NETHERLANDS NATIONAL REPORT ON NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS – THE EUROPEAN LEARNING SPACE

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1. General introduction

This report aims to present a provisional survey of the role of new learning environments (NLEs) in language learning and teaching at Dutch higher education (HE) institutes. It was not until the beginning of 2002 that the Netherlands got officially involved in the Thematic Network Project on New Learning Environments. At this late stage it was, unfortunately, not possible to collect the necessary data in a complete and systematic way. This report is by no means exhaustive and it certainly does not cover in detail all pedagogical and organizational aspects related to the use of NLEs. However, it gives an overview of the most relevant trends in the implementation of NLEs, which in practice means ICT-based learning environments, in HE language teaching. The data have been gathered by the author, CALL/ICT-coordinator at the faculty of Arts, University of Leiden, using personal contacts with colleagues at other Dutch universities, at other HE institutes ("Hogescholen", Graduate Schools for Teaching and Learning) and at university Language Centres. Due to the professional background of the author, the report gives more information about ongoing projects at university level. It is hoped that this bias may be redressed at a later stage.

This document must thus be considered as a starting point for a more comprehensive survey. It will also be published on the website of ICT-NL (the working group of ICT coordinators in the humanities) and brought to the attention of HE managers and professionals involved in the implementation of NLEs in HE language teaching. The author will be greatly indebted to all colleagues who will help her to improve the present version providing suggestions, new information and critical remarks.

2. The role of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning

In various Dutch HE institutions CALL-programmes (authoring systems, multimedia packages on CD-ROM) were successfully used during the nineties and are still in use, especially for grammar and vocabulary training, but also for listening skills. However, this software has not usually been implemented as a result of new pedagogical insights about learners' autonomy. It is in most cases self-study material, and students undoubtedly benefit from the increased language training possibilities offered by these programmes, but the traditional roles of teacher and students have not changed.

Starting from 1999, all Dutch HE institutions began introducing web-based virtual learning environments (VLEs) for a wide range of educational subjects. By far the most popular one is now Blackboard, because of its user-friendliness. Web-CT and Lotus Learning Space follow at a distance. There is a strong technical infrastructure that allows for further developments (e.g. the implementation of streaming audio and video). But VLEs are basically teacher-centered, not learner-centered, and in most cases they are used in a teacher-centered way. There are not a lot of examples yet of the use of VLEs for language teaching, but this is going to change rapidly. Pioneer projects in this area may hopefully stimulate a greater student involvement in the language learning process.

2.1.   The integration of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning

The overall impression is that new learning environments are not integrated in a structural way into the language curriculum as a whole, but that the integration – if any – is limited to specific courses. On the other hand, the present trend is to make more and more use of VLEs for all disciplines, and this will certainly lead to a quick integration of VLEs in the language curriculum, in some cases in combination with existing CALL-programs.

2.2.   Policies underlying the integration of New Learning Environments

In all HE institutions the management is actively promoting the use of VLEs at all levels, at the same time stimulating faculties and departments to choose for one "institutional" standard learning environment. This policy has of course financial, technical and organizational advantages. The universities of Groningen, Amsterdam, Leiden, Delft, Tilburg, the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, and the vaste majority of the Dutch "Hogescholen" have chosen for Blackboard as a standard platform. In the universities of Utrecht and Nijmegen different VLEs are used (Blackboard, Web-CT and other platforms); in both universities language teaching materials have been developed in Web-CT. At the Vrije Universiteit courses in LearningSpace and CommonSpace have been developed in the past, but they will now be converted into Blackboard. EFA (Educatieve Faculteit Amsterdam, the Amsterdam Faculty of Education) uses EFA-desk: a virtual office environment based on the Viadesk commercial programme, which supports teaching through projects more easily than Blackboard.

SURF, the HE partnership organization for network services and ICT, partly funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education, has played a major role in stimulating HE institutions to embrace VLEs and to cooperate in innovative educational projects (see http://www.surf.nl). From 1999 to 2002 SURF Educatie<F>, a joint organization, put out an annual call for tender. Institutes could submit proposals for the innovation of education and 40% of the project costs were funded by SURF. In the new plans for 2003-2006 the need for adequate teacher training has been stressed, suggestions like a sabbatical for training and development of materials are presented, but lack of funding will probably make it difficult to realize these plans.

