makes a difference"; 2 level learning is about establishing a new context of understanding, like from travelling, entering in to new relations or responsibilities; 3 level learning is considered quite tricky, as it is a creative kind of learning that appears when we experiences contradictions between different contexts of understanding. The classical example is about the Buddhist teacher, threatening his student that he will hit him with the stick if he moves. The creative, 3rd. learning level response of the student is to take the stick out of his master's hand and run away. The 3rd. level learning's backside is that the creativity also may show itself as an schizophrenic behaviour provoked by communication system were speech acts repeatedly have opposite meaning, and there by creating twisted expressions and experience of (self-) relationships. Bateson refers to this as a sciesmogenic culture that has self-distorting tendencies. This points to 4th level in Bateson's categories of logical types of communication that we left out as an option to the participants, because it is learning at a cultural and biogenetic level that cannot be individually and pedagogically planed for. Figure 4 sums up some of the characteristics of the logical categories of the learning

levels, and how we interpreted the possible learning levels of a specific learning goal: ‘Have competence in advanced marketing’.

Learning Levels	Learning process	Outcome
1.Level	Adjusting understanding with (new) information (assimilation)	Ex. Learning new concepts on marketing
2.Level	Establish new context awareness, expand horizon of understanding, go beyond already established structures (accommodation)	Ex. Applying the concepts to identify and/or solve marketing problems
3.Level	Creative response, go beyond the conditions for the known, appropriate new ideas, which are fundamentally different from the up to now known (double bind)	The prerequisite for level 3, learning is a pushing problem or a contradiction, which can't be solved within the existing knowledge frames.
Learning goal: Have competence in advanced marketing		
Goal Level	Learning level	
Marketing knowledge	1	
Experiences in using marketing knowledge in practice and critical reflection on the conditions for the knowledge	2	
Marketing knowledge as a driver for sustainable development	3	

Figure 4: Reification workshop #2

Quality facilitation: The participants were divided into two groups, and asked to reflect the desired learning level(s) of each learning goal. The quality group recorded the two groups’ mutual presentations and discussions of the chosen learning levels and their differences for further analysis. The analysis were done by first collecting all their descriptions of the possible learning levels of each learning goals, secondly comparing the two groups descriptions, thirdly in listing to the descriptions they agreed on, and as important those descriptions that contradicted each other. Both groups found 1st level learning important to all twelve courses, 2nd level to most of the courses and 3rd level to many of the courses. In the process of reflecting all learning goals in terms of learning levels the participants’ expectations on important learning outcome were verbalized into details. Differences between the groups understanding made it possible in the analysis to translate and synthesise such eventual differences into 3rd level learning issues, which anyhow, along with the definition of the 2nd level learning were the most difficult for the partners to find words for. The outcome of the analysis of the empirical data of workshop two were a detailed overview of learning levels of each learning goals and what kind of knowledge the partners expected the students to achieve. Further the analysis pointed to some divergences on the learning levels should be understood within and between the courses. One group found a fixed curriculum important in order to secure progression between the different courses and learning levels. The other group wanted it to be possible that every course could be taken independently of each other. Though ‘Problem-solving’ and ‘team-work’ were two of the learning goals, it was unclear what the roles of peer learning in project group work were to play in order to support the 2nd level learning and meaningful 3rd level learning. These inconsistencies among others were a quality issue to be worked at in the third workshop in Porto.

The third workshop, Porto, Portugal: Syllabuses with course information

The contradictions in the partners’ expectations on learning goals, levels, course duration, student workload, and curricula were, at the third workshop, worked at within a framework of a syllabus with basic course information. A syllabus with course information was made for every course. The syllabus consisted of general information on the title of the course, the teacher, the duration, the target group, the general aim of the course, the prerequisites of the students to participate, and then a table, listing the learning goals and the related learning levels, explicated from the analysis of the empirical data from the second workshop. Figure 5 shows how three of the learning goals were translated into specific knowledge to be learned at different learning levels.

