"Case study – An Online Training Course to Learn to Teach on Line"

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Abstract
This case study deals with the implementation of further training using distance and eLearning only. It was conducted within the framework of an interuniversity partnership between two distinct European countries. It relates the experience of several male and female academic advisers in charge of implementing this programme, along with the follow-up of the skills taught. This study lasted over a period of two years – from elaborating the programme during the first year through to implementing it in practice. During the design phase, a few issues came up. They were connected to the didactic method to be used, institutional isomorphism and the digital platforms operated in either university. Louis also analyses the hindrance and facilitating factors encountered in the second year, during the trainees’ tutorship and guidance.

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Case study – An Online Training Course to Learn to Teach on Line

A case–study conducted by Sylviane Bachy and Marcel Lebrun

Summary: This case study deals with the implementation of further training using distance and eLearning only. It was conducted within the framework of an inter-university partnership between two distinct European countries. It relates the experience of several male and female academic advisers in charge of implementing this programme, along with the follow–up of the skills taught. This study lasted over a period of two years – from elaborating the programme during the first year through to implementing it in practice. During the design phase, a few issues came up. They were connected to the didactic method to be used, institutional isomorphism and the digital platforms operated in either university. Louis also analyses the hindrance and facilitating factors encountered in the second year, during the trainees’ tutorship and guidance.

Key-words: non-presential distance training, inter-university, digital platforms

1. The Institutional Context
The training programme described in this study was delivered in Europe. Two university centres decided to develop together an online training course with the aim of teaching educators how to create an online course. It is an inter-university certificate – or University diploma – worth 10 ECTS-credits – 1 ECTS credit point equalling 30 student working hours. It is aimed at having the participants take part in a real non-presential online experience, while guiding them step by step in acquiring the skills necessary to build up an online course. As both higher education centres had previously accumulated a certain amount of experience in the field, they were intending to offer a training course that could possibly fulfil the following expectations:
- the necessity of space and time flexibility required by local participants who were, generally speaking, already engaged in other professional activities;
- the request from far-away participants unable to attend conventional or even blended training courses;
- the principle of isomorphism – that is treating participants the same way as you would expect them to treat their future students – by offering a training course that applies all that it prescribes;
2. Introduction to the People Involved in the Project

Louis is in charge of the management of Centre Alpha, as well as being a tutor there. He is the one who is relating this case study.

In this case study, he was interacting with:

Sylvie – an academic adviser and tutoress at Centre Alpha;
Nathalie – an academic adviser at Centre Epsilon;
Sandra – a student in instructional design and tutoress at Centre Epsilon;
Charles – in charge of Centre Epsilon and a tutor there, too;
Sophie – a tutoress at Centre Epsilon;
Jean and Barbara – both tutors at Centre Alpha.

The design process of the training programme was piloted by Charles and myself, as we had initiated the project together. We had met several times before during seminars, European project meetings or for Projects supported by the “Agence universitaire de la Francophonie” or “AUF” (for “Francophone University Association”). The idea of creating a common diploma through non-presential distance training emerged from such collaborations. Both of us asked for financial help from our respective educational institutions in order to design this training project.

Thus, Sylvie, an academic adviser was taken on for half of her duty time to elaborate the project in Centre Alpha, as she already had substantial experience in putting university courses on line. She was then joined by Nathalie, who is also an academic adviser and who was hired for half of her time, too, at Centre Epsilon. Nathalie is more familiar with computers and data processing than teaching. She worked on the project for three months before she was replaced by Sandra, a student in
instructional design. The replacement had effects, as we shall see further below, on the design of the course itself.

Other protagonists joined this initial group of lecturers in order to carry out the tutoring tasks planned in the training course during the implementation period.

3. The Timeline of the Course Design

In September 2010, Sylvie and Nathalie met to discuss the project and to plan their work, which was then to be done essentially on line from their respective centres. This first working session was a great opportunity to review resources—which were partly already available following previous presential and online training courses organised by Centre Alpha—its framework and the planning of tasks.

