This paper is taken from

Future Citizens in Europe
Proceedings of the fourth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network

London: CiCe 2002

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 356 5

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit
- The University of North London (now part of the London Metropolitan University) for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the European Commission Department of Education and Culture for their support and encouragement.

Creating a new culture of communication

CiCe Data Group
Sarantis Chelmis, Ethniko kai Kapodestriako Panepistimio Athinon (Greece)
Marie Clarke, National University of Ireland, Dublin (Republic of Ireland)
Riitta Korhonen, Turun Yliopisto (Finland)
Cass Mitchell-Riddle, University of North London (UK)
Søren Hegstrup, Hindholm Socialpædagogiske Seminarium (Denmark)

Introduction

CiCe's fundamental aim is:

> to build shared educational approaches to learning and teaching about social, economic and political similarities and differences across Europe, enhancing the quality of the relevant academic and professional courses in all participating states ... [which] will contribute to the development of an active and participating democratic citizenry (Ross, 2001:6).

Effective communication is a necessary precondition for sharing information and making joint decisions concerning the development of educational approaches and enriching and improving academic courses. Raptis (Raptis & Rapti, 2001) suggests that ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), which include e-mail communications, the world wide web and computer networks, holds significant advantages comparing to traditional communication tools because

a. they offer easy access to a knowledge database, especially where up-to-date or constantly changing information is needed, or where information is not available at the local level;

b. they promote the development of competencies needed in the contemporary learning society, for example the competence to process multiple information and the competence to read critically; choosing, evaluating and using information. A learning society needs to celebrate the qualities of being open to new ideas, to express different perspectives, to reflect and to enquire into solutions to new dilemmas, cooperating in the practice of change and critically renewing society (Ranson, 1994, p.139); and

c. they enable a group of people to work together without constraints of place and time (Raptis, 2001).

The Livelink software

CiCe's aims required a specialised technological tool, that would provide members with direct access to information relevant to their field of work, allow them to contribute to that information, and facilitate easy and rapid communication with other members.

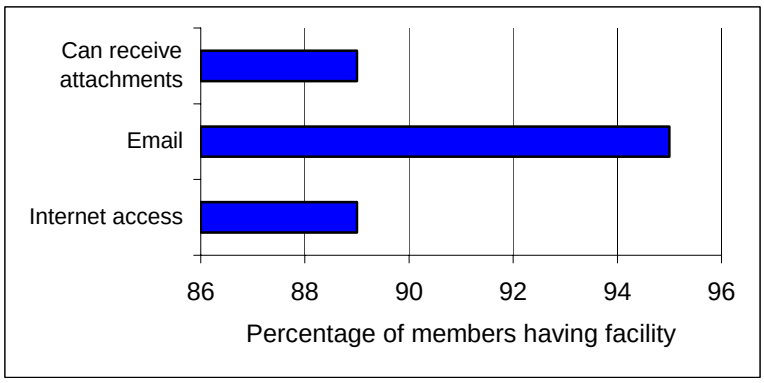
> [The] 'Livelink' software (from Open Text Corporation: a market leader in electronic document management) … is made available at no cost to the CiCe network through a contribution from the University of North London. … Because the system is web-based, members can use it to give and receive information from any networked machine at work, at home or anywhere in the world. (Ross, 2001, p.44)

Livelink is accessed via individual passwords and usernames. It holds CiCe's administrative records (Minutes of committee meetings, information about forthcoming conferences and edited papers from those already held, copies of bids for funding and contractual details, etc.) and includes a Cyber Café and a contacts database of members, searchable in a variety of ways which enable members to identify others who share their particular interests. In addition Livelink provides facilities for members to

- both deposit and download material
- set up and maintain shared project workspaces, with discussion areas where sub-groups can collaborate on writing documents, store and organise files, and make data available selectively to other members as desired
- arrange for automatic notification by email of additions to member-specified areas of interest.

All CiCe members are asked to provide information about themselves and their interests for the members' database. They are also asked to indicate the ICT facilities to which they have access. Not all members provide this information: Figure 1 shows the responses of those who have done so since CiCe's inception.

Figure 1 CiCe members' access to ICT facilities



(n=223, as at 15 April 2002)

Although the majority do have access to a range of ICT, just over 10% have no internet access at all. Further investigation has shown that the quality of access varies: many members face local internet provider constraints such as poor or costly connections, do not have easy individual access to the appropriate hardware, and in some cases share a departmental email address.

