

B-learning Approaches to the Teaching of Literature in the UCM within the Framework of the European Space for Higher Education

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Introduction

In recent years the speedy changes brought about by the spread of new technologies of information and communications are imposing new and dynamic alternatives for the acquisition of knowledge and its transmission. More and more countries are developing models for Information Literacy integral to educational curricula. A great emphasis on information and technology within the workforce has created the need to form professional profiles competent in the management of information and the use of technological tools. In a few years the great part of the work force will be employed in occupations based on the use of information (documentation, data processing, information retrieval and analysis, etc.).

The European Union has developed a number of programs for the development of Europe's Information Society¹. All these actions seek to consolidate the use of technology in different contexts and particularly in the European Space of Higher Education. The main goals of these programs are:

- Develop digital Information Literacy
- Create common European virtual campuses of Higher Education
- Achieve collaboration among educational institutions within different countries and define transversal lines of cooperation.
- Develop e-learning and b-learning²

In November 2005, the Spanish Government approved the so-called "Plan Avanza"³ to encourage the convergence with Europe's Information Society. The plan integrates several programs such as the "Programa Ingenio 2010" which seeks to increase to 7% GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by 2010 the volume of economic activity dealing with new technologies in

¹ For more information on these programs visit http://europa.eu.int/information_society/index_en.htm

² B-learning refers to a mixed methodology based on the use of new technologies and on some of the approaches traditionally used in distance education.

³ <<http://www.planavanza.es/>>

For information in English of e-initiatives developed in Spain <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/document/1369/413>

Spain. The plan is structured within five great areas of competence: *Hogar e Inclusión de Ciudadanos* (Homes and Citizens Inclusion) which includes the means to guarantee the spread of new technologies to most Spanish homes; *Competitividad e Innovación* (Competitiveness and Innovation) which seeks to promote the development of new technologies at all levels; *Educación en la Era Digital* (Education in the Digital Era), which intends to incorporate new technologies in educational programs; *Servicios Públicos Digitales* (Digital Public Services), which focuses in digitalizing Public Administration services; and *Contexto Digital* (Digital Context), which seeks to develop Ultra Wideband Technology.

However, despite the setting in motion of these initiatives, there are still very few projects developed in Spain in the area of Information Literacy models.

Fundamental aspects regarding teaching innovation and information literacy within the European Space for Higher Education (ESHE)

According to the *Tuning Report*,⁴ the fundamental aspects regarding learning and teaching perspectives developed within the ESHE⁵ are the following ones:

1. Innovation and introduction of new teaching methodologies that promote:
 - The creation of teaching materials and participation in virtual campuses, together with the development of new forms of evaluation, tutorials etc.
 - The development of students' autonomy through teaching methodologies that promote research and creativity processes as well as cooperation among students.
2. Introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

Therefore, the design of new curricular actions should promote both the development of conceptual knowledge and attitudes, and the acquisition of abilities that bring the students closer to social and professional contexts, teaching them to mobilize resources and transfer the results of their learning to other areas.

In the specific field of Humanities, the ESHE seeks to integrate the learning of languages and cultures (*Culture and Language Integrated Learning CLIL*), setting in motion prototype programs for the simultaneous acquisition of linguistic competence, procedures and abilities, without neglecting social and intercultural values. The idea is to move beyond

⁴ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning_en.html>

⁵ <<http://www.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>>.

ethnocentric positions and promote encounters among different cultures at a time when our models are no longer monocultural.

An important part of the work developed at the *European Centre for Modern Languages* (ECML) in Graz (Austria) has concentrated on the study of learning processes in relation to the student's autonomy. Anne-Brit Fenner's *Cultural Awareness and Language Awareness Based on Dialogic Interaction with Texts in Foreign Language Learning* (2001) explains how the texts employed in class can contribute to the development of an intercultural consciousness. Fenner shows the importance of literary texts as vehicles of "authenticity, semiotic richness and pluralism". Reading is a communication process that escapes spatial and temporal borders. The "encounter with the text is a dialogue" (Fenner 2001: 17). Employing reception theory Fenner argues for reading as a communicative experience and as a productive, not a receptive, skill. Based on a specific approach, reading literature in the target language is seen as a dialectic dialogue between reader and text as well as between two cultures within the social interaction of the classroom. The author investigates such dialogic encounters from a hermeneutical point of view, where one aspect of communication and development is adjusting attitudes and views between individuals and between cultures thereby enhancing cultural awareness.

