**E-learning history
Evaluating European Experiences**

Edited by
Sirkku Anttonen, Tapio Onnela and Henri Terho

Contents

E-learning history – foreseeing the future of learning history

Henri Terho and Tapio Onnela
University of Turku

eHistory Learning Environment and Evaluation (eHLEE) is a project included in and funded by the E-learning Initiative of the European Commission. It has had two primary objectives. The first has been to test the possibilities that international co-operation offers when planning and producing an e-learning course for advanced-level curriculum studies in history. For this purpose, all the project partners organized a joint e-learning course on *Identities in European History*. The second objective of the project has been to create this present book. Starting with a survey of prior experiences in using e-learning in the study of history, the eHLEE group has carried out an in-depth, analytical investigation into the possibilities that e-learning offers for history. They report their findings in this book.

This volume covers 20 examples of courses, and other pedagogical and technological activities, that are being used in a wide variety of institutions for studying history. The examples in these pages present some current experiences. Building on their findings, the group has drawn up guidelines, highlighting both the advantages of using e-learning for history and some of the disadvantages – the things to avoid. Our consideration has been based on a SWOT-analysis addressing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of using e-learning for history. Our intention has been not only to present the best. We have also noted many shortcomings and problems hindering the wider application of e-learning.

＊ ＊ ＊

Since the 1990s there has been a vogue for e-learning in most disciplines of higher education. During our research it has become obvious that history is among those disciplines where e-learning has not been widely adopted. Nevertheless, it has become equally clear that there are great advantages in certain learning situations, with specific pedagogical cases and with certain history-specific themes. All in all, we consider there to be a number of areas where e-learning is especially relevant in the study of history. Our book attempts to illustrate some of these.

Digitalisation and the emergence of a global education market spawned by the Internet have consequences for the humanities too, and for the teaching and learning of history. Many humanists in academe – including historians – are avoiding the whole phenomenon insisting that it is possible to teach history only by traditional, face-to-face methods and to transfer historical knowledge only by means of books and journals printed on paper.

Technological development will inevitably force historians to adopt new methods in doing research, in distributing their findings, and in teaching history. This will happen anyway when historians are faced with the fact that their source materials are in digital format – a situation which has already to a great extent happened. Fortunately, the confrontation between traditionalists and enthusiastic e-learning innovators is gradually fading away. It is now generally understood that both traditional and new methods are needed and that ICT-technology and computer networks will only enhance the opportunities for historians. They will not make old universities obsolete nor replace traditional teaching methods, as was predicted some years ago. Changing attitudes is a welcomed sign because e-learning history is too important to be left to the technicians and to relentless commercialism.

It is clear that there are many situations where the use of information technology is suitable and where a good case can be made for it. This is especially so when international co-operation between people or institutions is involved. E-learning technology offers us possibilities to re-organize teaching and learning in an alternative way, it gives teachers more flexibility in their work and it allows professionals to work together regardless of distance or geographical boundaries.

Thematic approach to e-learning history – The case studies of eHLEE

The eHLEE project began on 1st September, 2004, with gathering and thematically analysing information about current and recent experience in using e-learning for history. The first stage of analysis was conducted in the months up to 31st March, 2005. The work was carried out jointly by the entire consortium of nine universities and official bodies participating in eHLEE. The institutions involved, with their countries, were: University of Alcalá, Spain; University of Bologna, Italy; Universi-

ty of Hannover, Germany; University of Pisa, Italy; University of Siegen, Germany; University of Turku, Finland; University of Uppsala, Sweden; Primrose Publishing, United Kingdom; and the Virtual University of History, Finland.

Each participating institution was given the initial task of investigating the current state of affairs in e-learning history in their own country and in a few neighbouring areas. The countries thus investigated, in alphabetical order, were: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Each researcher investigated many university web-sites and contacted the key personnel responsible for e-learning. To carry out the task in practice, we needed a working definition of e-learning. It was decided to concentrate on three separate levels: learning, teaching and the delivery of materials. E-learning can be learning conducted on a *Learning Management System,* on the public Internet or on a closed intranet. It can also be *delivery of a learning, training or education program, or of materials, by electronic means*. It can also be *blended learning* in combination with other learning and training methods. In the case of delivery of learning, or education material, by electronic means, e-learning involves the use of a computer or other electronic device (such as a mobile phone) in some way in order to provide training, or educational or learning material. A particular feature of e-learning is that it can be "on demand", thus overcoming difficulties associated with timing, attendance and travelling.

