Constituting Sesame

- a minor field study of a cross-cultural cooperation

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Abstract

Internationally, universities are undergoing renewal because of technological and social changes that both increases the importance of open and flexible learning, as well as makes it practicable. Net-based education makes it possible to create courses where students can collaborate and share knowledge globally. *Collaborative Learning in Virtual Communitie*s, with the working title Sesame, is a cooperative project between Blekinge Institute of Technology, BTH, and University of Pretoria, UP that has intention to provide a course like this. The aim of this collaboration is to initiate research in, as well as to test, and evaluate methods for net-based collaborative learning to see how this can provide new perspectives for students and lecturers in both countries. One key concept in the project is "internationalisation at home" and this means interaction and knowledge sharing between people from different countries, and cultures, without them having to physically leave their country. In this thesis we describe the phase of constituting Sesame focusing on the cooperation between the involved parties from the two countries.

Keywords

Sesame, cross-cultural cooperation, net-based education.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Preface

We, Clara Axelsson and Charlotte Gustafsson, study our third year at the People Computers and Work programme (in Swedish Människor Datateknik Arbetsliv, MDA) at Blekinge Institute of Technology. The MDA-programme is an interdisciplinary education that combines the subjects human work science and computer science. This bachelor thesis comprises 20 credits, which is equivalent to 20 weeks of fulltime study, 10 credits in each discipline. This report is the outcome of a Minor Field Study (a MFS-report) and we have received funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA to perform field studies in Pretoria, South Africa.

In this thesis, we describe the initial phase of a cross-cultural cooperative project, *Collaborative Learning in Virtual Communitie*s where the parties have planned and created a net-based course that will involve students from the University of Pretoria, South Africa and Blekinge Institute of Technology, Sweden. We have participated as action researchers and we have taken active part in the progress of Sesame and at the same time, through different methods observed, described and analyzed the activities. With a focus on the cooperative processes between the involved parties, we identify and analyse interesting problem areas in order to see how they affect the progress of the project. The material we, in this thesis, present is formulated in such a way that it can be used as a basis in a formative evaluation. The working title of the project is *Sesame* (Sweden, South Africa Model for Education) and from now, we will use this name.

We were involved in the Sesame project for six months, from the end of January 2002 to the end of June. We spent the first 10 weeks in Sweden where we gathered field material and performed observations and after this period we went to Pretoria, South Africa, to continue our work with gathering material and there we stayed for six weeks.[1]

This thesis includes, besides the introduction, three parts. In the first part we give a description of our roles in the project. The next part treats the situations in which we have participated and done research. Finally, we present a conclusion where we discuss the results of our research.

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[1] For more information see page 17.

List of words

Sesame   Sweden, South Africa, Model for Education

BTH   Blekinge Institute of Technology

UP   the University of Pretoria

IHN   the Department of Health, Science and Mathematics

TLEI   the Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation

SIDA   the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

PBL   ProblemBased Learning

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

Sesame

Sesame, *Swedish – South African Model for Education*, is a research project involving Blekinge Institute of Technology in Sweden and the University of Pretoria in South Africa. The first contact was made in the year of 2000 and the project started in 2002 and will continue for three years with intentions of a continuing long-term cooperation. Sesame has received funding from Distum, the Swedish Agency for Distance Education.

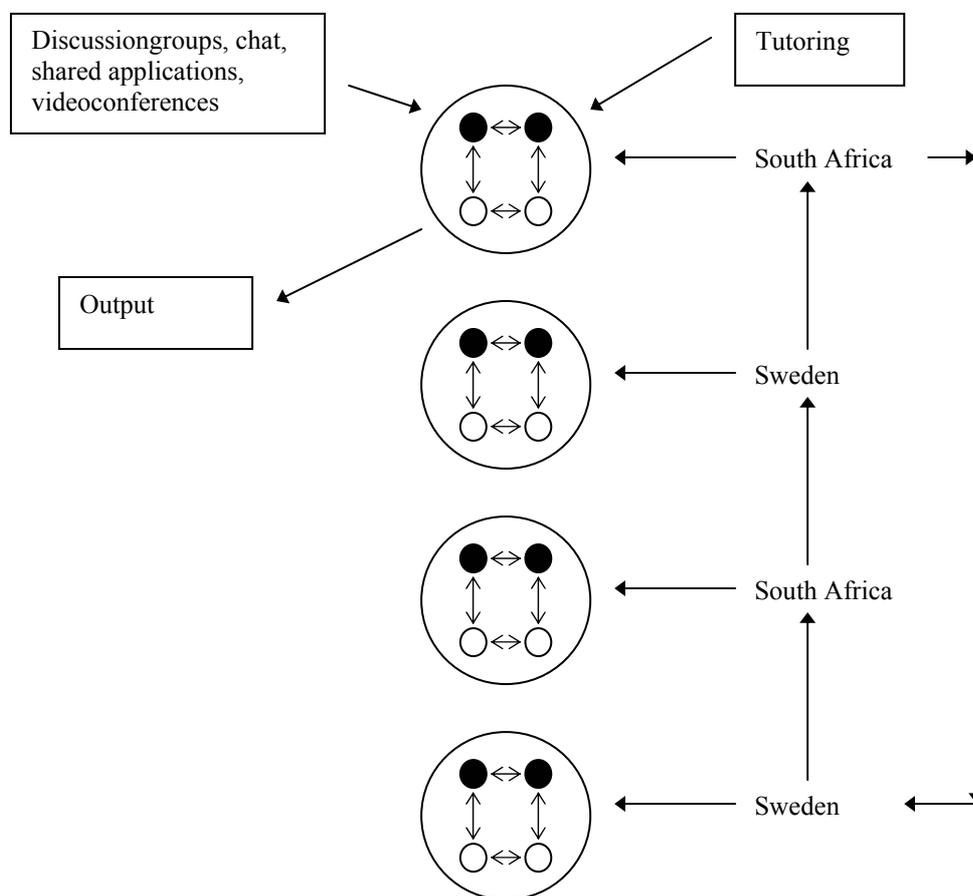Collaborative Learning in Virtual Communities