There is no specific policy for or organization concerned with HE language learning and teaching. The only innovative instrument implemented by HE institutes is the Common European Framework, that has been used to describe the learning goals for the new Bachelor-Master language curricula. As part of the national implementation of the Ba-Ma structure, in 2001 university language departments agreed on the learning goals at the end of the Ba-curriculum, determining the final level for every language. On the whole, there is no central philosophy or generally accepted views on language learning and teaching in Dutch HE. If policies are developed, this is only at departmental or faculty level.

2.3.   New learning strategies: the introduction and promotion of independent learning

Independent learning in the Netherlands is merely synonymous with self-study. Learner autonomy is an unknown concept to the majority of HE language teachers. The most innovative examples are probably to be found among departments and language centres involved in the teaching of Dutch as a second language. Generally speaking, the thorough implementation of language portfolios or of

the principles underlying the Common European Framework is still a long way off. EFA has been experimenting with a digital web-based portfolio for four years, in which portfolio a digital version of the European Language Portfolio has been incorporated. For the EFA portfolio see http://portfolioinfo.efa.nl/ and for the Language Portfolio see: http://www.efa.nl/bronnen/taalportfolio/index.htm.

2.4.   Facilities for independent learning

The technical facilities themselves are good to excellent. More or less all institutes have enough multimedia computers with Internet access and (in some cases digital) language laboratories and audio-visual centres. Not all institutes have a self-access centre ("mediatheek"). Well-equipped self-access centres are available at the Universiteit van Amsterdam and at the University of Nijmegen. There are no instances of professional language advisors, trained to coach students in an autonomous language learning setting.

2.5.   Development of learning materials

Several institutes have been involved in the development of CD-ROMs or of language materials for existing authoring systems. For a list of partnership projects, see 9. *Examples of good practices* .

Foreign language materials have also been developed in Question Mark (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, EFA, different languages), Wida suite (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Spanish; Hogeschool van Amsterdam, English), Ace (Hogeschool Utrecht, different languages), Web-CT (University of Utrecht, Spanish; University of Leiden, Javanese), Authorware (Universiteit van Amsterdam, English), Hot Potatoes (University of Amsterdam, Finnish, Dutch, Italian). The University of Tilburg produced Tumult, a multimedia CD-ROM for listening skills (Dutch, Spanish), partially funded by the Ministry of Education. The Delft University of Technology has been using home produced CALL for ten years: all language materials are CALL-supported (both learning and testing modules are available). Recently, learning materials have been developed in Blackboard. Also, home produced materials for Dutch for foreign students can be found at http://www.dutchforforeigners.tudelft.nl/studyhelper/hoofdmenu.htm. The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has developed a CD-ROM to learn collocations (self access), for Dutch, Spanish and Italian. EFA has used home produced CALL programmes for years. Most of the EFA material is CD-ROM based; e.g. within the 'Mobile Language Village' project, students and teachers have developed a wealth of practice material for oral skills (for information in Dutch about this project, see: http://www.efa.nl/gebeurtenissen/2001/talenprijs/index.html).

In general, teachers do not get extra time or facilities for the development of computer materials unless project funds are available for this. This has, of course, a negative effect on the quality of the developed exercises and activities. Training time is also limited, so that usually only a minority of motivated pioneers develop and implement ICT-based materials. The materials that have been designed vary therefore greatly in terms of format, techniques and pedagogical views.

2.6.   Redefining the profile of the actors involved

Very few concrete initiatives have been taken to change the profile of the actors involved (i.e. policy makers, students, and teachers) in language teaching and learning. Except a few cases, there

is a general lack of clear pedagogical views, training opportunities and sound didactic background information.

2.7.   Training programmes and courses for language teachers: in-service programmes, staff development

HE language teachers in most cases miss the necessary technical and pedagogical skills and knowledge to implement ~~succesfully~~successfully NLEs in the language curriculum. Among university managers there is a growing awareness of this problem. But, because in most language departments the average age is 50+, there is also a general reluctance to train teachers who will soon retire (and there is often an even greater reluctance in the teachers themselves to be trained). Training at the moment seems to be the major problem for the full integration of NLEs.