Working within these agreed definitions narrowed the scope of research to a particular set of learning experiences with a connection to digital media, virtual learning environments and learning management systems. A consequence of this was that the examples studied varied greatly. The researchers called their examples of prior experiences *case studies*. They ranged widely in scope covering everything from a singular course using electronic means of transmission to complete degree programmes.

As the basis for analysing e-learning history, eHLEE adopted a *thematic tool-kit*. The various themes are informed by the findings of the investigations of prior experience and reflect the group's own expectations concerning the purpose of e-learning. The themes of importance in evaluating e-learning history are the following: 1) Pedagogy, 2) Materials, 3) Platforms, 4) Administration, 5) Quality, 6) Assessment, 7) Language, and 8) Intercultural issues. These are themes that apply, in part, to all kinds of e-learning – not just in the field of history. Many themes are also relevant to learning in general – not just to e-learning. However, combining all eight themes provided us with a tool-kit particularly appropriate for analysing experiences of e-learning.

This book is divided into two parts: 1) institutional approaches to e-learning history and 2) pedagogical experiments and e-learning history courses. The chapters

of the book present cases with a variety of starting-points. Many of the cases are relevant from the point of view of the various thematic structures. In his article about Swiss experiences in e-learning in history, Christian R. Raschle presents the useful learning activities for on-line course-design as set out by William Horton. The five activities are important in terms of **pedagogy** for all learning activities, even for a self-study course: Presenting sequences; designing drills and practice activities; guided analysis of data; case studies of real-world events; and virtual laboratories.

The five cover a list of computer-based activities conducive to learning. It is a set of activating methods for learning which can be developed further. The crucial point is not what is being *taught*, but what is being *learned*. This is a central dichotomy presented in several different chapters of the book. The basis of our consideration of pedagogy lies in the processes of learning. Different types of assignment in history courses are presented in the article by Sirkku Anttonen. She divides these into two groups: writing tasks and discussion assignments. The material she has been working with is a set of courses organized by the Finnish Virtual University of History.

Whereas writing assignments and discussion assignments do not differ drastically from what can be accomplished in a class-room, an example presented by Enrica Salvatori in her case on *The Sigil Company* sets out a scenario with exclusively computer-driven possibilities. The course is based on a fascinating investigation triggered by the murder of a high-ranking municipal official in 12th Century Pisa. The students form groups and work with individual tasks trying to solve the mystery. As Enrica Salvatori argues, the course is structured like writing a historical novel with the novelist asking students to join her "research team".

For many cases in the book, learning together is a feature that comes across strongly. The combination of playing games and studying history is highlighted in the chapter written by Christian R. Raschle on *Antiquitas*, especially where he describes how the student has to play the part of a librarian working in a Roman library. Can you place the books in their correct places according to the instructions laid down by the ancient Roman tutor?

"Best practice", new possibilities and our concerns about e-learning history in terms of PEDAGOGY. These include:[1]

1) There are ways of teaching and learning history that are specific to e-learning. E-learning provides teachers and learners with new ways of learning

2) *Learning* is more important than *teaching*. *Content* is more important than *technology*

3) E-learning is based on a variety of tasks and assignments. Ideally, courses should include different types of assignments

4) Students also learn from each other, so group dynamics of learning are important

5) Narratives of e-learning history can be aided by using stories and plots

6) Source criticism of new forms of digital and digitized materials needs to be done painstakingly

7) E-learning pedagogy is based on scholarly netiquette, which is all about discussing, rather than merely chatting

8) Students should be encouraged to avoid downloading material unnecessarily and to work out the best way of studying using e-learning

9) Students should be aware of the importance of scheduling their work within the time allowed

10) E-learning history should find ways to accommodate new technologies of communication, to exploit "social software" such as blogs, wikis and podcasts, and to seek ways of combining e-learning with virtual communities.