Figure 1. This sketch visualises the organisational idea behind the Sesame project. The circles symbolise study groups with two students from each country and the arrows to the right show how the teachers cooperate in tutoring the students. They will use different tools to create their virtual community where they collaboratively produce knowledge.

The aim of Sesame is to create methods for collaborative learning in virtual communities and in order to do so they will create net-based courses. In these courses, students will be able to share experiences and knowledge by discussing and accomplish assignments over the Internet, where their different backgrounds – cultural, social, and national – would become a great asset in their collaboration. The students will work together in small groups consisting of three or four students in virtual project rooms. Since the collaboration will take place on the Internet, it is possible for students outside the main campuses to participate in the course. The topic in this project will be in the area of community health but the method is intended to be general and applicable on other subjects.

The collaborative courses will involve nursing students and lecturers from the Department of Health, Science and Mathematics at BTH and the Department of Nursing Science and Medicine at UP. The lecturers have previous experience in tutoring distance students with help of different technological tools. The virtual project rooms will be created by The Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation (TLEI) at UP in cooperation with Learning Lab at BTH. TLEI is the institution that facilitates the planning and developing of distance learning at UP. The services they offer to lecturers include instructional design of courses, development of web-based courses, graphic design, and interactive television broadcasting and they have all the equipment for video conferencing. Learning Lab is the centre for net-based learning at BTH and has a focus on pedagogy, didactics, and research within the field of applied ICT in learning.

A brief presentation of the participants in Sesame
This is a brief presentation of the people involved in Sesame and their roles in the project.
Doris Bohman, International administrator at the Department of Health, Science and Mathematics at BTH. She, together with Lasse Bourelius (see below), initiated the first contact for Sesame between the Universities.
Lasse Bourelius is the head of organisation at Learning Lab and has been involved in Sesame from the beginning. He is the project leader from the Swedish side.
Inger Ljunggren is a lecturer at the Department of Health, Science and Mathematics at BTH. She will be the tutor in the collaborative course and work closely together with Solina Richter (see below).

Salomé Meyer is a lecturer at the Department of Nursing Science, University of Pretoria. Her role in Sesame is to observe the progress towards the aim of the project.

Alméro du Pisani is an Educational Technology manager at the Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation and he will be responsible for the hardware used in Sesame.

Solina Richter is a lecturer at the Department of Nursing Science, University of Pretoria. She will be the tutor in the collaborative course and work closely together with Inger.

Irene le Roux is a Project Manager at the Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation. She is the project leader from the South African side.

Anna Tegel-Nilsson is a project leader at Learning Lab and the second Project Manager from Sweden in Sesame.

Neltjie van Wyk is Head of Department of Nursing Science, University of Pretoria and she will supervise the project.

Other persons will later on, during the evaluation be involved in the Sesame but are, so far of little importance to the project and therefore not presented here.

Hereafter we will refer to all parties by their first name, and the reason why we choose to do this is that we feel that we have created a close relationship with the persons involved.

- Part 1 -

Action Research in Sesame

Our roles as Action researchers

Action research aims to bring together action with reflection and theory with practice. (Reason and Bradbury ed., 2001). Through active participation, learning and developing together with the practitioner, the researcher should work towards producing practical knowledge (Svensson et al., 2002). The idea is that this knowledge should contribute to the increased development of persons or communities, rather than to produce static answers for questions. The researcher works in a problem-oriented way in a given situation and through his collaboration with the practitioner a mutual relationship is formed through which a dialog is sustained and knowledge, experience, and ideas can be exchanged.