Some of the work developed at the ECML⁶ has also shown that the students' intercultural awareness increased with the use of digital technology. In recent years new media technologies have exhibited a decisive turn towards more interactive forms of communication, and the Internet has fostered the creation of virtual communities through mediated conversation, abolishing physical (and social/hierarchical) distance between communicators. Its different uses (hypertext, chats, discussion forums, videoconferencing, etc.) enable information to circulate, be transformed and manipulated. Multimedia tools allow students to participate in a cooperative learning process and in continuous interaction with the different agents of the system: student/professor, student/student. Educators have found that the use of these technologies can heighten motivation because students are free to interact with other students and find their own resources in the Internet. Some uses, like slides or videoconferencing, can improve their presentation and communication skills. Virtual trips and videoconference offer the possibility of visiting places, and not only seeing, but interacting

⁶<<http://www.ecml.at/>> For a catalogue of publications see: http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=39&lang=EN&theme_catalogue=120243. See in particular *Information and Communication Technologies in Vocationally Oriented Language Learning* (Book + CD Rom) (2005) by Tony Fitzpatrick, Andreas Lund, Bernard Moro and Bernd Rüschoff.

with people that are far away from us and can have very different cultural customs and habits. Therefore, the use of new technologies can favor some of the learning processes in accordance with ESHE requirements, more specifically: students' autonomy, a cooperative relationship between professor/students and students/students and translocal learning-research, adequate for different needs and learning paces in a process that stimulates both creativity and the transferability of learning results.

Besides, this multimodality integrates text, image, sound, video, etc., in a single electronic document and the user can have sequential or simultaneous access to these different kinds of information, thus multiplying the communicational capacity of the document. The student can interact with the document (e.g. send commentaries by means of e-mail, *chat*, etc.) and he/she can also choose the reading sequence. Hypertextual models oblige the user to make a choice, to decide his/her itinerary. They introduce a question within the unity of the text, encouraging argumentation and showing that the reading and thinking chain is not unidirectional but relational. The so-called "Information Search Models" for developing Information Literacy can also contribute to create socially responsible citizens by showing that information is generated through a socially constructed process and that the results of any research, whose aim is to improve human vital conditions, should be transferred to other areas of our lives. These technologies can help students achieve cooperative abilities, make decisions, use their learning to enhance their professional profile and also transfer it to other social areas. The ESHE places particular emphasis in multilingual interpersonal mediation and multilingual information management in all Humanities areas. Within Spain the so-called *Libros Blancos de Títulos de Grado*⁷ reveal the importance placed on Information Literacy and Media Management.

Research has also revealed that the development of Information Literacy is more effective when it forms part of the curricula; thus, some countries including the US, Canada, the UK and others, have carried out reforms to bring forward educational standards for the different age-groups, regarding Information Management Processes. The models developed seek not only to treat information, that is question, research, find meaning, develop ideas, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, solve problems, but also to communicate, transfer information, and use it in making decisions and in an effective and responsible way, by applying it to concrete social situations. More and more institutions and organizations are devoted to

⁷ They set the National Education Standards for Higher Education in Spain.

promoting and enhancing practical applications of Information Literacy Programs⁸ and implementing transversal actions of b-learning.⁹

This approach to education also requires new forms of student assessment, where students demonstrate their skills, assess their own learning, and evaluate the processes by which their learning is achieved (preparing portfolios, research logs, etc.). *The Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning* in the US provided a conceptual framework and broad guidelines for describing the information-literate student. These standards include “information literacy”, “independent learning” and “social responsibility”.¹⁰

Modern education should help students to learn in dynamic situations where information constantly changes. They need to learn how to manage information excess and to select pertinent resources. They also need to find meaning for themselves, among the diverse and numerous informational resources. Finally, they should be able to formulate their personal understanding from even contradictory informational sources.