Learning goals	Knowledge from learning level:
Increasing knowledge, self-confidence and intercultural competence in international markets	<input type="checkbox"/> 1: what are the relations between marketing and culture
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2: how to differentiate and cultivate marketing in different contexts
	<input type="checkbox"/> 3: why and when to plan strategically for new international

Learning goals	Knowledge from learning level:
	research on marketing
Obtain highly specialized knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> 1: demonstrating what specialized knowledge is available <input type="checkbox"/> 2: experiences of how to find, select and evaluate specialized knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> 3: answering why further research and resources for specialized knowledge are desirable
Increase mobility on the labor market	<input type="checkbox"/> 1: what are the conditions of local home labor market <input type="checkbox"/> 2: how does international labor markets differ from local market <input type="checkbox"/> 3: why do they differ, and what new needs and labor mobility these differences are promoting?

Figure 5: Reification workshop 3

At the workshop teachers and it-experts of mixed schools/countries sat side by side and discussed the relevance of all chosen learning level, rejecting some and confirming the majority. Along this process they were to reflect, teachers and it-experts together, what techniques they could imagine would facilitate the specific learning goals' different learning levels. If possible they should write their recommendations into the syllabuses. Further issues were the possible target group and the relation of the twelve courses to each other within a curriculum.

The Fourth workshop, situated national, within each marketing schools: *Design scenarios of e-learning courses on marketing*

The detailed syllabuses were within each marketing schools integrated with *cases*, developed by the Italian partner, and thereby turned into design scenarios for developing twelve e-learning courses. Each Marketing school took charge of developing three design scenarios. The local teachers and it-experts collaborated in choosing e-learning activities to support the chosen learning levels in the syllabus of each course.

Module I			
Subject:	Introduction and market development (Basic technologies, use of the internet in Europe / worldwide, use of the Internet in companies, market development)		
Learning goals	Knowledge from learning level	Activities	Infrastructure
Increasing knowledge, self-confidence and intercultural competence in international markets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3: why and when to plan strategically for new international research on marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - different kind of research (find out some additionally information, find out persons or institutions working in the same area, find out questions, theories, etc. related to the topics in work) - writing a summary (as text or as presentation or an image) and upload it into the platform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - library resource, internet, books, forum, tutorial - text editor, wiki, blog
Problem solving and problem formulation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1: to know what 'a problem' means within pedagogical theory <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2: to know how to formulate a learning problem within a project study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reading advanced organizer before working with the text - reading the text - generating questions and writing down in a forum - testing the knowledge with an assessment (e.g. hot potatoes) - reading advanced organizer before working with the text - working in groups with the method "JigSaw" or cross-partnership - case-studies - trying to answer at least two questions in the forum. - writing a summary (as text or as presentation or an image) and upload it into the platform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - classroom and video, demonstration, maps, learning objects, LMS book, LMS, internet - LMS with forum, text chat, wiki - LMS with tests - demonstration, maps, learning objects, LMS groups, experts, co-workers, different classrooms, internet, portable media, videoconference, Skype, library resource - LMS, forum, wiki - LMS, text editor
Expected student's workload in hours:		10	

Figure 6: Reification workshop 4

Figure 6 show the design scenario of Market Development, and how the learning levels are explicated into existing infrastructures and possible techniques to facilitated the students' interactions and learning process.

The Fifth workshop, situated national, within each marketing schools: e-course products

The design scenarios are used for producing three e-courses within the concrete educational programs of the different schools.



Figure 7: Reification workshop 5. Video-clip demonstrate 'Product placement' in e-course on International Marketing.

This process of turning the scenarios into concrete e-learning product were done in collaboration with different subcontractors with the sufficient engineering expertise.

The Sixth workshop- Warsaw, Poland: Quality evaluation with users of the e-course products

In order to secure the quality of the e-learning products in relation to the actual learning outcome, as assessed by the teachers and the students themselves interview guides (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) and questionnaires (Gillham, 2007) were developed. The analysis of the data were presented to the partners at the final meeting of the partners in the MOPEM-project in Poland, see (Coto, Wentzer, & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2009).