> "Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing knowing in the pursuit of human work process"
> (Reason and Bradbury ed., 2001, s1).

It is often stressed that through the fact that the researcher works together with the practitioner and learns and develops in a close relationship with them there is a danger that the action prevails. This together with the risk that the researcher loses her objectivity by becoming a part of the group that she studies means a danger that one looses the ability to perform good research. We have tried to avoid this problem by focusing on our participation in a specific activity and at the same time, we have made audio and video recordings of the activity. The intentions with this were for us to be able to concentrate on the activity, but afterwards, when analysing the recordings we tried to neglect our role as action researchers and instead looked upon ourselves as anyone of the participants. We were of course affected by our participation but we believe that we in this way were able to maintain a certain degree of objectivity.

We have participated as action researchers in three different ways, as participants in practical work in the project, writers of a project history, and administrators of an administrative web based platform; Luvit. We have studied the process in the same time

as we have participated in it, and then we have reflected both upon the activities we have participated in and upon the information we have gathered through our research.

Our role as participants

We have participated in the issues that are related to our field of expert, for example the IP-based equipment, Luvit and our undertaking during our stay in South Africa. We have been consulted in discussions regarding our field but our responsibilities have never been clearly defined. Lasse has approached us as his assistants, i.e. we have written and translated documents, sustained Luvit and distributed information. Together with him, we have discussed various ideas regarding virtual project rooms, software, videoconferences, and other concerns about the arrangements of the collaborative course. He has asked us for advice and to present suggestions to diverse problems.

We have in various ways acted as a link between the participants in Sweden and South Africa, i.e. we have distributed information, both in forms of documents and oral information of what has been said and decisions that has been made. We have answered questions about the work with the project, what progresses that have been made at each site, and also in a more concrete way described the work routines in Sweden. We have also forwarded questions from South Africa to Sweden and then worked as an intermediary link and forwarded the information given to us as answer.

For example, at one meeting held between TLEI and the Department of Nursing Science in South Africa, they planned to discuss the project budget. The budget, at that time, only existed in Swedish and Lasse gave us the task to read the documents, translate them and present them at the meeting. The information regarding these figures was not known amongst most of the participants and many questions arose. Some of them we could answer but others we had to forward to Lasse, who was in Sweden.

We have participated as observers at a number of meetings and also more actively taken part in some of them. Due to the fact that we are the ones who have participated in most of the meetings we have answered questions about discussions and decisions made at previous meetings. We have shared the information that we have documented at other meetings when questions about previously discussed issues have risen.

We also came up the idea that there could be a video presentation made in both countries to present the environments that the students and teachers work in. The

respond to this idea was very good and the parties believed that such a video could help the students in Sweden to realize the students and the university South Africa and vice versa. It could perhaps bring them closer and help them feel less outdistanced.

Lasse introduced us to the idea that we could write a design proposal for the project's website at one meeting held in South Africa. A project website is something that Distum required in their grant for funding. Our suggestions included sketches of the lay out as well as suggestions on the content. Our proposal was accepted in a positive way but has up until the day we left the project not resulted in any practical outcome. We have not been asked to develop our suggestions nor has it been decided who is going to create the web page or when this is going to be done.

We have become a part of the project group through our active participation and our practical work has given us a role in the project we otherwise would not have had. This has given us an insight in the work performed by the involved and opened up the possibilities to sustain a dialog between them and us.

Our participation as assistants has given us an insight of what the information flow looks in the work process. Moreover, because we have participated in this information flow, we have come to a better understanding and a greater insight of the process than we would have had observing it from the periphery. We have also seen and noticed the different work cultures that the participants come from, and what affect this have had on the cooperation. Problems and solutions have for us become clearer through our participation since we, in our activities, have had to deal with them. Possessing this role has somewhat consolidated our positions as participants and we have been able to contribute with our knowledge.

Administrators of the virtual workspace
The creation of the common workspace on Luvit began with discussions between Lasse and us on how one best can develop an environment in which participants in a project like Sesame can meet. A decision about a virtual project room on Luvit was taken and this was supposed to be a space for communication and sharing of documents. Lasse set up a course that should work as a project room at Luvit and he added us as "administrators" of the space. He then sent us all documents regarding the project in electronically forms. We studied these documents and presented to him a suggestion on how we thought they should be organized on the web. We wanted a logical structure as