Judi Harris <<http://virtual-architecture.wm.edu/>> offers a list of virtual instructional strategies that can help in the acquisition of informational competence: problem solving, information collection and analysis, and interpersonal exchange. These strategies transform the learning experience into a form of research. Students need to construct their own learning

⁸ The article “Information Literacy in Europe: a Literature Review” *Information Research* 8 (4), 2003 by Sirje Virkus (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) examines the development of Information Literacy within Europe, and provides an overview of the concepts used and discussed by European authors. It also offers some examples of information literacy initiatives in schools and the higher education sector, as well as of institutions and organizations, projects and conferences concerned with information literacy. It is available online at <http://informationr.net/ir/8-4/paper159.html>. Another interesting source is Carla Basili’s (ed.) *Information Literacy in Europe: A first insight into the state of the art of Information Literacy in the European Union*. Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Roma 2003.

⁹ Some of the most important ones in the USA are: ACRL (American College and Research Libraries-Institute for Information Literacy at www.ala.org/acrl/, largest division of ALA (American Library Association), IASL (International Association of School Librarianship – Information Literacy Special Interest Group, at <http://www.iasl-slo.org/>). The FREE Web site <<http://www.ed.gov/free/what.html>>, created in 1997, is formed by a group of more than 30 Federal agencies. Its aim is to make hundreds of Federal supported teaching and learning resources easier to find. It is a very useful page for finding educational resources in the U.S. Other world-wide organizations involved in Information Literacy Programs are: ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association -Information Literacy Forum at <http://www.alia.org.au/>), ANZIIL (Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy at <http://www.anziil.org/>), CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals - Information Literacy Group, UK at <http://www.cilip.org.uk/default.cilip>), EnIL (European network for Information Literacy at <http://www.enil.eu.com/>), FORMIST (Formation à l’information scientifique et technique, France at <http://formist.enssib.fr/>), IAIL (International Alliance for Information Literacy at <http://www.infolit.org/IAIL/index.html>), SEDIC (Sociedad Española de Documentación e Información Científica at <http://www.sedic.es/> in Spain), CNICE (Centro Nacional de Información y Comunicación Educativa <<http://www.cnice.mec.es/>> also in Spain), IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations – Information Literacy Section, <<http://www.ifla.org/>>), NORDINFOLIT (Nordic Forum for Information Literacy at <http://www.nordinfolit.org/>) SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries, UK; at <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/>), the UNESCO IFAP <<http://portal.unesco.org/>> and the UNESCO-CEI <<http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/>> and <<http://www.ceinet.org/main.php?pageID=81>>).

¹⁰ More information at:

http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslproftools/informationpower/InformationLiteracyStandards_final.pdf

dimension from a variety of sources. They learn to question and think away from predetermined formulas and solutions. The learning experience follows a constructivist approach rather than the traditional way of transmitting of knowledge and abilities. Students learn by constructing their own comprehension and experiences of the world in an active and permanent process. Social interaction is also an important element in the learning process. The constructivist approach based on students' research helps them to develop techniques to transfer abilities to different learning situations. It requires students to think and reflect about the process of information research and the purpose of the information found, so that the process of information management can be transmitted to other situations.

According to Carol C. Kuhlthau (1993), an Information Search Process should follow the following steps: initiation (analysis of the task or project and identification of themes and questions involved); selection of the theme or question to be explored; exploration (this process should identify inconsistencies or incompatibilities in the information); formulation (that is, to develop a perspective centered around the information found); recollection (recompilation and documentation of the information around the central theme or problem); presentation to other students (bringing forward possible connections with other themes and information); evaluation (reflection about the whole learning process and learning contents). The main strategies for this kind of learning experience are: selecting, remembering, organized summarizing and paraphrasing with the students' own words.