Contrary to the former training programmes, the goal in this case was to offer a training programme delivered totally online for a total of 10 ECTS-credits. This implied reviewing the various existing materials on either side, the materials to be transposed and put on line, along with the material to be drawn up.

The issue was to delineate the extent of the training programme.

Besides this, the teaching advisers were hesitating as to the nature of the training programme—did it have to be distance teaching or e-Learning?

Sylvie: “We have a great deal of teaching materials available from the previous training programmes, are we going to pass them on as they are? What leading paradigm will prevail in our training programme?”

Nathalie: “What do you mean?”

Sylvie: “I am wondering if we have to concentrate only on transmitting theoretical concepts rather than keeping to the philosophy underlying the ECTS grading scale—that is focussing our training programme on students’ attainment. This would obviously require us to go deeper into what skills we are targeting, as well as the teaching activities to be involved.”

Further information – ECTS-credits

When working on line, it is indeed quite difficult to assess the time needed for the learning process. The ECTS grading scale has been developed to provide a common measure of the work to be done by students within the framework of his/her course. Therefore, by awarding 10 ECTS-credits to the training programme, the academic advisers were able to better calibrate and choose the materials and learning activities.
Sylvie and Nathalie also had to take into account the statutory provisions in their respective countries so as to “give credit” to this training course leading to a qualification.

Sylvie: "In our country, this training course will be officially recognised by a university certificate."
Nathalie: "Do you think it would be equivalent to a university diploma?"
Sylvie: “We do have to make sure about it by asking our respective institutional and administrative decision-makers.”

The tasks to be performed were scheduled over a year, a period that corresponded to the two commitment conventions for the programme’s design. The year devoted to the design was split into two. The first semester was dedicated to the sessions’ script-writing, and the other six months to putting it on line.

3.1 The Script-Writing Issues that Arose

On either side, both course-designers realised right from the start that their assignment went well beyond the mere conceptualisation phase – the design of the training programme. As regards this matter, Nathalie was to tell her colleague from Centre Alpha: “In addition to this assignment, I have to give other courses and lectures, engage in teacher support and take part in the overall functioning of my institution.”

The tasks were then assigned to either of them according their availabilities and skills.

Sylvie and Nathalie began by defining the content of the training course’s seven modules and by building up a designing strategy in accordance with the principle of isomorphism to be implemented within this training programme.

Further Information – Isomorphism

The isomorphism principle requires that “the form” used in the training course – the workflow, the methodology, interactions, etc. – should be the same as the one expected by participants in their further teaching – active methods, exchanges, differentiated instruction, formative assessment and so on... In other words, one had to pay as much – if not greater – attention – to the form – the method – as to the substance – the content – of the training course. However, the point is not to ask participants to reproduce the
simulation activities to the letter, but to take up the processes or principles and adapt them to their specific work as teachers.

So as not to fail to convey such aspects, the academic advisers quickly came to an agreement as regards the assessment criteria to be achieved to be awarded the certificate. By the end of the process, participants would have to have put on line at least one module as part of their project and would have to hand out a written report aiming at reflecting on what they had learnt and what they had to adapt to suit it to the institutional, technical and teaching context in which they worked.

During the teaching–scenario writing period, a Skype meeting was planned so as to give feedback. To begin with, Sylvie worked on the first module aiming at making the notion of drafting course goals and teaching objectives clearer, while Nathalie focussed on the module related to the teaching tools available on line. During the feedback sessions, they experienced issues trying to expound to each other what they had conceived. Indeed, they had to go through the content, the material, the activities, the purpose and mode of assessment, the tasks assigned to tutors, together with the time the learners took to complete the module. So, they made up their minds to make a work sheet (Table 1) divided into columns and that took up such aspects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Goals, skills targeted?</td>
<td>Already existing? To be created?</td>
<td>What makes modules different</td>
<td>For formative and certification purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3...</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They also reviewed the way in which tasks were to be organized.