easy to navigate as possible and it should not matter whether the user was used to Luvit or familiar with the documents, or not. We then created a navigation tree and placed the documents according to our suggestions that Lasse approved.
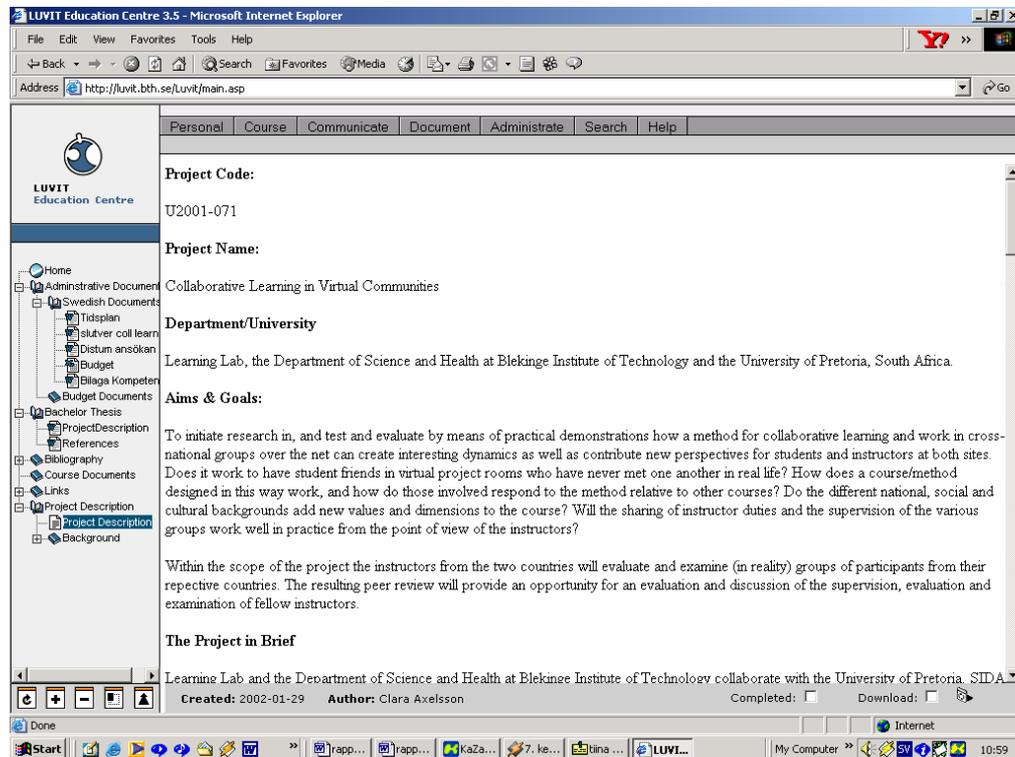
Figure 2. Screen dump from Luvit, when viewing a document

To the right, the navigation tree is located. We created several modules, catalogues with under-catalogues and in Figure 1, some of them are expanded to reveal the documents inside. If a user clicks on a document, it is revealed to the left, in Figure 1 the project description is shown. Several participants have used the documents put on Luvit, participants that in no other way have had access to the information. We used the documents ourselves during our stay in South Africa, this was for us an easy way to get access to a number of documents we otherwise would have needed to carry with us, in paper form or on disks. Due to the fact that we only needed a computer with Internet connection to reach them we did not need to know in advance what documents that would be required.

We added all participants as "students" on the community, which means that they have access to all information and functions but they cannot add or remove public documents

or users. Nor can they access lecturer-functions such as grading or creating quizzes. We then wrote a welcome message with a brief introduction on how to use Luvit, including a description of the functions they first would come in contact with. We wanted to simplify for those who never have used the platform. We did not want them to have to put too much energy in trying to figure out how various function works but rather to be able to use the site in a practical manner, in as short time as possible. The participants from South Africa usually attend an instructional course on a platform or software before they use it in their classes, nor have they ever seen Luvit. Therefore, we found the writing of the instructions more important.

Administrating the space on Luvit has made us aware of the parties work routines, given us an insight about the importance of the platform for this cooperation project. We have also become familiar with the content and structure of the project documents.

Writers of the projects initial history
As part of our participation as action researchers in Sesame, we where asked by Lasse to write an initial project history. According to him the story should describe the progress of Sesame, from that the first contact was made between the University of Pretoria and Blekinge Institute of Technology, up until us leaving the project in the end of June. The history should include a brief introduction of the participants that has been, or still are, involved and describe their roles in the project along with their visions about it. A report of important meetings and decisions that has been taken during the period of development should also be included in order to present a holistic image of the project.

Apart from the applications for funding to Distum, there was no other official documentation of the project, so we had to contact the involved persons to find out all the information we needed in writing the history. We started by reading the project description that is a part of the applications to get an insight of Sesame, the project plan, its goals and aims and which involved participants we should interview. As a course of action during our studies at the MDA-programme, we have done a lot of interviewing and therefore we know some different techniques and methods to use. This made us confident in our roles as interviewers. We prefer the technique of the informal interview because it allows the respondent to speak more freely due the fact that it is not that structured. Informal interviews can progress as casual conversations, following the turns of the participants' and the questioners' interests. The questions in an informal interview should be open-ended to help the respondent to elaborate her answers and share her

thoughts in a more unreserved way. Informal interviews are useful throughout an ethnographic study in discovering how people think and how one person's perceptions compare with another's (Fetterman 1998). Such comparisons helped us to identify shared values in the project. We have also done audio recordings of the interviews on and sometimes video recordings. By previous experiences, we know that we do better interviews with the help of these techniques. Not having to take notes during the interview makes us better and more attentive listeners and we can take a more active part in the conversation.