2.8.   Measuring proficiency: assessment and self-assessment

Assessment has been affected very little by the introduction of NLEs. Students often have access to computer programmes that can help them in their own self-assessment, but this is usually done in a traditional way (self-study). English departments at different universities have developed a computer-assisted vocabulary test together. The Delft University of technology has developed a programme for testing listening skills, which is now used in all language courses.

2.9. Action research on the implementation of New Learning Environments

There are no ongoing projects in this field in HE language teaching and learning.

3.   Promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity

No special measures have been taken with respect to multilingualism and cultural diversity.

3.1.   Promoting the learning of the less widely used and less taught languages

There are a lot of initiatives promoting the learning of Dutch as a second language. Many initiatives are funded by the TaalUnie, a joint Dutch-Flemish organisation. For instance, in the past years bilingual dictionaries have been published (Dutch-Italian, Dutch-Russian, Dutch-Swedish) and many others are in preparation. The Language Centre of the university of Tilburg took part in the European project "Small is Beautiful". The project aimed at the development of a CD-ROM based course for different less commonly taught and spoken European languages. Tilburg created a course for Dutch as a foreign language in cooperation with the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). Parts of this course are now offered through the WWW, through the website of the Centre for Dutch as a Foreign Language (Steunpunt Nederlands als Tweede Taal) at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. Also the Vrije Universiteit has developed materials on CD-ROM for Dutch as a foreign language.

A few years ago the ~~Ministery~~Ministry of Education launched the idea that English should become the official language in the Dutch HE system. This plan has never been implemented on a large scale, however university boards encourage the use ~~of English~~of English as instruction language in

the hope to attract more foreign students. This trend seems anyway limited to those disciplines with a strong tradition of publication in English. The knowledge of German and French among HE students has certainly decreased in the last quarter of the past century. In the past, students of various disciplines were able to read relevant literature in German and French, nowadays the vast majority of students is only able to read academic publications in English.

3.2.   Promoting cultural understanding and intercultural awareness

No special measures have been taken with respect to these issues.

3.3.   Accessing authentic resources and materials

Authentic resources and materials can easily be accessed in the Netherlands. Nowadays a lot of resources can be found on the Internet, but foreign newspapers, magazines and books have always been widely available. Foreign TV programmes and movies have never been dubbed but subtitled and many foreign TV stations are offered on the cable tvTV. The language centre of the University of Amsterdam also offers satellite TV for the Scandinavian and Slavic languages. Web radio is also used in many institutions, for listening skills training.

3.4.   Student and staff exchanges

Student exchanges have always been important. At the beginning of the Erasmus programme the number of students going abroad greatly exceeded the number of students coming to Dutch universities, but this trend has changed during the nineties, mostly because Dutch students were put under pressure through financial measures to finish the university study in due time. Therefore, a study period abroad has become less attractive. Staff exchanges are less popular in HE. The increased student mobility and the Bologna treaty have anyway led to the wide adoption of the ECTS system. Interestingly, in different academic disciplines the number of PhD students coming from southern or eastern European countries has increased considerably. Efforts are being made to offer both outgoing and incoming students language and culture preparation courses.

4.   *The role of New Learning Environments in training programmes for language and language related professions*

Different graduate schools for teacher training use VLEs (in most cases Blackboard) in pre-service teacher training programmes, but this concerns only language teachers in secondary education. There are no specific projects for language teachers training in HE.

5.   *The role of New Learning Environments in continuing education programmes or courses*

The Dutch Open University uses VLEs in continuing education programmes or courses, but this institution does not offer language courses. Continuous education in foreign languages is usually organised and offered by private language institutes. In some institutes CALL programmes and CD-ROMs are used, but the use of webbasedweb based materials and of VLEs is limited. A trend setter in this field is the LOI, a private institution for distance education; students may now choose to

submit their homework in the traditional way (by mail) or by logging on a virtual campus. The LOI also offers language courses; the use of VLEs is anyway limited to the organizational aspects, the course materials are not offered online.

6. *How to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for promoting European co-operation?*

6.1. Using ICT for co-operation in the development of programmes

Several institutes take or took part in European projects for the development of language materials (most notably the Haagse Hogeschool and the University of Tilburg), but such development often leads to the production of a closed CD-ROM with a limited distribution. Moreover, the language materials are in most cases specifically developed for a particular teaching situation. In the field of teacher training, the IMICTLL (International Modules in ICT and Language Learning) project must be mentioned (http://www.ilo.uva.nl/Ontwikkeling/imictll/). During this Lingua project (1998-2001), coordinated by the Universiteit van Amsterdam (Graduate School of Teaching and Learning), a total of 60 distance learning modules of one ECTS each has been produced. The aim of the project was to provide newly qualified and experienced language teachers with special expertise in the field of information and communication technology and language learning.