Sylvie: “How are we going to work? Shall we split modules between us, or shall we work together on all modules?”
Nathalie: “I’d rather we worked together on each and every module, which would allow us to better select and determine the right materials, the most relevant activities, and so on…”

Yet another problem arose. The work split into modules did not allow us to adjust the choices in methods from one module to the other – in the activity column. There was a conscious wish to use various teaching methods – group-work, exercises, case studies, forum debates –, but without an overall view, some decisions that had been made were to be suspended for some time.

Once all the modules had been drafted on paper, a specific meeting was organised to think about the learning sequences. Sylvie and Nathalie – the latter having reached the end of her assignment – were joined by Sandra – as a replacement for Nathalie, which turned out to be a good opportunity to explain to an outsider all the work that had already been completed.

Meta-reflection (examining the research process itself, as well as being self-critical) – Passing the Relay in the Designing Process  Sylvie and Nathalie found out that, even though expounding the training programme’s content as it has been thought out so far turned out to be a perfect way to test its consistency module after module, which led to having to explain everything over again and at times to cover the most basic teaching concepts for Sandra – who was still a teacher trainee at the time – to be able to grasp the whys and wherefores of the project, it actually proved quite time-consuming.

An issue in the teaching design came their way during this crucial working session, so I decided to interfere.

Louis: "You’re showing to me the content of the training programme’s seven modules, but I really cannot see at this stage in what way and to what extent they complement one another and integrate into the whole programme."

Sylvie: "You’re right! Up to now we have just been thinking about introducing the modules alongside one another. What can you suggest for us to better integrate them?”
Louis: “We may imagine modules nested within one another, a bit like Russian dolls - for each new module you would need to have completed the previous one, so as to stress how complementary these are.”

Sylvie: “I’m going to draw a graph in order to better visualize this peculiarity – see figure 1 below.”

**Figure 1 – An Integrative Representation of the Seven Modules Making up the Online Training Programme to Learn to Teach on Line**

Meta-Reflection – Consistency

I am familiar with this issue. It derives from goal planning – or “salami slicing” – conflicting with the need for integration expressed by the participants – see De Ketele 1995 – you must come up with a consistent training programme. In other words, you ought to offer interdependent modules – figure 1 – which implies, for instance, that the methodological, or “How?”, module should be coordinated with the goal, or “what for?”, module, and that assessment should be grounded on the latter – “Have they reached the goals set?”

Sylvie, with Nathalie and Sandra’s support, then wrote a script of the “online training course to learn to teach on line” for each module to take up the most significant elements from the previous ones by linking their content and by devising record tasks providing actual evidence of achievement – e–portfolio – to facilitate the students' reflection on their own learning.
Script-writing was completed within the deadline set. Once the content had been split up into pre-established modules, weekly learning and integration sequences were designed so as to give a structure to the training course – each module was to last over two to four weeks. For each week, the course designers, Sylvie and Nathalie, detailed the targeted operational goals, the topics to be broached, the type and guidelines for the activities envisaged, the materials available and to be drawn up, the assessment criteria, the work tutors were supposed to perform, and so on… Thus, the agenda of every single week was fully and precisely set out.

**Meta-reflection – the Design Approach**

In terms of teaching design, I became aware that the design activities therefore relied more on a system seen as a whole, which is a clever framework in accordance with the socio-constructivist theory, rather than on accumulated repetitive sequences advocated by the behaviourist theory of learning – Dick & Carey and Willis models presented in Lebrun’s 2007 article.

After agreeing on this breakdown, the teams divided up the work of putting the content on line. Let me give my very warm thanks to Nathalie, who left the project at this stage.