The following table sums up the Dialogue process and designs:

Table 1: Process of dialogue and reifications

Workshops	Process of dialogues in MOPEM design	Reifications of dialogues in MOPEM design
1	Articulating learning goals, resources and technical infrastructure of all partners	List of 10 learning goals
2	Identifying the desired learning level of the learning goals	Pedagogical model of learning levels, according to Bateson's theory
3	Explicating and synthesis inconsistencies and paradoxes between the desired learning levels of the learning goals into syllabuses with educational course descriptions	Syllabus with course information
4	Consenting on design scenarios for e-learning courses on marketing	Design scenarios for e-learning courses on marketing
5	Suggesting activities to accommodate the desired learning level of the courses' learning goals, and designing e-learning modules within concrete educational programs.	e-courses products
6	Including the experiences of the first e-learning groups of students and their teachers' interpretation of the actual learning outcome into adjusting and redesigning the e-learning modules.	Questionnaires and interview guides information about implementation into local educational infrastructure

Reflecting the quality process and methodology ourselves it became evident that the learning goals and especially the ambitions concerning the advanced levels of learning the goals were more easily explicated and designed for than actually practiced. The students did experiences learning of 2nd and 3rd learning, but not necessary as designed for. The teachers explained some of these inconsistencies between how the e-learning

products had been designed, and how they needed to stick to their existing educational practice. There was a ‘double bind’ or paradox between the peer learning and project group work designed for in the e-courses and the individual learning the students experienced. The restricting in e-learning here did not as much come from the technical side or the e-learning products but from an educational tradition with little group- and project work. The real challenge of e-learning, and networked learning, is then rather the restriction in the existing educational infrastructure of supporting dialogue and learning between students, and between students and teachers in open ended environments.

One might say that the MOPEM project in implementing its own learning products not only was facing the challenge of 3rd level learning, but also depends on a 4th level of a changing culture that accepts and supports the variations in learning relations and outcomes.

Coming home in diverse educational infrastructure and cultural settings: The 7th task....

The subject of international marketing had undergone a development where it transformed into twelve e-learning products. At the same time it became clear as the partners presented their students and colleagues in their home institutions of the Marketing schools that the employment of the e-products was not an easy task. Infrastructure cannot be reduced to technical solutions, as the cultural aspects of the educational infrastructure, teaching traditions and student expectation also play their role. These issues should also be addressed more explicit in the iterative design process as a step dealing explicit with the institutional/organisational regulations. We would therefore suggest to reframe the model with one more issue. The 7-steps model for formative evaluation based on dialogue design would therefore look like the following:

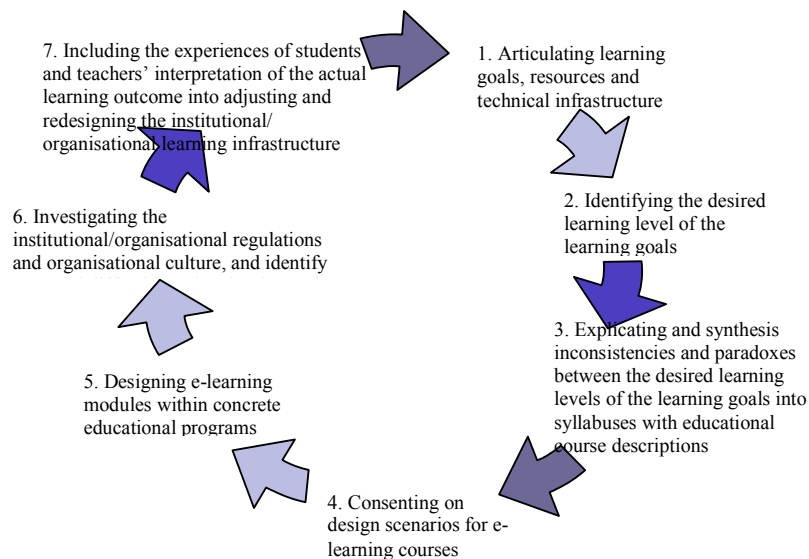


Figure 8: Model for formative evaluation based on dialogue-design

Though collaboration are essential to dialogue design and the networked learning in the MOPEM project, it was not necessarily a part of the partners existing educational infrastructure and education programmes, and therefore difficult to fit into the e-learning modules and the quest for contextual second level learning. The transformation of learning and development in international marketing therefore had a hindrance in the homes of the different, national partners. Leaving it up to the MOPEM teachers' and IT-experts' new competences of collaboration to start a local transformation of practices through dialogue and design for quality in blended-learning environments.

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