Apart from providing an exceptional setting in terms of pedagogy, cases of murder mysteries also guide students to the variety of **materials** e-learning can offer. By a remarkable coincidence, this book has another example of a detective story: *Who killed William Robinson?* by Marianna Baldi. A website with this provocative name was part of a Canadian initiative launched in 1997 to provide learning materials. From the relevant records a virtual archive was assembled including all the key documents available on the death of William Robinson, as well as information illustrating the background to the incident. Each of the documents was transcribed and these were then all assembled thematically. Teachers' guides were prepared to assist implementation in the class-room and students were invited to "solve" this old crime. In her article about William Robinson, Marianna Baldi extends the discussion beyond the particular course to the relevance that on-line archives might have for the study of history.

At its simplest, an e-learning course can be a set of materials available through a web browser. Many higher-education institutions have placed great emphasis on delivery of materials using new means of communication. David Sephton presents

---

1   The suggestions and "best practice" are a result of the workshops of the eHLEE group held in Turku on 31st March and 1st April, 2006. There have been many experts in e-learning history and history professors at universities that have influenced the conclusions of the project. The persons involved in various meetings and discussions have been: Tapio Onnela, Henri Terho and Sirkku Anttonen (University of Turku), Rita Rios, Mª Dolores Cabañas and Mónica Olivares (University of Alcalá), Carla Salvaterra, Alessandro Cristofori, Christian R. Raschle, Marianna Baldi, Gaia Fanelli, Vittorio Caporrella, Hans Decrop and Fausto Carmianti (University of Bologna), Ines Katenhusen and Annette Weyergraf (University of Hannover), Ann Katherine Isaacs, Enrica Salvatori, Anna Maria Pult, Giada Marcazzani, Laura Burgisano, Stefano Villani, Maurizio Arfaioli and Pasquale Cuomo (University of Pisa), Raphaela Averkorn, Britta Anzenhofer (University of Siegen), György Novaky, Sofia Ling and Peter Knutar (University of Uppsala); David Sephton (Primrose Publishing); and Sabine Liebig and Antony Day (Karlsruhe Pedagogical University).

the electronic book-shelf in the form of tutorials that the University of Edinburgh offers its history students. He highlights one of the important concerns of e-learning: promoting high-quality materials and ensuring good access to them from all around the world. Here we have another conflict issue, but from the reverse angle: that of copyright. Many courses, especially those involving international co-operation, are gravely hindered by the uneven accessibility of digital and digitized collections.

In the case of e-learning history, the rule of thumb regarding copyright is simple: you cannot post material unless you have permission. This problem is manifested in their article on *ICoN* by Enrica Salvatori and Giada Marcazzani. ICoN is an abbreviation of Italian Culture on the Net, which offers, among other things, on-line courses in history. ICoN comprises an online library with 318 works of Italian literature by 104 leading authors. These have been selected based on commercial agreements between ICoN and institutions participating in the consortium of the platform.

"Best practice", new possibilities and our concerns about e-learning history in terms of MATERIALS. These include:

1) E-learning history can utilize digitized and digital collections of materials, and there should be electronic book-shelves available

2) Students should be encouraged, indeed required, to search for material on their own. Students must learn to explore for themselves

3) E-learning materials can include rare and fragile materials which are otherwise not accessible to students

4) Courses can be re-used thus creating content repositories for improved learning. They should then be available under open access

5) There is a need for a wider selection of materials of different types: illustrations, videos, sound, etc.

6) Students should be taught to use research material, not just ready-made materials. Source criticism is of great importance

7) Digitized material needs to be presented along with contextual information on the origin of the material

8) Support material for studying is of great importance

9) Material should be planned so that parts of it can be re-used as course units

10) Access to databases needs to be made easy and affordable

11) Much important material for the study of history is not available on-line.

E-learning history courses can be based either on materials that are presented to students – like in an electronic bookshelf – or on materials that students have to collect, or to produce themselves. In the articles in this volume, there are descriptions of the ways in which materials are promoted, and commentaries on them are made. In the world of electronic communication the historian's craft should include source criticism of digitized and digital materials. What, for example, are the tools and methods that e-learning can offer for learning the skills needed for studying Ancient History? What can you read from inscriptions with a very limited understanding of Latin? Christian R. Raschle shows one example where a specially tailored PHP & MySQL application has been made to instruct students in epigraphy. This is an example of **platforms** used in e-learning history.