### 3.2 The Digital Equipment Issues

The training course was on offer in two universities that do not use the same technology in terms of platforms. Consequently, we had to take into account the technical and data-processing specificities of both facilities to develop the material and its presentation. Since Sandra – who was still training – had no practical experience, the course was first put on line on Centre Alpha’s Platform by Sylvie. Within this digital facility, the modules were designed as teaching pathways, a teaching pathway being organised so as to complete all the tasks assigned. Once a task had been performed, it counted in the follow-up of the learning process. Accordingly, the learner could easily see what he/she still had to complete in his/her progress towards achieving the goals set. This first online version allowed us to have an overview of the whole training course.

Sandra: “Now, what we have to do is adapt the course to Centre Epsilon, which will prove tricky as the platforms are very dissimilar.”
Sylvie: “On the Centre Alpha Platform we can indeed set out teaching pathways, while on Your platform the central thread might be found in the blog.”

Sandra: “Yes, I do think we can adapt the course using this tool. Now, what about video conferences? You integrated Skype into your platform and Charles is suggesting to use Google+’s Hangout application.”

Sylvie: "Like Skype, it is a tool that is external to the platform, but why shouldn’t we do that? This would give us an opportunity to experiment new tools, put them to the test and explore their downsides and advantages.”

From this project onwards, it became easier for Sylvie and Sandra to consider finding common points between different interface specifications. A last meeting was held to complete all administrative paperwork, to write out the partnership contracts, to set the fees to be paid and think about the best way to promote this most innovative training course. Sandra was now joined by Sophie to work at Centre Epsilon. The two designers introduced the project again to her, along with the philosophy behind it and how they saw what was to come next. Here are the outcomes.

4. The Result of this Research Work

The basis of this training course – named eLearn² for “eLearn Squared” – is the “three stages in a teaching strategy” according to Tardiff (1992) adapted to the processes of contextualisation, decontextualisation and recontextualisation (Proulx 1997). Instances of training programmes, case studies allow learners to adjust the amount of output required in order to get ready for learning, which is the contextualisation stage. Theoretical models, resources from research in education sciences – mainly as regards ICTs or Information and Communications Technologies in Education – form the decontextualisation stage allowing learners to learn, analyse, take in their newly-acquired knowledge and shape it with what they already know. Finally, the training course relies on a recontextualisation phase in which the learner has to transfer his/her newly-acquired knowledge or skills to a new situation, in this precise case the building-up of his/her own online course, in order to improve knowledge transfer and knowledge building(KB) even more.

The first module introduces the major concepts of the course (table 2) upon which we rely throughout the training course.
Sandra: "This first module is of paramount importance. We must be able to introduce, through concrete cases, the different faces of online and distance learning."

Sylvie: “We must convey the message that putting a course on line is in no way a matter of improvisation. With widely differing ongoing uses, we can give an overview of online education. This will engage and enthuse learners, who will be able to have an idea across the full range of what already exists and what can be done.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The many variations of e-Learning and delivery methods and their respective added-value according to the context</td>
<td>Analysing examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Alignment (goal–method–assessment)</td>
<td>Comparing scripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary scripting</td>
<td>Viewing video clips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “IMAIP” Model for “Information, Motivation, Activities, Interaction and Production” (Lebrun 2005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Right from this first module, the participants are in a position to think about their own projects and are able to start writing out their course scripts. These breaks for reflection will be allotted to them under the guidance of a tutor.

In the second module, the technical tools and current usage will be explored and analysed against their added value in teaching and training (table 3). Without a well-worked-out scenario, a budding course designer might get lost in the plethora of resources available for the Internet.

Sylvie: "There are so many tools for online teaching. What should we show them?"

Sandra: "Ideally, we ought to show them tools in relation with the various components of the theoretical models in module 1."