Before we initiated our work with the interviews we sat down to write some questions and guidelines that we thought would be helpful to us during the interviews. The questions handled information such as: what role the respondent had, when and how she got involved in Sesame, what her vision of the project was. This was not only a way for us to get the requested information but also a way to start the interview and open up the conversation. The guidelines were more for us not to forget other important issues and to stay on the subject. After the initial questions we followed our guidelines and asked the respondent to tell us the project history as from their point of view, from the time when they got involved up until the time of the interview. This method worked very well at all occasions.

The interview with Lasse gave us new lines of vision and knowledge of how Learning Lab is organized and a better understanding of the thoughts and ideas behind Sesame. After the first interview we listened to the recording we had done and this led to new thoughts which we translated into follow-up questions and we met with Lasse for an other interview a couple of days later. After the second conversation, we transcribed both interviews and from the gathered information we started to write the base of the project history. In the interviews with Lasse, he mentioned Doris Bohman and Inger Ljunggren as key persons in Sesame and they were the next persons that we contacted. In that way one interview led to another one and for each interview the history became more and more clear to us.

In order to write an objective project history of Sesame we continued our work with it in South Africa. Through the other interviews we already knew who the involved were before we got there, so we just had to make appointments to talk to them. We interviewed Neltjie van Wyk, Salomé Mayer, Solina Richter, Irene le Roux and Almero du Pisani and even though they, in a broad outline gave us the same information that we already had gathered it provided us with the necessary details we needed in order to complete the history.

The writing of the project history has been an iterative process of interviewing, transcribing, and writing. One interview led to new thoughts and questions, and led to new contacts and interviews and the writing process continued through the whole procedure by rewriting and lengthened the history for every iteration. The recordings we did have for us been a great deal of help. We have asked all the involved to tell the same story but the facts in the stories has not always been the same. We have compared their stories and in case of uncertainties, for example about dates and names of people and places, we have asked them to check their calendars and notes and reply, via e-mail, to us. Due to the recordings, we have not had to rely on our own notes from the interviews, but we have trusted the data in our notes and recordings to be accurate.

Writing the project history has in ways been a tool for us, both as active participants in Sesame but also as researchers. The interviewing has given us a thorough description of Sesame, its background, development and the roles of the participants, which have been of help to us when we have taken part in meetings and work shops. We have been the ones with the most holistic view of its progress from the start, which means that we know what is at the bottom of decisions that have been made, by whom and when they have been made and by whom they have been carried through. The writing of the history has given us a solid ground to stand on, which has been utterly important for our participation, because even though our roles in the collaboration has not clearly been defined, we have through our knowing obtained a status as actors in Sesame.

The work with the history has been an essential element for us as researchers, since it has made us see the project through different viewpoints and thereby helped us to be able to study it more critically. The interviews have made the involved to think about and to formulate their understanding of the goals and aims of Sesame and how they believe they all should work to reach these goals. We have heard their individual expectations of the collaboration, both how they think it will affect the students' learning and attitudes and the nursing education, but also what they think they will achieve on a more personal level.

- Part 2 -

The planning phase in Sesame

We have followed the progress of Sesame in various ways. On the next page, we present a timeline describing our actions, along with the project's progress, during the period that we have participated.

In the previous part we described our actions, as action researchers, and we will in this section describe the activities and the situations we have studied, i.e. the research part of our involvement.