Individual passwords to Livelink were distributed to members in May 1999. Hands-on tutorial sessions were held at the first conference in London that month. Most CiCe members present attended one of the eight sessions and there was a lot of enthusiasm. A manual covering the most important features of the software (c.20 pages) was distributed to all members later in the year. However, monitoring of usage showed that the initial enthusiasm generated in London was not maintained.

The role of Data Group

At the Athens Conference (May 2000) Alistair Ross gave a well-attended plenary session on use of Livelink, and the Data Group was formed with a remit to

- monitor data and information in Livelink
- review the current use of Livelink the central part of the communication process within CiCe
- identify strategies to encourage more members to use Livelink as a communication tool, and
- implement these strategies throughout CiCe network.

Working on the assumption that poor usage was related to the software itself, the Data Group employed the following strategies, which focused mainly on familiarising members with the use of Livelink:

1. *Supporting and encouraging the linking of CiCe activities to Livelink.* Groups operating within the network were encouraged to use Livelink as a communication tool. Advice was given on how to make full use of Livelink's possibilities in order to maximise the effectiveness of its use.

2. *Developing a new instruction leaflet.* The Data Group considered an instruction booklet an essential tool for Livelink users, both as a reference resource and as instructional material during training seminars, but thought that the original version was perhaps too all-embracing. A simplified instruction booklet was written which covered only the basics - logging on and off, an explanation of the structure of the site and how to move around it, opening documents, adding documents, and using the Cyber Café.

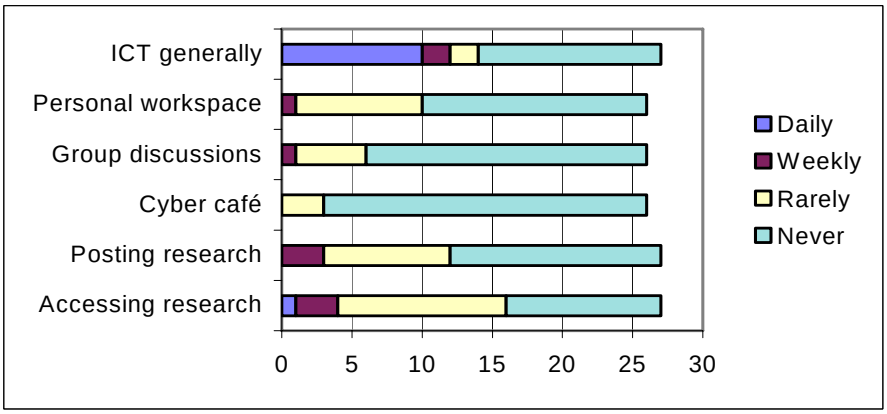
3. *Organising a training seminar at the Brugge conference in 2001*. Members of the Data Group and several additional experienced users provided one-to-one tuition for beginners and encouraged more confident users to extend their skills and knowledge of Livelink, and to discuss and solve specific problems encountered in Livelink use.

The Data Group sought feedback from delegates attending the Brugge Conference (2001) concerning ICT use generally: delegates were asked to assess the following areas of their ICT use as daily, weekly, rarely or never:

ICT in general	Livelink
• word processing • email • internet	• personal workspace • group discussions • the cyber café • posting research articles • accessing research articles.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the usage of the Livelink facilities was minimal.

Figure 2 Survey respondent's use of ICT / Livelink

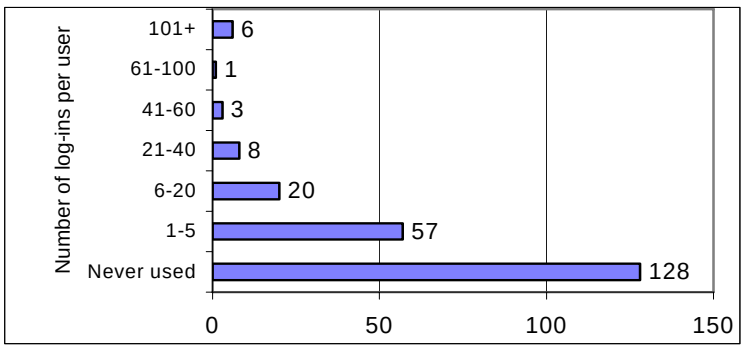


(N=27)

Evaluation of the Data Group's intervention

Contrary to expectations and all efforts, Livelink was and has continued to be an underused facility (Figure 3).