Sylvie: “I’m going to draw a conceptual interactive map that will take up characteristics such as information, motivation, activities and so on and so forth... And I will connect them with various tools outlining their technical specifications – PC or Mac compatible – as well as the uses that can be made of them in teaching.”
Table 3 – Module 2 – Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A variety of tools and media and their potentialities for online education</td>
<td>Analysing resources and “tools” freely by referring to a map that defines them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting the tools’ added value to the two theoretical models expounded in module 1</td>
<td>Implementing and using a portfolio under the tutors’ guidance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third module (table 4) is dedicated to the teaching objectives and skills to be learnt: “How can you make students learn what you expect them to learn? What can you do for the students’ activities to be in keeping with the teacher’s intentions?” (Biggs 2006). It had been very tempting to start with this module. Nonetheless, so as to make the goals precise and to label them, the course designers had reckoned that one had to first analyse one’s technological environment – what type of e-Learning and what tools were to be used? – which is often imposed by the teaching institution. This will facilitate the implementation of realistic and achievable teaching goals.

Table 4 – Module 3 – Pedagogical Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining learning goals, abilities, skills and explanations given to the trainees – course outline</td>
<td>Analysing learning goals through video viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking goals and learning activities, consistency of the course</td>
<td>Comparing learning activities in keeping with the goals set out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating the content of this module into the learner’s own project – ePortfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These explanatory and contextualisation details that add more sense to the activities are critical to enthuse and inspire students to join in the activities to be done (Viau 1994).
The fourth module follows the interdependent logic which exists between modules. The focus here is on choosing teaching methods that should be consistent with the goals aimed at and the tools used (table 5). In this module, participants evaluate their own learning habits, so to as to identify the teaching methods best suited to their own way of acquiring knowledge, which will typically match their own teaching strategies.

Sylvie: “In order to highlight various teaching techniques, why not allow participants to experience them themselves?”

Sandra: “What you’re hinting at is the isomorphism principle, aren’t you?”

Louis: "Yes, I am. Besides, it is also essential to make participants aware that they are being influenced in the methods they choose by their own learning style. We all fall into a particular learning category that somehow determines the way we teach.”

Sylvie: "In the previous modules, we already suggested learning methods like case studies, analysing video presentations and individual follow-up by creating and maintaining a portfolio. In the next modules, let's target other types of methods like teaching in small groups, doing exercises designed to apply the lesson to a practical situation, etc. …”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning styles</td>
<td>Determining one’s own learning profile using a questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discovering the numerous types of learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods – stress on diversity</td>
<td>Adapting teaching methods to the goals and matching the goals with the methods used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating the content of this module into the learner’s own project- ePortfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fifth module is an opportunity to think about the acquired knowledge online assessment in view of certification (table 6). Participants are requested to explore a variety of assessment tools for checking on line that the knowledge and skills taught
have been retained. There was quite some discussion as regards the position of this module in the training course. The initial reaction was to place it just after having clarified the teaching goals. Indeed, you define your goals according to what you are aiming at, which will then be assessed. The teaching advisers eventually decided to put it after the method review, since assessment is also grounded on teaching methods that imply adjusting on the learner’s part the amount of cognitive output required, which determines the level of expectations in respect of the goals set, hence the reference to Biggs’ research work (1982).

### Table 6 – Module 5 – Certificate-based Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The notions of criteria, indicators and scales for relevance, accuracy and reliability</td>
<td>Group marking of a student’s paper and chatting on a forum to discuss the assessment requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing Prof. J. Biggs’ Constructive Alignment and The SOLO Taxonomy (1982)</td>
<td>Exploring the various assessment tools – multiple-choice questionnaires, assignments, etc. – and whether or not they match the goals set and methods used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing the skills and level of the answers given by students</td>
<td>Integrating the content of this module into the learner’s own project– e-Portfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The sixth module** is an introduction to formative assessment (table 7) and the parts played by tutorship and support in an online course, so as to keep the learner motivated and guide him/her in his/her learning process.

Sandra: “I do agree with that, but isn’t it actually a bit late to award certification at the very end of the course if you seek to spot students experiencing difficulty or who would have given up altogether?”

Sylvie: “As far as distance teaching is concerned, I quite side with Perrenoud (2001) who insists on the paramount importance of monitoring as a rationale, of supporting the learning process and assisting learners in getting closer to the goals set in the course.”