Platforms can be either ready-made Learning Management Systems or specially-built tools for e-learning. As David Sephton shows, the Open University in Britain, with an all-time record of 2 million students, needs to be very cautious in its choice of application. It requires a robust data-base backup for all the learning activities. However, that doesn't prevent us from going for novelties. Apart from LMSs and emails, e-learning history can also mean podcasting, videocasting or blogging. A very special requirement arises in the case of the Open University, where a remarkable percentage of students are disabled, many of them being either blind or only partially-sighted. Technological solutions and devices open the possibility of learning for a whole new audience with applications such as the speech synthesizer Jaws for Windows.

The setting of e-learning in terms of Learning Management Systems is two-fold. Learning activities take place mainly on commercial platforms. Tapio Onnela presents the development of e-learning history in Finland by the initiatives taken by the Finnish Virtual University of History (FVUH). Since its inception, the platform choice of FVUH has been one of the largest commercial platforms: WebCT (Web Course Tools). This offers stability, which is considered essential for a large-scale operation. At the same time, there have been major instances of university-led projects developing platforms of their own. Peter Knutar writes of extensive experience that a group of departments at Uppsala University have had with a portal all their own. The better a portal can be customized to regular teaching and learning activities, the more it will be used at all levels of academia. In his article, Peter Knutar bluntly argues, however, that the most widely-used e-learning tool is still email. Nevertheless, he maintains that by using a simple and practical system, such as a notice-board, e-learning can become feasible at a more developed stage.

The use of commercial platforms always implies passwords, restricted access, control and costs. Practically any attempt to produce a course for an unlimited audience demands an open-source platform. That, however, is not cost-free, since its maintenance tends to remain the responsibility of the local institution using the

application. E-learning history is seen to be a terrain of many locally-developed platforms. Rita Rios and Mª Dolores Cabañas write about the Universidad Oberta de Catalunya in Spain, which has developed a platform of its own. It has had good experience with its maintenance. Another example is that of the Swiss Virtual Campus. With huge financial support, the planners were able to produce a Flash-based multimedia program on interactive learning. An example presented by Christian R. Raschle, where Roman coins can be investigated in every conceivable way – short of actually flipping the coin – is a fine example of high-quality design. A platform planned for a special purpose can lift e-learning to a high level of edutainment.

"Best practice", new possibilities and our concerns about e-learning history in terms of PLATFORMS. These include:

1) Ready-made commercial Learning Management Systems are expensive and have restricted access but they are generally reliable and provide support services

2) Open-source platforms can be modified as needed, and there are moral grounds for going non-commercial and for networking with peers. When choosing an open source platform, organizations have to learn the skills needed to ensure proper maintenance. This requires institutional decisions and resources

3) In-house platforms facilitate co-operation between end-users and developers

4) Other technical possibilities apart from Learning Management Systems should be considered, such as Flash, PHP/MySQL programming language, social software, podcasting, blogs, etc.

5) ICT can be developed jointly in institutions by combining e-learning with other types of forum already used in the institution, such as noticeboards

6) E-learning provides the possibility of edutainment

7) There is a need for automated stand-alone history courses

8) Learning Management Systems are needed if complete control and management of courses and groups of students are required

9) Overall, there is a need for a long-term strategy for platforms

In the end, e-learning is about learning, and in most instances, about shared learning. Innovations in communications technology present us with a far wider horizon than we have previously experienced. In *The Sigil Company* Enrica Salvatori illustrates the use of blogs. Future initiatives that we might envisage could be with

mobile phones and the further use of streaming with sound and vision. This might be a matter of finance or of co-operating with partners from more-distant fields, but it would certainly involve co-ordinating and require proper **administration**. How can we be certain that the right people are in contact, and are talking to each other, in order to combine new communication technologies with (e)learning history? Peter Knutar highlights a real problem: people who know a great deal about history have to administer things in a complex IT environment when they have only basic computer skills. Unfortunately the technical planners rarely talk to the content planners.