Numerous projects on Information Search Processes have been developed in the last ten years. Some of the most important ones are:

- **Big6:** <<http://www.big6.com>>
- **Pathways of Knowledge:** <http://www.sparkfactor.com/clients/follett/home.html>>
- **The Research Cycle:** <http://www.questioning.org/rcycle.html>>
<http://www.fromnowon.org>>
- **Information Seeking Process.** <<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kuhlthau/>>
- **The Thoughtful Learning Cycle (TLC).**
<<http://witloof.sjsu.edu/courses/250.loertscher/modelstrip.html>>
- **Christine Irving Project** (Glasgow Caledonian University UK)
<<http://www.learningservices.gcal.ac.uk/ils/index.html>>
- **OSLA.** (Ontario School Library Association Canada)
<http://www.accessola.com/action/positions/info_studies/>

- **I-Search.**<<http://www.edc.org/FSC/MIH/i-search.html>>
<<http://www.literacymatters.org/content/isearch/intro.htm>>
- **Infoquest Interchange** <<http://www.infoquestline.net>>

Many of these models are constructed following the narrative structure of the trip or travel. Since we refer to concrete tasks developed during specific periods of time, the term “virtual trip” is often used. A virtual trip or Information Search Process is a guided exploration through a collection of Web pages. The experience can also become a structured online learning experience (Foley, 2003). In the last few years educators have realized the education potential of such experiences. A virtual field trip is more than just giving students time to browse and surf the Internet for sites related to a specific topic. It should be a guided tour, arranged by the educator but allowing students sufficient freedom to choose their own path and therefore acquire a learning experience that is unique and different for each one of them. A virtual trip should also grant access to information that is not generally available to students, like a visit to a specific museum, a field trip abroad, etc. In terms of cost effectiveness, it saves time and resources and students bring back facts and information in several forms of media. A well-planned virtual trip can help students assimilate a specific experience through discovery and transform the material into knowledge (Kawka & Burgess 2001: 4-5). They can also become important intercultural tools, since they offer multiple perspectives on an issue, which facilitate in-depth knowledge and cooperative learning experiences. Finally they provide the opportunity of seeing authentic situations, and it is well-known that real-world experiences can help to boost up motivation levels in the classroom.

Besides the Information Research Processes mentioned above, there are many other instructional strategies that can help students to develop more active learning approaches. The final objective of these experiences is to promote a high level of critical thought so that information sources are selected in the best possible way and contribute substantially to problem solving and the making of decisions.

Cyberguides, for instance, were developed by Karen McLachlan as a means of introducing the World Wide Web to novice users in 1996. They are supplementary, standards-based, web-delivered units of instruction centred on core works of literature. Each CyberGuide contains a student and teacher edition, a task and a process by which it may be completed. They also include teacher-selected web sites.¹¹

¹¹ <<http://www.cyberbee.com/guides.html>>, <<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cyberguide.html>>

WebQuests, developed by Bernie Dodge and Tom March, are inquiry-oriented activities in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet. The main critical attribute of a WebQuest is to facilitate this transformation of information into a newly constructed, assimilated understanding. The main strategies that WebQuests prompt are: motivation, questioning-schema theory, constructivism, differentiated learning, situated learning, thematic instruction, authentic assessment, metacognition and learner-centred psychological principles. WebQuests are developed in the following steps: introduction, task, process, resources, evaluation and conclusion. Good searching strategies are important.¹² The task is the most important part of a WebQuest, providing a goal and focus for the student. It should be well designed, engaging and should elicit thinking in learners that goes beyond mere comprehension.¹³

MiniQuests are online instructional modules designed by teachers for their students, which help them in developing critical thinking and promote knowledge construction on an authentic topic or problem. MiniQuests last for one or two days and involve a structured investigative approach that guides students through a unique set of Web resources with the specific purpose of answering some question. They can be used at the beginning, middle, or at the end of a curriculum unit. MiniQuests were developed by Tom March, who later collaborated with Bernie Dodge in creating WebQuests.¹⁴

The work of the research group Literaturas Españolas y Europeas del Texto al Hipertexto (LEETHi)¹⁵

LEETHi was created in 2002 when a group of researchers from different areas of the Faculty of Humanities of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid got together after a seminar and decided to work towards the ESHE, trying to bridge different teaching experiences and epistemological perspectives in order to reflect on the literary event and its intercultural

See also the work developed by LEETHI, *Guías de Lectura*, at <http://www.ucm.es/info/guias/indexdom.htm>

¹² There are many specialized search engines (*Search Engine Guide* <<http://www.searchengineguide.com/>>). A selective list of search resources for WebQuests can be found at <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/Webquest/searching/specialized.html>. *The WebQuest Page* <<http://webquest.sdsu.edu/>> and *Best WebQuests* <<http://bestwebquests.com/>> offer information on what WebQuests are and provide links to some good topically listed WebQuests in English. They are indexed following school grading – early, middle, high, adult.