Myself: “Such are, indeed, the role and functions assigned to tutors in this training course.”
Table 7 – Module 6 – Formative Assessment/ Diagnostic Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of formative assessment - the tutors’ functions</td>
<td>Analysing instances of interaction between tutors and learners to regulate the learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback techniques</td>
<td>Integrating the content of this module into the learner’s own project - ePortfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, in the seventh module, learners are to look back at the teaching scenario (table 8) produced during the first module, further developed and improved throughout the training course. They have to draw up each and every step in their online course by fleshing out their backbone teaching script in more detail and in accordance with the elements studied throughout the eLearn² training course.

Sylvie: “We have reached the end of the training course. The learners have to demonstrate that they are able to write a consistent teaching scenario.”

Sandra: “They have already been given a chance to elaborate in their portfolio on some elements of their course, but also to think with their tutors about how consistent and efficient the choices they have made are. They now have to ask themselves about the materials they are going to use to achieve their objectives.”

Sylvie: “Well, what we should include in our training course is legal information such as the rules regarding plagiarism, copyright or creative commons (CC).”

Table 8 – Module 7 – Teaching Scenario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching scenario</td>
<td>Writing out the scenario of one's own online course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright, plagiarism, Creative Commons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing a course in pedagogical terms</td>
<td>Drawing out the organisational graph of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debating on a wiki web application about the choice of teaching materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and associated rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finalising the personal reflection project and training plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be awarded the certification, participants have to give a presentation of their online course on the teaching platform of their choice, along with their reflection logbook with documented proof of what they have learnt together with traces of the reflective and critical work they engaged in throughout the training course. Participation in weekly activities shall also be taken into account.

5. Implementing the Training Course - during the Project's Second Year

I will now move on to explaining the way the training course worked, which was somewhat unusual. In addition to its complex design process, I think it is useful to give an overview of how the training programme was managed simultaneously in both countries. The work assigned to the teaching advisers in the two teams differed.

After a face-to-face launching meeting in either department of the partnership with the lecturers concerned, the training course started in October. There were about forty participants altogether.

Charles, Sophie and Sandra – from Centre Epsilon – were involved in the learners’ overall and individual follow-up work. Sandra was the only one who took part in the designing phase – but just towards the end of it. Therefore, Charles and Sophie had to review and take in all the content of the seven modules.

Things were a little different as regards Centre Alpha. Sylvie – who designed the training course – was the only one in charge of the overall follow-up of all the participants on her side. Every week, she would send learners the information and activities to be completed, as well as being assigned their overall tutorship,
consisting in correcting the written work, performing the formative assessment, managing group-work, providing technical assistance, etc…. In addition to all this, she supervised ten learners in particular. This guidance consisted in giving feedback on the way the reflexive work was organized, analysing contextual situations and exchanging with them to provide the best guidelines possible concerning the teaching scenario of their projects.

The other affiliate learners at Centre Alpha were being supervised by Jean, Barbara and myself. We entered together the personal spaces of those we were tutoring on an ad-hoc basis to read over and comment on their teaching scenarios in progress. We also took part in discussions on message boards.

To ensure consistency between the two countries, the resource facilities were open on the same days, both platforms had free access for all tutors to view the feedback given on the activities if they needed to, and regular contacts were made.

Sandra – who was a tutoress at Centre Epsilon – also joined in the flesh the Centre Alpha team on a part-time basis three months into the training course. She replaced me to perform the follow-up tasks concerning two learners I was initially in charge of. Thanks to her two-fold assignments she was able to engage in direct contacts with both teams.

At Centre Alpha, monthly meetings were being organised between Sylvie, the other tutors and myself. She updated us on the evolution of the modules, the new activities and kept us in touch as regards organisational issues. These sessions afforded us an opportunity to take stock of the learners’ difficulty, to share ideas on tutorship and assess the modules.