Timeline for our participation in Sesame, 2002
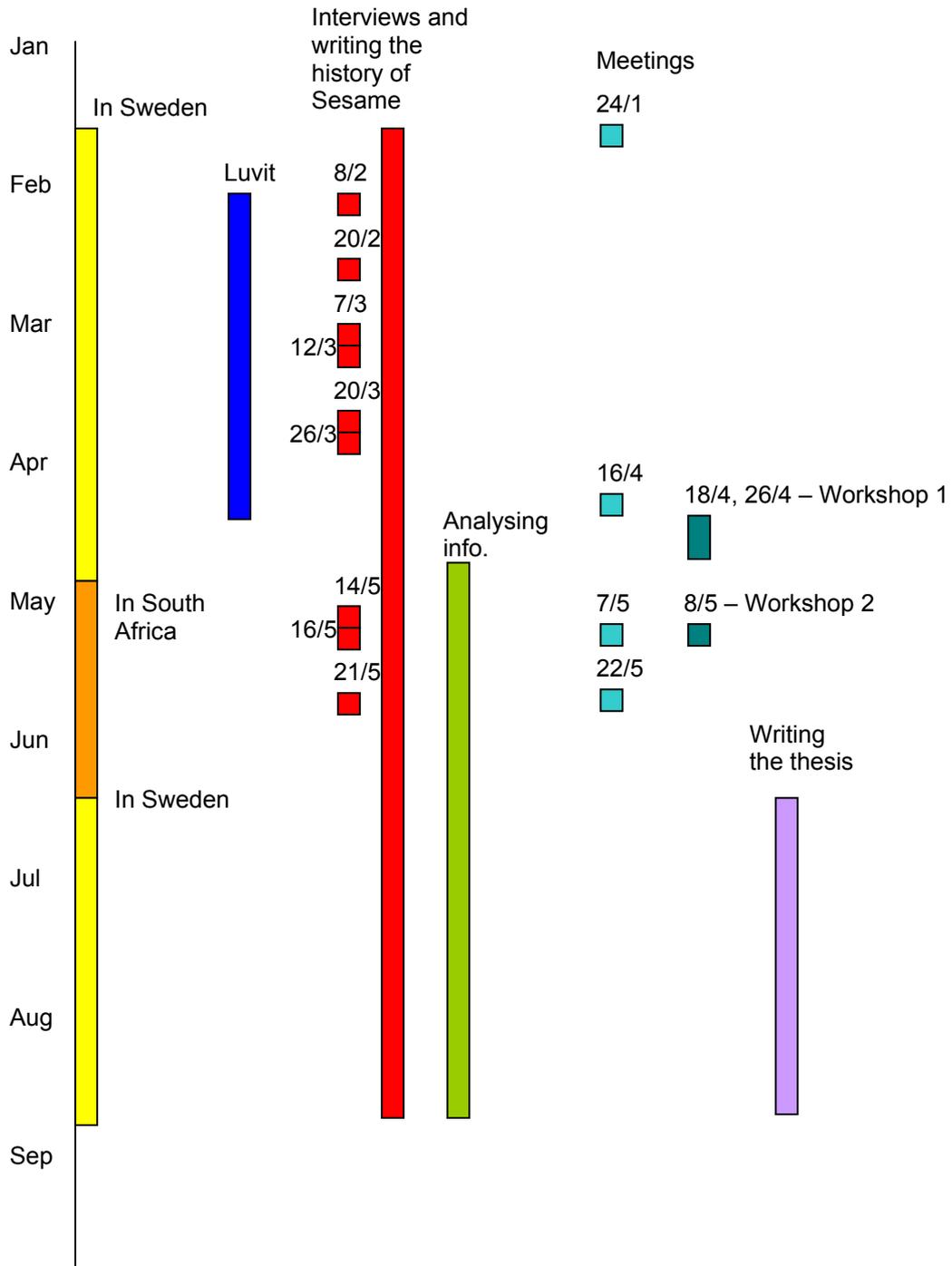
Meetings and workshops

During our time in the Sesame project, we have participated in four meetings, of which one was held in Sweden and three in South Africa. There have been two workshops, the first divided into two sessions that both were held in Sweden and the second workshop took place during one day in South Africa. We have during these occasions made audio and video recordings and have taken both passive roles as observers as well as active roles as participants and made field notes in order for us to conduct our research. We have tried to look at the activities through critical lenses, which has not always been easy since we investigate a practice that we, at the same time have been involved very actively in. To not interrupt in the process more that what is expected of us as participants we have taken notes and asked our questions afterwards or on breaks.

Meetings

There have, generally speaking, not been any paper-presented agendas at these meetings, they have been initiated in the way that one person has taken on a more leading role and presented subjects for the discussion. There have been no keeping of the minutes but the participants have during most meetings taken their own notes. Decisions made have not been written down in any general documents, the persons on whose lot it has fallen to see the decision through has instead made a personal note. All of the meetings have taken place at the University facilities in Karlskrona or Pretoria.

Bellow follows a description of a meeting, to give an example of what a meeting may look like and to present an example of our participation as action researchers. During the meeting, we used a minidisk player to record the conversation and we both observed and wrote field notes. The meeting was held at UP 020522 and present was Neltjie, Doris, Salomé, Irene, Solina and us, the authors. The reason why we give a detailed description of the environment at the meeting is that we have done this at all meetings in order to retrieve a holistic image of the meetings. We wanted to describe, not only the content of the meeting but also the conditions under which they were held.