6.2. Using ICT for co-operation in the delivery of programmes

A selection of the modules developed during the IMICTLL project (see 6.1) is now delivered using Blackboard.

7. *Needs in the area of New Learning Environments*

There is undoubtedly an urgent need for teacher training, both in technical and in pedagogical skills. The great risk is to go on implementing NLEs without making efforts for a parallel implementation of learner autonomy. Next to training, extra funding is needed for the development of language materials, otherwise teachers will not use NLEs.

8. *Measures to be taken to meet the needs identified*

A model of "training on the job" should be developed: teachers should acquire the necessary technical and pedagogical skills while developing language materials for direct implementation in the language curriculum of their departments. Access to technology should be combined with professional development and local content development. This set-up has just been tested at the University of Amsterdam, where a teachers' studio, with the hardware and software facilities has been set up. There is professional help, instructions are given on a small scale, and teachers are helped with content development. A lot of new projects for self study materials are now being developed.

9. *Examples of good practice*

Partnership projects

- Hologram. Hologram is an authoring system developed in Toolbook by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen. It provides templates for exercises, extensive registration of students' performance and semi-adaptivity (all exercises are coded, so that students get more exercises on the topics that they master less). Hologram, first released in 1996, has been further developed and maintained through the years by a consortium formed by the universities of Groningen, Leiden and Nijmegen. In 2001 the university of Tilburg also joined the consortium and in 2002 Utrecht followed. The consortium partners get technical support and may use in their institutions all the Hologram language materials developed so far by others. Up to now hundreds of exercise hours have been produced for English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Turkish, Latin and ancient Greek, Arabic, Chinese and Dutch as a second language. The majority of these materials has been produced by Leiden.

- The **DigiTalenKlas project** (1-10-2001 – 31 –12-2003), funded by SURF, is a cooperation project involving the universities of Utrecht, Groningen, Leiden and Tilburg, and a commercial partner, Edufocus. The project, involving the languages Dutch, English, Spanish and Arabic, makes full use of programs such as Blackboard and WebCT but also aims at the development of a web-based CALL program with specific functions for language teaching, such as templates for listening and speaking practice and an online portfolio. A very important part of the project is the development of open language learning tasks in the VLEs; for this purpose, constructivistic pedagogical models among which the WebQuest model have been applied.

 The specific language-learning functionality will be hosted as a web-based service, allowing for the (re)use of exercises by a growing community of users. In order to facilitate finding and using the language learning materials available, metadata based on descriptors from the Common European Framework for Language Learning will be used. The service will run under the aegis of the DigiTalenKlas Consortium, presently consisting of the universities of Utrecht, Groningen, Leiden and Tilburg. Other universities interested in using the service will be invited to participate in the consortium.

- There are several partnership projects, partially funded by SURF and partially by the universities, aiming at using ICT and VLEs for supporting writing skills:
   - the SURF **Concourse project** (2000-2002) at the faculty of Arts, University of Utrecht. In this project a "virtual space" (the "Classroom") for collaborative writing has been developed, which allows for peer feedback. A pilot has been conducted with students of German, in the future Spanish and Italian will follow. All writing products are stored in an archive; this growing collection of examples can be used by other students.
   - the SURF **World Wide Writing project** (2000-2002) University of Nijmegen and Hogeschool of Nijmegen. In this project reference materials for improving writing skills in various foreign languages (English, French, Spanish, German) have been developed, together with a marking system for correcting texts written by other students. The materials are offered through a VLE.

Also the SLOC conference should be mentioned: it is organized every year by the ICT coordinators of the different Faculties of Arts (Tilburg is represented by the Language Centre). The conference

focuses on the use of ICT in HE teaching in the humanities. Special attention is paid to language teaching.