Sandra would then pass on the information to Centre Epsilon when she went back to work there. Sylvie, Sandra and Sophie also contacted one another on a regular basis via Skype. Sylvie was therefore able to assist her two colleagues in the implementation process. The above approach allowed for the training course to proceed in a virtually identical fashion on either side, except for tutorship.

A general virtual meeting with a view to assess progress half-way through the training programme was held in mid-January between the two centres to look back at the first semester and suggest a few minor changes to be made – for example in
the size of a sub-group in order to perform a task. These changes were directly connected with the degree of involvement of those individuals who did take an active part in the training programme. Such flexibility is not only normal, but proves to be necessary when it comes to managing an online course – you have to plan and adjust the course according to the participants’ profiles.

The last meeting took place in June, at the time of certification. What was discussed had to do mainly with the organisational and logistic aspects related to graduation, the year’s student intake, preparing for the coming year’s training course, etc. …

At the end of the first year this training course was delivered, 90% of participants left with an attendance certificate and 75% with the actual university certificate/diploma. The very few people who dropped out did so due to changes in their careers. On the basis on such high percentages with excellent evaluations of the teaching staff by learners, the teaching advisers should be more than satisfied with this outcome.

However, they did not share the same experience of this training course. Sophie and Charles from Centre Epsilon did not contribute to designing the training programme. Their team of two was complemented by Sandra, who was still a student, and who contributed to establishing a link between the designing and implementation phases, but who also served as a go-between with the two teams when she was hired as a replacement at Centre Alpha. The three of them covered the tutorship and supervising tasks for the 20 people enrolled on their side.

As far as Centre Alpha is concerned, virtually all the work involved in the training programme was performed by Sylvie – Jean, Barbara and myself having provided on-demand advice to some learners.

6. The Academic Advisers’ Experience
As the two centres worked differently, I asked for a survey to be conducted amongst the seven tutors who were involved in the training programme. Thanks to the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) tool, we were able to express our personal feelings about the training programme implemented. Accordingly, the academic advisers gave their opinions as regards the strengths and weaknesses of the guidance and pedagogical follow-up provided to the participants, which form a
core part of the eLearn² training programme. The tutors highlighted a number of positive features, while pointing out potential improvements that could be made, which were discussed during a meeting.

The Strengths of the Guidance Offered
Sylvie: “The points you stressed regarding the strengths’ part are mainly related to the guidance provided to participants and the flexibility given to them.”
Myself: “Splitting up the training course into modules allows participants to know at any time what they are supposed to do and what they are expected to achieve. Moreover, the possibility that is given to them of having access to all the materials in the module right from the start allows everyone to organise their working time and to work at their own pace.”
Sandra: “Yes, indeed, notwithstanding the isomorphism principle we strive to stick to.”
Barbara: “This way, participants experiment this online training programme as learners, and in parallel design their own online course – as teachers.

The flexibility – around a programme split into modules – and isomorphism, which lie at the heart of this training course, form strengths that were pinpointed at by most participants.

The Weaknesses of the Guidance Offered
Sylvie: “You reported three weaknesses in our programme. They have to do with time management, the participants’ difficulty to identify the part played by tutors and the time taken for learning.”
Charles: “The workload assigned to us did not allow us to perform our tutorship tasks as we would have liked to.”
Sandra: “Yes, indeed, and this is the reason why I took over the tutorship assigned to Louis and also why the two learners tutored by Jean turned to Sylvie.”
Sylvie: “And this leads us to the second weakness pointed at. I think that at a time learners were at a loss to know who the tutor in charge of them was. I performed some kind of overall tutorship, and at times I took care more specifically of learners I was not officially in charge of.”
Myself: “Obviously the discrepancy you felt as the designer of the course that you were, Sylvie, and as a de facto tutor, can only fade away if tutors are actually
in a position, by being allotted enough time, to get more familiar with the subject matter of the training course.”

Jean: “This is an issue that was also met with by learners who could not always spare time to absorb and assimilate the course materials.”

