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THE RED-INK DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Digital technologies, globalization, knowledge-based economy: learning and education acquire more and more a key role in the balance of human activities worldwide. Education and training are at the core itself of every social/cultural/economic transformation, equipping new generations to face new challenges and opportunities, as those offered by ICT (OF-COM 2006: n. 5). The important role of ICT in learning experiences needs to be further considered and studied, in close connection with the development and dynamics of the knowledge society. To address this research issue young researchers with a wide scientific background are required: hence the red-ink pro*doc proposal. In Switzerland the Information Society Coordination Committee (ISCC 2005) has been mandated to “lead the federal administration’s ICT activities and to make the Swiss population aware of the challenges of the information era” (www.infosociety.ch).

Understanding the new requirements and challenges that education – educators and educational institutions – must face today requires an effort for *Rethinking Education in the Knowledge Society*, and this is the reason for the research efforts carried forward within the red-ink doctoral school. The school has the goal of understanding the complex issues related to the introduction, management and impact of educational technologies and eLearning in the perspective of the knowledge society.

Red-ink is funded within the pro*doc program of the SNF, and the project consortium is composed by the NewMinE Lab at the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI Lugano, directed by prof. Lorenzo Cantoni and coordinated by Luca Botturi), the CRAFT center at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL, directed by prof. Pierre Dillenbourg) and the IWP at the University of St. Gallen (UNISG, directed by

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prof. Dieter Euler). It is indeed the latest fruit of a collaboration started in 2001 with the first New Media in Education doctoral school.

Rather than a discipline, eLearning is an interdisciplinary research area. Among the different research perspectives on eLearning, three seem to be very productive, since they pull together many researchers and research lines and are specifically studied by the members of the consortium: psycho-pedagogical, managerial, and communicative. Each of them addresses specific research issues, which inform the research work of red-ink doctoral students (*red-inklings*):

- *The psycho-pedagogical perspective*: how does the introduction of a new medium affect teaching and learning practices? How do formal, non formal and informal learning change by means of new media? What are the psychological implications of the adoption of a new medium?
- *The managerial perspective*: what are the changes brought about by the introduction of a new media in a given context (company, institution, school, university, etc.)? How can the institution bear these changes? How can the institution measure the benefits deriving from the introduction of the new medium?
- *The communication perspective*: what kind of (educational) communication is allowed by new media? What are the chances they offer and the limitations they impose? How do they re-organize the relationship among interlocutors?

The interconnections among these three perspectives are strong and very relevant for the doctoral program itself: for instance, studying how new media re-shape communication flows in a given (e.g. educational) context is a matter of both the communication and the management perspectives; investigating the organizational changes caused by the adoption of a new media (e.g. in a university) implies investigating their psychological aspects as well; again, research on learning communities is at the very crossroads of pedagogical and communication studies.

This close interplay among the three main perspectives adopted by the doctoral program is an added value of red-ink, since it allows participants to have a comprehensive approach to eLearning as a whole, stressing at the same time its many facets and the interconnections among its main disciplines.

The Doctoral Training Program

The red-ink doctoral program offers to its members a rich learning environment where to better understand eLearning in its many facets. In particular, a wider and deeper comprehension of the many involved factors and of their interplay in the educational experience is promoted through a continuous sharing of knowledge among students and scholars coming from different areas of expertise.

The red-ink pro*doc builds a rich learning experience for PhD students, offering them the opportunity to enter a network of Swiss researchers, enjoying a rich collaboration among participants, and to learn an interdisciplinary approach to research, where different points of view enhance discussions and understanding, enrich personal academic paths, and offer a more adequate view on education in the knowledge society. This is achieved by promoting interaction with the leading experts in the field, by providing support to members in their personal PhD research projects and by actually having an experience as eLearners, experimenting different technologies and communication/collaboration scenarios using ICT.

The training program, spread over 3 years, is structured in residential seminars, blended seminars and online seminars. Each event has a specific topic; hosts international guests and provides opportunities to discuss each student's research work. So far, red-ink hosted guests from Germany, Austria, the UK, and the Netherlands. Research and teaching done in the framework of the doctoral school are of excellence at an international level, and represent the best practices in the eLearning area.

Red-ink is releasing the content of its online seminars as Open Educational resources, available at www.red-ink.ch/oer.

Doctoral Students

Excellence is promoted also through a careful selection of red-ink members. So far, 11 members are active (5 at USI, 3 at EPFL, 3 at UNISG). Their theses focus on different but complementary issues, for example:

- The development of design communication in eLearning teams,
- The use of visual representations of learner profiles in educational adaptive hypermedia applications,

- The development of 3D collaborative environments for design activities,
- The use of ethnographic methods for understanding the diffusion of eLearning as an innovation, as related to the drop-out phenomenon,
- Visual tools for teaching argumentation,
- The description and management of organizational learning cultures,
- The use of ICT to create intelligent physical learning environments and objects.

More information about the red-ink doctoral school is available at www.red-ink.ch. Continuous update on students' research projects are blogged at <http://red-inklings.blogspot.com>

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