Other interesting local developments
In all universities workshops and symposia for language teachers are organized on a regular basis, so that teachers know about examples of good practices and are informed about new developments (e.g. the Common European Framework, computer based testing)

University of Utrecht, Faculty of Arts
- in the summer 2001 the analogue language laboratories have been replaced by digital language laboratories and all the teaching material has been digitalized
- a course for Spanish as a foreign language has been implemented in Web-CT; both "closed" exercises and open, collaborative tasks are available
- an ongoing project of the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Utrecht University, aiming at creating a NLE for teaching writing skills. Different ICT programs are implemented: Web-CT and Markin, a software which allows to codify mistakes in essays. Students are asked to comment upon essays written by other students, following a template. The implementation of this NLE is part of the changes in the curriculum due to the implementation of the Ba-Ma structure.

University of Groningen, Faculty of Arts
- in 2000 Blackboard has been introduced as standard VLE. All teachers have been trained in the use of Blackboard. Language courses for various languages (Arabic, English) are now offered through Blackboard. Hologram materials for Italian are now offered through the WWW in a Blackboard course making use of Citrix technology.
- allocated resources for technical support (1 full-time position) and coordination (1 full-time position)
- staff training will be promoted through a new training programme, which will provide teachers with individual technical and didactical assistance during the development of ICT-enhanced teaching modules

Universiteit van Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities
- use of Blackboard in different language acquisition courses (all teacher centered)
- extensive use of the self access language centre where commercial CALL material is available.
- a digitalization room studio for teachers is now open;
- allocated resources for technical and didactic support in the use of ICT– 16 hours a week
- workshops on the available authoring tools (Hot Potatoes, Authorware applications, concordancing tools) are organised for language teachers.
- home produced (web based) CALL materials for different languages are being developed; selfstudy listening modules for Italian, Finnish course for beginners, selfstudy Spanish vocabulary material, Grammatik tutor for German, Dutch vocabulary programme. (for some of the results see: www.hum.uva.nl/dsp/dido).
- allocated resources for technical support.

University of Tilburg, Language Centre
- in 2002 the analogue language laboratories have been replaced by digital ones and by special rooms equipped with computer, beamer and video, for speaking skills training.
- special attention for the professional development of language teachers, through an e-learning course about the didactic "added value" of ICT in language traching.

- allocated resources to staff for technical support (10,4 hours a week) and project coordination/teacher training (10, 4 hours a week).

University of Leiden, Faculty of Arts
- allocated resources to teachers staff, so that they can learn how to implement technology and at the same time produce learning materials (about 50.000 euro's a year)
- allocated resources to staff for technical support (23,8 hours a week) and coordination/teacher training (26,6 hours a week)
- the "Hologram community": all teachers using Hologram participate in workshops and are in regular contact with each other, so that they can exchange ideas, teaching and technical tips.
- digitalization of audio and video materials: now available a Javanese course in Blackboard (with audio and video materials), a Chinese pronunciation course (in Hologram) and other language materials in Hologram for Arabic, French and Dutch as a second language.

University of Nijmegen, Faculty of Arts
- in the well-equipped self access centre students can access a lot of language materials, mostly in Hologram and Web-CT.

Delft University of Technology
- allocated resources to teachers staff, to allow production of learning materials (CD-ROMs with audio and video materials and audio cds for courses Dutch for special purposes; a computer assisted application for listening skills training, for speakers of tonal languages)
- students use the so-called "Delft Method", based on a text/lexical approach; for this method a lot of home produced CALL materials are available
- home produced concordancing software for the development of learning materials.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- CommonSpace has been used for chatting (Spanish), collaborative work and peer reviewing, among others for translations (French, English). In translation courses students prepare individually a first version of the translation, and then they work in pairs in the computerlab on the definitive version, using online resources (thesauri, dictionaries).
- In 2001-2002 the ELW, English Language Workbench (http://cursus.let.vu.nl/workbench/english) has been developed and is now integrated in the curriculum of the English Department. It provides students, researchers and teachers with information on, and direct access to, a wide range of electronic resources related to English language learning and linguistic research.
- The Co-Edit programme, developed in 1994, is used for writing skills training (English). Students have to reformulate incorrect sentences en receive feedback.
- The Franch, German and English department use the home produced programme Lexvaardig for developing lexical skills. Lexvaardig consists of three components: a) a text corpus and specific tasks for every language, b) an user-friendly database, so that every student can build his/her own 'dictionary', c) an introductory handbook about lexical knowledge.

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