After analysing the strengths and weaknesses as regards the follow-up of learners during the online teaching programme, the academic advisers also stated their positions on the opportunities in favour of and threats against institutionalizing such a training course online.

**The Opportunities in Sight**

Promoting online and distance training courses corresponds to a real expectation from the lecturers in both institutions. They are indeed led to design their own distance courses to innovate and improve their teaching. They have to face an ever-so-large intake of students in overcrowded groups, these students being unable to attend classes locally because of the Erasmus Mobility Programme, practical training periods and so on... Initiatives from lecturers in the field of e-Learning that had been deemed “on the margin” so far in these two teaching institutions are now becoming the norm as “instances of good practice”.

Sylvie: "I was able to design this training course thanks to a financial subsidy from my institution. But beyond this one-off initiative, I have grounds to be concerned about the reluctance to generalise this approach and lack of budget allocation to ensure its sustainability.”

Myself: “This is the lot of the search for innovations in teaching. You have to make up an innovative method, and then fight your way to keep it going.”

Nathalie: “The institution relies on us as part of our assignment to follow up a project in the years after it was developed.”

Another possibility that was raised was the participation of the course designers in the tutoring teams, which greatly improves the quality of training and allows for the guidance of tutors to respond more efficiently to the participants' expectations.

Finally, international cooperation enabled us to design the training course, and through intra/inter-university exchanges, to adapt the training course on a
systematic and regular basis. Moreover, this cooperation allows participants to be awarded certification by both countries.

The Threats
Tutors reported to us how difficult it was to have the real benefits and costs of eLearning acknowledged by the universities’ administration, as the people there still remain unfamiliar with the digital world. Being a distance-learning tutor is barely recognized as a real job, which implies an extra workload for a number of tutors who perform this type of guidance in addition to the other tasks assigned to them as university lecturers. Higher education regulatory texts remain too strict as regards the flexibility in time and space required when working on line. Concerning this matter, Louis admitted: "Let me spare you the number of offices I had to contact here and there to find the appropriate information mandatory to fill in the application form for the accreditation of the training course, in order for us to be able to deliver certification. It can get really complicated!"

7. Conclusion and Overall Assessment of the Experiment
The implementation of a training course like this one was made possible through initial assistance from our institutions on either side. Indeed, even though the course’s follow-up part was brought to a successful and satisfactory outcome, designing such an online training course requires for time-release to be granted ahead to tutors. It proves interesting to compare the teaching follow-up approaches, as well as to ponder on the impact the designers of such training courses may have on the follow-up and tutorship. Accordingly, tutors cannot but agree in saying that when they did not design the course themselves – as was the case with Sylvie and Sandra – they have to be granted time to absorb and assimilate the content, so as to able to provide quality support to learners, which is not always the case. This automatically raises the issue of the recognition of distance tutorship by higher education institutions. This training course was cleverly designed from a framework through a number of comings and goings between the project’s designers – Sylvie and Sandra– and its developers – Louis and Charles – on either site. Such exchanges have allowed us to achieve the consistency and isomorphism we were seeking.

The project leaders agree in saying that it turned out to be an enriching experience to design this training course on two dissimilar platforms, which allowed tutors to highlight the portability of the project whatever the technology used. As its
foundation stone was isomorphism – or “training them as we wish they will train their future trainees”, as Charles put it in his draft project – this training course met with this feature the expectations of participants, and the completion of the latter’s concrete own projects is an undeniable proof of it. The participants in this training course were consequently very happy to be able to experience performing various learning tasks on line.

The online version related in this case–study is innovative in that it puts together the principle of isomorphism, immediate practice of the teaching tools, as well as a meta–reflective dimension in the guidance provided. Right from the beginning, participants are plunged into an approach that helps them to overcome their fear as regards new technologies and to start thinking about a teaching strategy, which leads them to dare imagine all the more easily consistent and engaging learning sequences. They are immersed straight away into a method relying wholly on consistency. This way, although they admitted it was not easy, 75% of them were able to design and put a project of their own on line.

References