The book presents several cases involving huge public investment in large-scale e-learning initiatives. Cases *par excellence* are the virtual campuses presented in the book. The Finnish Virtual University was set up in 2000. Since then over 30 history courses have been produced in co-operation with all the history departments in Finland. Portugal has had its Universidade Aberta and Spain the UOC. Both examples from the Iberian Peninsula share a common emphasis on life-long learning. We are witnessing the rise of a niche audience, that of adult learners. Since it overcomes the constraints of time and place, e-learning becomes feasible for adults with day-time jobs, for people living at a distance, and for people with special needs. E-learning history should pay attention to its specific target audiences, its special groups of students. Indeed – who are the students wanting e-learning courses in history?

For the cases David Sephton presents, a noteworthy issue is the commercial aspect. For some institutions, e-learning history can be a profit-making business. The courses which depend on course-fees must be popular and in sufficient demand – or they have to close – as has been the case with Alllearn.

E-learning initiatives have had a profound impact on the way courses have been planned and re-used. With the FVUH, Tapio Onnela shows how course planners are actually forming planning teams. Previously, in "regular" face-to-face teaching, the course has been the work of a single author, that of the teacher. E-learning by contrast regularly produces courses resulting from joint planning work. This also provides opportunities for what Onnela describes as "free-lance" teachers and planners. There is a demand for a new kind of teacher/planner in a new kind of learning environment. The Finnish approach is not isolated, as is obvious from the case of Oscail presented by David Sephton. The universities in Ireland have formed a consortium where courses are not only planned jointly but also re-worked together. The more closely different institutions are connected in their e-learning pursuits, the more likely they are to evaluate the courses together and learn from each other. A remarkable and practical feature of e-learning history is that the courses can be repeated and can be re-developed.

Course planning has turned out to be not a one-time action but a series of repetitive actions. Sirkku Anttonen, while discussing quality features of the Finnish

e-learning scene, presents regular evaluation seminars for the Finnish Virtual University of History. Similarly David Sephton takes up with his Irish case of Oscail the way courses are redesigned and regularly redeveloped. In the Open University example, David Sephton claims that evaluation should be done by an outside professional who is involved in the course from the outset. The evaluator should therefore be present throughout the design stage, and should ideally take part in the course as a student – even if for only part of the time. In the Universidade Aberta, as mentioned by Rita Rios and Mª Dolores Cabañas, there are courses that have been re-scheduled several times. It is revealing that they use the term "edition" for each rescheduling. Courses are not simple repetitions. They can be repeated unchanged or they can be modified and developed further.

"Best practice", new possibilities and our concerns about e-learning history in terms of ADMINISTRATION. They include:

1) E-learning provides a structure for virtual campuses and other new forms of institution for history. It creates opportunities for institutions to co-operate at both national and international level

2) E-learning accommodates new types of study groups, and also raises the question: What is the clientele for studying history? Life-long learners and adult education create a special niche for e-learning

3) There are commercial possibilities for e-learning history

4) E-learning enables courses to be developed as team-work and opens up new possibilities for the division of labour in course production.

5) E-learning courses can be re-used – either as they are, or redeveloped

6) Course planning should take into account the possibility of re-using parts of courses across university platforms

7) Course planning teams need to agree about the copyright of their courses

8) There is a need to connect LMSs to centralized systems like user databases

9) How to match advanced technical skills with expertise in history?

10) There should be some means of estimating the work-load for students

11) Tutor training needs to be considered, and course planners need to be kept fully informed of its details.

12) Financial aid needs to be directed to the planners and to the departments involved.

In all higher-education institutions the issue of **quality** is becoming ever more prominent in daily planning procedures. In this book the issue is approached from

the perspective of both content and administration. A specific feature of e-learning history, is the widened scope of courses on offer. As Christian R. Raschle points out, students' lack of knowledge of Latin and Greek will, in the near future, become a major obstacle to studying history. This is another instance of where e-learning can be an asset. By offering stand-alone modules for acquiring specialized skills, history students can fill in gaps left by the school curriculum. The obstacles of time and distance can be overcome, and students living in more remote areas can obtain skills otherwise out of their reach.

However, the question of quality has other implications as well. Sirkku Anttonen gives a detailed description of VOPLA, a quality-assurance procedure used in many Finnish institutions and one that, remarkably, is intended specifically for e-learning. The basic point about VOPLA is that it offers a matrix which can be followed to make the planning and executing of courses transparent. After a description of the process, various problems of course planning and studying are addressed. In the end, quality is a matter of having a clearly-defined and rigorous agenda for learning outcomes and competences. This is featured in several articles of the book with references to work done with the "Tuning Education in Europe" project.