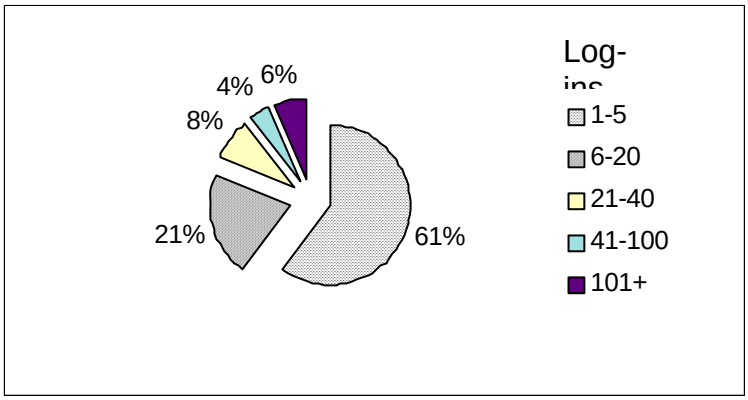
Figure 3 Livelink usage



(n=223, as at 15 April 2002)

In addition, a disappointingly small percentage of the CiCe members who do use Livelink do so on a regular basis (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Percentage of log-ons by regular users



(n=95, as at 15 April 2002)

We had posited that the low levels of usage may be a result of

- a lack of user-friendliness in the software itself
- an initial lack of material within Livelink to attract browsers
- language difficulties, either with the software or with the manual provided by CiCe.

However, the results of the Brugge questionnaire (Figure 2 above) suggest that ICT in the wider sense, i.e. use of email and of the web generally, is not a regular feature of the working life of many members. In this context, introducing Livelink is much more than introducing a simple work tool; it is an introduction to a new culture of communication which holds specific codes, values and methods of interpersonal interaction. Changing communication practices through the use of ICT means changing a whole system of thinking, acting and interacting.

We also asked for suggestions for making Livelink more useful: these were

- more member involvement/exchange of ideas/contacts;
- more general information concerning courses, funding opportunities, other conferences and with connections to other sites;
- more documents and opportunities for research and collaboration;
- develop a data base about citizenship education / opportunities for collaboration;
- easier access to the data bases; and
- more-user friendly / with more information about Livelink's possibilities.

Only two of the suggestions relate to possible technical difficulties. It appears from the first four listed that members have not appreciated that Livelink is intended to be a reciprocal facility, and this is clearly something that we need to address.

The need for change

The broad cultural milieu in which we live is witnessing rapid changes in philosophical, societal, educational research and theory contexts which are increasingly underscored by the opportunities offered by ICT for local, national, and global communication. This context demands multilevel change from professionals. This is the challenge that members of CiCe face in achieving the aims of the network, disseminating research and informing good practice.

However, change is not easy. Research has shown that it is difficult to change personal stances (Tillema & Knol, 1997: p.32), and that people resist transition (Nisbett & Ross, 1980) Passing from the tried and tested to the new and unknown creates uncertainty in areas customarily considered stable, with consequent feelings of uneasiness, anxiety, and concern whether skills and knowledge will be still valued in the new context. People are concerned whether they will still be able to participate effectively (Nadler, 1995). If this is so, and if we focus on the narrow initiation of technological tools to promote CiCe aims, then the possibilities of achieving our purposes are minimal. We need a broader consideration of relevant issues around the development of information literacy and skills, within and beyond CiCe's network.

We do not know why those members who completed our questionnaire do not make more use of ICT. Some do not have individual and/or reliable access to the necessary hardware. There may be issues of language, and of finding the time in a busy academic schedule, or some who entered academic life before the ICT explosion may prefer to use older and more trusted methods of accessing information. However, it is worth considering whether many members have simply not had the opportunity to develop the necessary practical skills. Most of us have computers in our workplace, and many at home also; how many have been offered any formal training in their use? Most of us use word processors, but how many can use, or are even aware of, many of the facilities modern programs offer? Similarly, finding information on the web is not intuitive. Many search engines present the user with badly-designed screens crammed full of advertisements and miscellaneous items - the visual equivalent of Muzak. Overcoming this hurdle can lead to the next - the discovery that one's search has yielded thousands of results. Where to start sifting these? It is all too easy to follow from site to site, getting further and further from the point of enquiry without acquiring anything useful until one gives up in disgust, frustration or despair.

Information technology or information literacy?