¹³ The taxonomy of tasks can be found at Dodge's Webpage <<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/Webquest/taskonomy.html>>. See also *Task Oriented Question Construction Wheel Based on Bloom's Taxonomy*, 2001 St. Edward's University Center for Teaching Excellence, at <http://www.stedwards.edu/cte/resources/bwheel.htm>

¹⁴ The main differences between MiniQuests and WebQuests are listed here: <http://www.biopoint.com/miniquests/faceoff.htm>, <http://www.biopoint.com/wq2/Welcome.html>

¹⁵ See <http://www.ucm.es/info/leethi/index.php>

repercussions. *Guías de lectura*¹⁶ was their first Web space, financed by a Complutense Project in 2002.

Guías de Lectura was a pioneer project in its interdepartamental presentation within a heterogeneous Faculty of Humanities. It allowed us to focus more attention on the varied student profile and on certain abilities that seemed to be underdeveloped, particularly concerning information management and the development of critical capacities. The Webpage facilitated an education process centered on each individual student; it offered students basic information on the authors and literary works to be studied and provided tasks for continual assessment. Students were able to select their own learning path and timing in accessing information and performing the suggested tasks. The main objective was the development of students' autonomy and their research capabilities. Tasks were organized encouraging cross-readings, such as the transversal perspectives that could be found in different works, or comparative approaches to the study of cultural differences among works of distinct European literatures.

Our sensibilities are formed through language; thus, language pervades even non-linguistic domains. Different discourses are possible because the construction of the social is a form of virtualization mediated through language, where the contract, agreement or consensus – in the form of ritual, political, economical or religious laws- substitute force relations. Recent research in sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology (Schegloff 1992) has shown that people engage in constant efforts to structure experience together and to establish order in conventions of discourse so that shared meanings are possible. Our concern is precisely the dialogical quality of literature in general, which speaks across different cultures, across space and across time (as literature provides a basis of our historical memories).

The associative mechanisms facilitated by hypertext and research processes can help develop complex cognitive mechanisms of storage and access of information, thus staging the learning process and the production of ideological, symbolic and aesthetic meaning in a concrete context, causing students to become conscious of their learning process and facilitating the integration of information in long-term memory structures.

Recent research on hypertextual theory is helping to show the tremendous effect of technological applications on cultural issues: “Windows have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system. [...] The life practice of windows is that of a decentered self that exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time”

¹⁶ More information at: <http://www.ucm.es/info/guias/indexdom.htm>

(Turkle 1995: 14). Traditionally, cultural transformations were explained in ideological terms, ignoring the fact that the very materiality of the forms of representation and conveying information – that is, the changes from papyrus to manuscript, book-form and, finally, cables and a screen – has also had an enormous impact. The growing use of these technologies, based on hypertextual models of textual representation, makes necessary their study and that of the changing role of the reader/user, particularly when addressing hypertexts designed for educational purposes.

What impact do Web technologies have upon our individual and social identity? We have mentioned the turn towards more interactive forms of communication where users can experience an immediate feedback and sense of participation and involvement (Greimas & Courtés 1986: 115) and where hierarchical structures can appear to dissolve. Internet communication seems to abolish the physical and social/hierarchical distance between communicators, even producing an effect of loss of our own personal and concrete limits. For Turkle (1995), Net technologies liberate the individual from the social constraints of embodied identity and from the restrictions of geographically embodied space. They create a powerful sense of disembodiment, heightening the subjective awareness of the lack of congruity, and even provide new forms of experiencing *otherness*. Kerckhove (1997) also explains that the Net helps users to project digitally outwards, to lose their sense of physical separation and gain power of action at a distance. He also points out that the interactivity inherent to the Internet is felt as a process of interchange, of cooperation, a dialogue which can promote a sense of connectedness or fraternity, what he has termed “Webness”.