The Tuning model differentiates learning outcomes from objectives. Both are explicitly defined at the start of the planning activity. Students must be given a chance to understand the importance of each e-learning activity and also to get a clear idea of the work-load they will be involved in. As for the Tuning methodology, there are special instances where e-learning in the field of history can be of importance. It is noteworthy that simply by using e-learning technologies, history students will become acquainted with a number of valuable communications tools.

"Best practice", new possibilities and our concerns about e-learning history in terms of QUALITY. These include:

1) Institutions should focus on where e-learning can be used best. What is the added value of e-learning history and how is it to be measured? This calls for institutions to have an e-learning strategy

2) E-learning makes it possible to widen course catalogues

3) By using e-learning, study paths can be traced in greater detail which enables development to be based on learning processes

4) The learning objectives and outcomes of the course need to be clearly defined. They must be reflected in the learning. Objectives should be listed but they should also be verified by assessing the learning outcomes by the criterion of quality

5) There is a need to point out those learning outcomes that can be better achieved by e-learning. This makes the careful selection of pedagogical tools essential

6) External, even international, evaluation is possible for e-learning courses since the learning processes can be traced and repeated

7) Institutions should develop the means and procedures for an annual evaluation of courses by both pedagogical and technical experts

8) Good quality of courses requires good support services

9) Quality of learning is enhanced by making it possible to return and repeat the study paths

10) Evaluation processes for courses should be put on a regular footing. Self-reflection on study performance is extremely valuable.

For purposes of international co-operation, **language** and **intercultural issues** have particular relevance in e-learning. They can also present some difficulties. In their articles on OUC, Spain, and Universidade Aberta, Portugal, Rita Rios and Mª Dolores Cabañas express their concern about the limitations caused by the use of "other" languages. Apart from the native language, Universidade Aberta also uses some materials in French and Italian. Generally speaking, English is widely used as the new lingua franca of the scholarly world. While the use of an e-learning system succeeds in breaking the barriers of space and time, the use of different languages makes access to the materials difficult for many students.

At the same time the use of different languages brings intercultural issues to the fore. If they know the languages, it is obvious that students can learn about the history of more-remote and less-populated areas of the world. The history courses of Aberta in Portugal are promoting a multi-dimensional and intercultural view of history through the use of materials written in different languages.

The pilot course, *Identities in European History*, produced by the eHLEE partners, clearly exemplifies the crucial advantage e-learning can have in terms of intercultural awareness. By creating a study group of students from different countries, e-learning can facilitate truly international communication at a very basic level of history. Despite being essentially a national genre, as history is, just about any theme of history has an international dimension. International study groups can increase the understanding of national concerns too.

"Best" practice, new possibilities and our concerns about e-learning history in terms of INTERCULTURAL ISSUES. These include:

1) E-learning supports international learning communities with the possibility of learning together with foreign students

2) E-learning can make a difference for the discipline of history by confronting other cultures and other historiographical traditions. E-learning simply brings into the open different national traditions for using all kinds of materials

3) Possibilities for international study groups demand shared languages, thereby providing possibilities for learning other languages

4) Work-load in international courses depends to a great extent on the language skills of the students

5) E-learning can be used to promote course topics too marginal for local teaching activities

6) The Internet makes it possible to find materials outside the Western hemisphere

7) Cultural context is always part of historical documents, and this can be of critical importance in international e-learning courses

8) International learning environment provides cultural perspectives for topics

9) Understanding different cultures supports our understanding of history

10) International courses provide an opportunity to learn how events are interpretated in other cultures. At the same time, students learn to express their concerns about other nationalities in an understandable way.

International co-operation and cross-border initiatives make a special demand on **assessment**. At a basic level, e-learning courses can be assessed like any other form of teaching. However, since e-learning assignments can differ markedly from those in class-room teaching, a special concern needs to be exercised in the assessment of students' assignments and their performance. It is vital to have a regular pattern to follow, based on a combination of face-to-face examinations and the assessing of e-learning activities.