The ability to access and use information effectively is a key enabler for society as a whole. It allows us to do three vital things. First, it is a prerequisite for participative citizenship. Secondly, information literacy is required for the production of new knowledge. Thirdly, it is needed to solve global problems which threaten the planet and the survival of civilisation (Butterworth 1996).

The main issue of the so-called information age is still being given scant systematic attention. Even if they recognise the need for ICT-sourced information, people often lack the understandings and skills to identify, locate and access it (Bundy, 2000). Naisbett and Aburdene stress that when a technology is introduced into society, a counterbalancing human response is required. What formal education, politicians and governments have tended to respond to is the incessant call for more information technology. This has been at great cost and has yielded little demonstrable learning return on the investment. There has been a tendency to view the key educational issue of the so-called information age as information technology, rather than information literacy. There has also been a tendency within education to equate computer or IT literacy with information literacy (Bundy, 2000).

Crawford (1999) contends that technology works when people need and use it. People determine which technologies survive, which ones become significant but minor niches,

which ones linger on without significance, and which ones sink without a trace. Studies of the users of information services over thirty years and more have consistently shown that what people really want is access to information of the highest quality. They want tools or people capable of separating the wheat from the chaff. They want quality filtering (Lancaster 1999).

A related central issue is the concept of information overload, largely engendered by the information and communication technologies, and email in particular (Bundy, 2000). In order to survive in the knowledge society, and to create within it a climate of participative citizenship, it is very necessary that members of CiCe be familiar with the communication tools that we have available. It is vital that focus is on information literacy as opposed to information technology. As Bruce (1997) notes, rapid and widespread acceptance of the concept of information literacy has led to renewed emphasis on the concept in all education sectors. Information literacy is making a significant impact on the educational curriculum as the relationship between information literacy and autodidactics that is 'the independent pursuit of learning within formal institutional structures' is recognised. Today the meaning of information literacy has broadened considerably and the term represents a convergence of interests in the need to educate those who must live and work in our information society.

Promoting information literacy, both formally and informally, thus has to be a pervasive concern of citizenship education in the 21st century society.

ICT and the future of CiCe

In second phase of CiCe the role of ICT generally, and Livelink in particular, will be of great importance. For CiCe2 many working groups have been proposed, each with a brief to produce an outcome for publication in a given time-frame. Face-to-face meetings must be kept to a minimum for financial and logistical reasons; group members will be heavily reliant on ICT to communicate among themselves and to consult among the wider membership. The proposed development of postgraduate Masters' modules, and the modules themselves, will be web-based. In developing these common, European-wide courses and curricula throughout all educational levels on citizenship education, it will be necessary to ensure that they are flexible, and representative of the different voices all around Europe. This will be best accomplished through popularising electronic media. As Ornstein & Hunkins (1998) note:

> With [the] demassification of the media, it is likely that people's opinions will not only be enriched, but that they will also become less uniform. Individuals will 'tune into' and interact within their 'sections' of the information world (p.326).

References

Bruce, C (1997) *The seven faces of information literacy*, Adelaide, Auslib Press

Bundy, Alan (2000) 'Drowning in information, starved for knowledge:information literacy, not technology, is the issue'. Paper presented at Books and Bytes: technologies for the hybrid library 10th VALA Conference, Melbourne 16-18 February 2000 http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/papers/drowning.htm.

Butterworth, M (1996) 'The moving target: education for the information age', in Nimon, M (ed) *Learning resourcefully: challenges for teacher librarians in the information age* Adelaide, Auslib Press

Crawford, W (1999) 'The card catalog and other digital controversies: what's obsolete and what's not in the age of information'. *American Libraries* pp 53-58

Lancaster F W (1999) *Library Trends*, p807

Nadler (1995) *Discontinuous Change: Leading Organizational Transformation*. California: Jossey-Bass

Nisbett & Ross (1980) *Human Inference*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall

Ornstein, A. & Hunkins, F. (1988). *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles and Issues*. N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Ranson, S (1994) 'Education for Democracy' in Tomlinson, S *Educational Reform and its consequences* IPPR/Rivers Oram Press, London

Raptis A. & Rapti, A. (2001). *Learning and instruction in information age,* v. 1, Athens (in Greek)

Ross, A (ed) (2001) *Preparing Professionals in Education for Issues of Citizenship and Identity in Europe* CiCe, London

Tillema, H., & Knol, W., (1997). *Collaborative Planning by Teacher Educators to Promote Belief Change in Their Students. Teachers and Teaching*, v. 3 (1)