However, it is important not to underestimate the fact that this current preoccupation with *interactivity* and *the interactional* comes from the impossibility of taking into account the amount of information generated nowadays, and which would oblige to develop systems for relating different groups of information. This can also explain the emphasis on human interaction and dialogue, which are the result of interconnection among the media and also among disciplines. The convenience of the transcultural dialogical paradigm is particularly important in Humanities departments, where finances always fall short.

The problem is a complex one and we can only suggest, in the limited space of this paper, the direction that research could follow in trying to analyze the discourse of a global modernity constituted by multiple, hybrid and diasporic identities involved in a complex negotiation which also seek to authorize new cultural hybrids, emerging at this time of historical transformations. This kind of research is imperative if we want to find out more about the construction of our identities – whether individual or social and more recently

transnational – and their relation to textual spaces as our means of representation. Thus, the study of hypertext becomes much more than a didactic tool. It develops into an epistemological mechanism for the transmission of knowledge, and a cognitive structure of production.

But there is even more; because, since context is prior to orderly discourse, the emergence of new contexts, such as the Internet, change the means by which order is constructed. As Bloomfield & Vurdubakis put it:

Our argument [...] is that any account that takes the "properties" of a particular technology as its starting point is from the beginning caught up in those practices that generate and sustain the objectively given quality of those properties. Hence this type of account will, however reluctantly, tend to reinforce the whole notion of a technology as something that develops outside, as it were, the social relations on which it imparts. (1994: 10)

For this reason it would be interesting to enter briefly, in this last part of the paper, into the complex Web dynamics and specificity of the communicative and linguistic practices that arise from the nature of the media involved (Gumperz 1983), since the very nature of hypertext technologies appears to preclude any discussion of power, at least on a superficial level.

Web designers and hypertext theorists, such as Landow, explain that the user of hypertext may modify any document or at least choose any link between documents. Landow's proposal explicitly extends the vision of completely interlocking documents and, hence, implies the collapse of the independent, isolated document and of the authoritative original text. Linked documents are part of a collaborative network, "of a complex dialogue" (Landow 1992: 12). When any document can be integrated into the network instantaneously and without regard to specific location (spatial and temporal framework) the physical separation between documents, their boundaries or borders, become meaningless.

It seems obvious that the movement or paradigm shift towards inter-, multi-, or trans-cultural positions is in consonance, not only with the new media technologies but also with global flows of capital, products and people. National sovereignty is questioned and threatened by global and multinational corporations. The world of capital is transnational and deterritorialized, while people in small localities in the Third World, who have never owned a computer nor traveled abroad, experience the whole process of globalization as just another

form of colonization or domination. We, the chosen few with a connection to the Internet, speak of “Webness” and of new forms of virtual communities.

For these reasons, our group LEETHi is in the process of inquiring into the complex nature of the cultural foundations of these non-localized, non-sequential, multi-linear structures which are beginning to emerge in various research areas. The task is not an easy one, not only because venturing outside one’s discipline is risky business, but also because deep inside, our social unconscious might be more political than we are prepared to admit.

Our first project, *Guías de lectura*¹⁷, cyberguides designed to explore the possibilities of b-learning strategies in the classroom, sought to implement European Convergence didactic patterns and hypertextual models that might generate novel learning processes and new forms of production of information and transmission of knowledge. The guides are designed to allow students complete autonomy to decide their reading itinerary while helping them to construct meaning in a pluri-linguistic and multicultural frame. The flexibility of the hypertextual model allows for the generation of a network of paths and intersections that stages the dialogical processes of literary reception, helping to unveil the inter-texts built into our representations and world conceptions.

Projects such as *Guías de Lectura* address the potential role that the Social Sciences and Humanities (Education and Literature in particular) can play with regard to the imminent transformations to a European knowledge-based society and its educational, ethical and societal implications. The emergence of the knowledge-based society will entail new forms of relationships between its citizens, on one hand, and between its citizens and institutions, on the other. Hence the emphasis LEETHi has placed on intercultural approaches.