"Best practice", new possibilities and our concerns about e-learning history in terms of ASSESSMENT. These include:

1) E-learning makes possible both in-course assessment and peer assessment

2) Students can assess themselves by path assessment. Self assessment in sequence is a way of learning, not only a way of assessing

3) Criteria for assessment should be transparent and comparable.

History-specific considerations of e-learning

The findings and interpretations of the case-studies reveal issues that are important for all e-learning activities. However, our aim has been to point out specific concerns about e-learning history. By using a method of SWOT-analysis, the project has produced a scenario of the current state of e-learning history as well as a consideration of future possibilities and threats for the further dissemination of e-learning.

The study of history is always based on sources from the past – be they written documents, images, objects, oral history or other forms of material. Learning, including e-learning, is always founded on materials. In a society becoming ever more digitalized, e-learning offers a suitable combination of digital materials and a digital learning environment. More and more materials relevant to the study of history are best accessed by means of ICT.

E-learning history creates learning communities difficult to assemble with any "traditional" method. It embraces shared learning with the possibility of having students from any region at any time. Since history is a discipline deeply involved in interpretating, a valuable addition for any learning activity is a set of shared discussions and shared thinking. This is facilitated using the most basic means of e-learning in a way that all views expressed are also traceable. E-learning can provide a method of reflective learning together, which can be considered of special advantage for history.

Pilot course: Identities in European History

With the publication of this book, the work undertaken by the partnership in eHLEE has come to an end, at least as far as the project itself is concerned. The overarching ambition of bringing e-learning into the mainstream of the study of history, however, is a task that still lies ahead of us. Of great importance in showing the possibilities of e-learning has been the pilot course *Identities in European History* produced jointly by all the partners. This gave the participating institutions direct evidence of the strengths that international studying can exploit when using e-learning.

The course was prepared for 5 ECTS and was targeted at late-first-cycle and early-second-cycle students. Each participating institution had a quota of ten students eligible to enroll. Overall 74 students started the course. Students were first introduced to the possibilities of the chosen platform, WebCT, where they learned to use the various communications tools provided by the platform. After this inaugural session, a set of seven study phases followed, stretching over three months. Students got acquainted with the theoretical concept(s) of identity in history and continued by studying, in local groups, historical cases of the formation of identity. The precise themes were: 1) *The Jews in European History*, 2) *Roman Antiquity and*

the construction of cultural identity in ancient and contemporary Italy, 3) *The Celtic fringe*, 4) *The Mediterranean: Cultural Encounters and the Construction of Identities*, 5) *Building up a Nation – Construction of national identity in 1800s Finland*, and 6) *Us and them – The construction of the Swedish national identity*.

Each study group, assisted by a local tutor, made a presentation of their own theme to the other study groups. These presentations were used to launch new considerations of identity in history in international study groups which concentrated on themes of religion, politics, gender and language in relation to identities in history. As in the earlier phase, the students here produced a presentation to their fellow students. The course ended with a grand final discussion, a debate in fact, on the group presentations. Dr. Teija Tiilikainen, Director of Research at the Centre for European Studies at the University of Helsinki, was closely involved in this and provided the official commentary on it.

The major success of the course was the lively international communication between students, tutors and planners. During the three months of work, an astonishing total of 4,300 messages were posted to the various communications forums. The communications were mainly related to the tasks and assignments, but in addition, students started to communicate on more general topics and in this way began to form real interactive communities extending beyond their course work.

The number of messages also reveals the other side of the coin. It soon became obvious that the work-load was exceeding the expected number of hours, a fact due simply to the enthusiasm of the students. The evaluation report[2] prepared by a research team from the Karlsruhe Pedagogical University, Germany, showed that the students in general found that they had a lot more work than they had anticipated. It nevertheless was evident that a theme as suitable for international shared learning as identity in history, was also very suitable for an international course. The possibility of studying, tutoring and planning together in an international environment remains a crucial advantage that e-learning can offer – also for history.