Observation of a meeting held 020522:
The meeting is held at the Medical Faculty at the University of Pretoria and the premise is a conference room in close connection to the Nursing Department. Neltjie opens the meeting and she welcomes us all and informs us that no written agenda exist for the

meeting, instead she presents the subject that is to be discussed, the project plan and the time plan. After this Salomé tells us what she and Lasse discussed during the two meetings that they has had in Sweden where they discussed the time plan and she mentions the project plan that exists in the application to Distum. They move on by discussing the time plan and that the existing one is not accurate but that they can work from this one in today's meeting. No one has brought the document and besides Doris and Salomé, we are the only ones who have seen it. A recurrent question, regarding the dates for when the net-based course is going to take place, is once again brought up and discussed, the dates is not yet set and no decision is taken during the meeting. They say, several times, that this course is going to be a trial event and that the dates do not correlate between the Swedish and the South African courses.

> "Person A: *But this year will be a trial run and have already a few preliminary research questions that we could focus on during this year.* Person B: *The problem to this year specifically is due to that their university is closed during July and opens only on the 26th of August. That is why we thought that if we shall start this year it will only be in September and not earlier. And they also have the problem that they work when our students have their last block in September and in Sweden they work through out December. That is the problem of the semesters starting a little bit different and that was part of the date-problem.*"
> (Recording from 020522)

It is decided earlier that this first course event are going to be run as a test event and in this meeting they talk about that they are going to have a lot more time at hand to plan the future courses that will take place in the spring of 2003. They also talk about how the students are going to present themselves in this first event and decide that this will happen via a videoconference held in the beginning of the course. They feel that it would be a good thing if the students could get a presentation of the two universities through a digital video via the Internet. Another practical issue that they move on with is the course literature. We argue during the meeting that the students from Sweden will not have any problem with downloading or accessing material from the Internet. But the South African students will experience problems with this, this argue we agreed in. They decide that they will provide the students a CD with all the necessary material so that they can work offline as well as online, TLEI will produce the CD.

Next issue to be discussed is the time plan and Irene uses the flip-chart to draw the outlines for a new time plan. She stands by the flip-chart and handles the writing while the others observe and together they discussed decisions regarding the plan. After the discussion, Irene writes down the notes from the flip-chart in her own notes. She informs us that she will put the notes together and soon present a project proposal (this is an internal document for UP and TLEI).

One of the most important issues that was brought up at this meeting was the South African part of the budget which we had concluded in a document that we gave to all attendants. We all looked it over and we explained the figures; how Lasse, who is the one responsible for the finances in the project, had calculated the sums and on what the different parts of the budget are to be spent. We also clarified how they should report their expenses by sending invoices to Lasse.

In the end of the meeting all participants express their thoughts about that they now feel that the project is more structured and they all thank Irene for her work with the project proposal. The opinion that this is not only good for the South African side but also for the Swedish is manifested, and we, present Swedes, agree. They also utter their positive attitude regarding the project and that they all believe that the collaboration will work well.

The meeting takes place in a relaxed atmosphere, in spite of the strict interior of the conference room. The coffee or tea is served on nice porcelain and everyone is conversing about general matters. Most of the participants are co-workers and know each other well which clearly shows in the way they associate. The conversation is friendly and, apart from the matters of work, they discuss such as holidays, children and houses. After the opening coffee interlude the issues are effectively conferred. One matter at a time is discussed and there are a lot of questions and informing of the unknowing participants, but no immediate disagreements. Everyone gets to express her opinion and has a chance to affect the outcome of the meeting. In case of a discrepancy, they discuss the matter and try to find a solution of compromise. The decisions are made orally and there is no keeping of the minutes, however everyone take their own notes of important conclusions and what they are expected to do. The participants from each country have work together for some time and know each other well.

Structures of the meetings
During the other three meetings, the atmosphere has been similar to the one we above described. Similar matters have been discussed and we have not noticed any differences

in the structures of the meetings, they have all been effective though decisions may not always have been taken.

Workshops

There has, since the initiation of the project up until the end of June, in the Sesame project been held two workshops, named Workshop 1 and Workshop 2. According to the time plan in the project description two more workshops are going to be held, one in the spring of 2003 and one in 2004. The workshops have been much like the meetings regarding absence of agendas and official keeping of the minutes.

Workshop 1 was held in the research library at IHN in Karlskrona and present were, besides us, Lasse, Anna, Inger and Salomé. The workshop took place during two sessions held on the 18th and on the 26th of April 2002. The subjects discussed were the design of the course, the web and the work plan for the project.

They discuss the collaborative aspect of the aim of the project and Lasse brings up the issues that he believes are of special importance to generate a collaboration which are creating of a virtual project room and the design of study instructions for the course. Lasse's and Salomé's roles should be those of supervisors and Lasse emphasizes that there are two aims of Sesame, one to create a net-based course but also that the aim of the whole project is to create methods for net-based learning.

The actual execution of the course is next to being argued and matters as how and when this is going to happen is briefed. Lasse presents his ideas regarding online seminars and videoconference sessions where the students can meet and communicate with their tutors.