LEETHi’s new hypertextual dynamic space¹⁸ is a meeting point for different European identities and cultures; an interface articulating the opening of borders and limits towards hybrid spaces where we can encounter the others. Interculturality, interdisciplinarity and a plurality of languages and world conceptions form part of this complex model which, in line with the European programs of *Culture and Language Integrated Learning* seeks to formalize the simultaneous acquisition of linguistic and literary competence, information literacy and procedimental and performative abilities, without forgetting intercultural and social values.

The mechanism of representation of a model such as this needs, necessarily, a hypertextual structure that would include a cognitive and philosophical dimension of the

¹⁷< <http://www.ucm.es/info/guias/indexdom.htm>>

¹⁸< <http://www.ucm.es/info/leethi/index.php>>

phenomenon of multiculturalism together with a didactic and pedagogic dimension which can help to develop positive values in the face of diversity. In this sense, educational research in language learning developed for the European Convergence has shown that the building up of autonomy as a conscious metacognitive activity, permits a reflection on one's own language that gives rise to the emergence of a multicultural consciousness.¹⁹ The literary event becomes an exceptional meeting space, dialogic crossroad of readings that help to build what we have been, what we are and what we want to become. The affirmation of identity –individual, historical, social, cultural, national- is, for LEETHi., a space of dialogic learning, of exchange of experiences with everything that is somehow other and different –other languages, other cultures, other disciplines .

Open and dynamic, the image of Rubik's cube, chosen as interface, does not follow unidirectional communicative and cognitive paths – a single source of information, one sender, one transmission channel, one receptor-; a constructed, multiple, simultaneously bounded and unbounded space that allows the visualization of different categories of problems, than can be deconstructed, fragmented, parceled out for their comprehension; a complex combination of varied positions which can be manipulated by the user around a central axis while maintaining different faces in the bordering extremes.

Systems, nations, interculturalures, transliteratures, histories and identities are the shifting combinatory concepts, not global but “glocal”²⁰, moving between centre and periphery. Bidimensional on the screen, the model aspires to generate, in its mobility, three-dimensional mental projections; a systemic configuration around two combinatory axis: on the one hand the hypertextual representational and cognitive structure and on the other the didactic one that helps to implement the theoretical model and transforms it in concrete performances of autonomous learning.

Nodes and links, as invariant textual moments, bind the different pages within the hypertext, supplying local stability within the global flux. Each *lexia*, to use Landow's and Barthes' term, builds up key associative prospects of internal coherence and consistency and simultaneously demolishes them, placing the user at the limit of the textual moment and pushing him forward towards a new discursive territory. The hypertextual space is always a relative subjective read-writable space, configured by the reader/user along his/her chosen

¹⁹ See Fenner 2001 and also Breen 2001.

²⁰ We have borrowed Roland Robertson's concept, in Featherstone, M., S.Nash & R. Robertson (eds.) *Global Modernities*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.

path. The colors of the cube help to remember the selected itinerary in this complex associative Web in progress.

The relativism of the model is the price to pay for allowing the user the consciousness of his/her decisions, something that can only be achieved if one is able to situate oneself simultaneously within and without the space of representation. On the other hand, any non-deterministic model forces us to make decisions and situate ourselves both cognitively and discursively, generating conducts of responsibility that may not be gratifying and which we may want to avoid for the sake of convenience. Autonomy and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. The student/user can, however, take the easy way out and access directly the library in order to contemplate all the documents listed in alphabetical order. She or he can also use the key-words search engine to find what they need.

Our pedagogic hypertexts are designed with this objective in mind: to teach students to become better persons through reading. We believe that learning to deal with the 'other' in literature can make us aware of our own historical specificity and help us value ourselves more, and thus value the 'other' for helping us to be. Hence LEETHi's new space aspires to become a data-base of research essays on the concepts proposed, where we all become students and the learning process becomes a permanent inquiry into the nature of knowledge and its changing contextual applications. Our aim is to create a virtual community, a space of agreement and disagreement that can help see the literary event in relation to the linguistic, individual, historical, cultural, national and transnational factors; a hypertextual systemic representation of the associative mechanisms of our mind that stages how we can learn and think differently while working together towards the same goal: constructing a better world.

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