The final analysis of the project, for both the possibilities and shortcoming of e-learning history, was based on a SWOT analysis which was carried out in the final workshop of the project. Our conclusion is presented in four parts: the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of e-learning history. Each part consists of ten statements covering the present situation and the future of e-learning history:

Strengths of e-learning history

1) E-learning can make national historical traditions more transparent by giving access to several different traditions, and by providing transversal content to the subject area. E-learning history can create new interpreta-

---

[2] Sabine Liebig and Antony Day, *Evaluation Report for eHLEE*. 2006. http://ehlee.utu.fi. See section Publications.

tions of history independent of national traditions. This assumes that the learning is being done internationally

2) E-learning enables students of history to use a wide range of sources and makes it possible to compare the sources and discuss these in an easier way than in traditional ways of teaching

3) History can be studied from multiple points of departure by utilizing digital sources

4) E-learning can offer interactive narratives for learning history, for example by assuming roles and playing games

5) E-learning makes it possible to teach and to learn marginal historical topics, since study groups can be larger by combining students from different universities. By using e-learning the course catalogue can be expanded

6) E-learning tools create learning communities where students can study topics and learn skills that nobody in practice is able to teach them

7) Students learn to be more precise and more focused in formulating their opinions and their views of history

8) E-learning teaches students to become more aware of the need for source criticism

9) Through e-learning, an incentive is given to libraries, archives, and collections to make their materials available to the public

10) By using e-learning technologies, students learn ICT skills which are important for the historian's craft.

Weaknesses of e-learning history

1) There is a chronic shortage of intermediaries transferring pedagogical ideas into technical solutions

2) E-learning history courses tend to cause too big a work-load for planners and teachers

3) E-learning plays no part in the daily experience of most history tutors and rarely figures in the pedagogical agenda of university history departments

4) There is little appreciation of the possibilities offered by e-learning history. As a result, e-learning courses tend to resemble class-room teaching

5) Lack of good experience in e-learning history hinders new teachers from getting interested in its possibilities

6) E-learning history courses are not easily repeated as they stand, since they tend to demand the constant involvement of a tutor

7) E-learning history courses tend to be enclosed such that individual parts and segments cannot be replaced nor transferred to other courses

8) Digitally-available material is still rather limited, so does not meet the demands of all courses

9) Lack of standardized technology limits transferability and the re-use of courses

10) The level of source criticism is often inadequate to evaluate source materials.

Opportunities of e-learning history

1) Student mobility can be enhanced by giving students the possibility of studying in international history courses using e-learning

2) E-learning courses can reach greater numbers of students

3) Students who have a day-time job can pursue history courses using e-learning since they are independent of time and place

4) History is of interest to different groups of people, and by using e-learning as a show-case for history, new groups of students will be attracted to study history

5) With a general interest in history in society, e-learning courses can be re-modeled as stand-alone courses for an unlimited audience. E-learning can be used for spreading an awareness of the importance of history among the general public

6) Using e-learning, teachers can experiment with new teaching methods, and this can also influence class-room teaching

7) E-learning can create co-operation in teaching and also in research between history departments

8) By using e-learning, the demand can be met for new ways of talking about history

9) E-learning can promote and justify demands for open archives and open access to materials

10) International networking, that e-learning can offer, supports the quest for a European identity and especially for tolerance and critical thinking which are essential for our society.

Threats foreseen for e-learning history

1) There is a substantial lack of institutional financial support for e-learning history

2) Copyright issues hinder the use of digital and digitized materials. A specific problem is the difference in copyright law between different European countries in using materials for teaching

3) History is often considered a traditional subject with conservative attitudes towards teaching

4) E-learning history continues to be seen as a project rather than as regular practice

5) E-learning history courses can result in an overload of work that teachers and students find hard to cope with

6) Digital and digitized materials may spread the dominance of the English-speaking world and thus diminish our understanding of the multiplicity of history

7) E-learning courses cannot compete with the hugely-expensive multimedia content of edutainment, and their form may resemble fancy commercial products thereby giving false expectations

8) Staff in history departments cannot keep pace with development in technology

9) Staff members specializing in e-learning may see their work undervalued by colleagues and not appreciated for what it is worth. E-learning can be downgraded as a field of expertise in history, and can be considered more as a hobby than as rigorous academic teaching expertise

10) Teaching can become faceless with restricted subjective variations by teachers.

With the encouraging experience that the project has provided, it is the wish of the eHLEE partners to continue with international co-operation between universities in the field of history. There is a clear need, even a mission, to demonstrate the possibilities that e-learning offers for history. We hope that the enthusiasm we have shown in our work is visible to our readers in the pages of this book!