The parties move on by arguing the project proposal and making changes to it in the sense that they makes corrections concerning names of persons that has left or joined the project. This is done in the way that the participants study the documents on a laptop and they make their own notes, on paper. Salome takes up a document she calls a "proper Project Proposal", this is something TLEI requires when developing a web-based course. At this stage, they decide the existing one is sufficient as a basis for writing this specific document.

The participants end the session by discussing the parties different work cultures and traditions concerning how net-based courses is developed and sustained at the two universities. Lasse points out the importance of awareness in this matter and he suggests that a special workshop is dedicated to this subject and that they write include these problems in the first reports that is to be written in the project.

Workshop 2 was held 8/5 at TLEI in Pretoria and present was Lasse, Doris, Irene, Solina, Almero and we, the writers.

They begin with a briefing of the participants in Sesame and their roles. Irene describes the role of TLEI, to develop the net-based platform on WebCT, educate the users, and facilitate the delivery of the course. They move on with a discussion regarding the uncertainties around the roles of the participants from South Africa but now clarity arise and nothing is decided.

They move on by discussing problems with the existing time plan and it is said that they will modify the existing time plan that is a part of the project proposal written for Distum. The dates during which the course will take place are discussed but at this point, nothing is decided and since Inger is not present, Doris takes on the representative role for her. Nothing is decided regarding these dates and the meeting proceeds with a discussion about the fact that the South African students have expressed their fear of being computer illiterate. Lasse asks if they will have the possibility to get computer access at learning centres near their homes and the answer given to this is yes but they question if the students really will participate when off the campus.

> *"Will they participate or will they only participate when the lecturers are there"*
> (recording Workshop 2 020508).

During this session we download and install the software that is required in order to use the IP-based video camera, PolySpan, we brought from Sweden and this leads the discussion into field of the Internets accessibility in South Africa. It becomes obvious that this is going to be a problem when we test the PolySpan, the camera requires a bit rate of 128 k/s but Almero confirms the speed in South Africa to rarely exceed 10 k/s.

Structures of the workshops
Both these workshops have been held more as meetings, the participants has been placed around a table and no specific tools for visualisation have been used. At the first

session of Workshop 1, a laptop was used to show some documents among the participators but otherwise they use documents in paper form as basis in the discussions. The participants have taken their own notes but no official minutes or other documents come out of the workshops.

E-mail

E-mail is the most common channel of communication between the participants from the different countries in Sesame because it is an easy and quick way to communicate at long distances. All the participants have their own computer and access to Internet and according to our interviews they check their e-mail at least once a day when at the office. We have done a detailed study of the e-mails with their attached documents, drawn charts of the proceedings to map what has been discussed and which decisions that has been made under what period in the planning phase or sometimes, more specifically at what dates. This has helped us to see the progress that has been made through the e-mail contact and to compare it to what has happened at meetings etc at the same time.

The lecturers, Inger and Solina, started the planning of the collaborative course in the beginning of 2002. In February, they initiated the mail contact that has been their main communication channel through which they planned and created the content of the course and decided when and how they shall present it. The collaborative course will be a part of one ordinary course, in their educations, that the students will take in Sweden and South Africa. There will be a total of eight or ten students, four or five from both countries participating in the pilot course that will start in the autumn of 2002.

We have studied the approximately 30 e-mails that have been sent between Inger and Solina from February until June and this have given us a general view of how the work has progressed under that period. We have been able to understand the routines of the cooperation, the pace of the progress, and at the same time been able to see how working routines and methods differ between the countries. Since we participated in Sesame during that period, we have also followed their work during meetings and interviews.

Solina and Inger has decided the contents of the course and then together developed the module i.e. its goal, purpose, requirements, assignments, and a list of prescribed books. In order to fit in the collaborative course in the educations, so that the students will benefit from the collaboration as much as possible, Solina and Inger first had to know the

curriculums of the courses it will be a part of in both countries. They thereby started to e-mail each other's curriculum to see if there were some topics that were in accordance with the ordinary courses. The curriculums were listed and attached to the e-mails together with comments and suggestions to topics for the collaboration. According to a mail they had already started this discussion when Solina was visiting Karlskrona in the beginning of the year.

There has been a telephone conference between Solina, Salomé, Irene, Lasse and Doris where it was decided that the course will be presented from Pretoria on WebCT and that the technical development of the module will managed from there. That decision seems to infuse fresh life into the cooperation with the course and after that, the e-mail contact is more frequent. They send some proposals to one another, comments, questions and exchange of ideas until they, in the beginning of May almost seem to have reached an agreement on the content. Inger returned to Solina a couple of days later to confirm what has been decided and to see what Solina thinks of her suggestions for assignments and topics for discussion that she attached. Solina agreed and they could start writing the different parts that shall be presented on WebCT. TLEI has a detailed list of requirements for the curriculum that is to be fulfilled before they can start create the course for WebCT and they needed the material in the end of June, at the latest for it to be available on the web in the end of July. Solina and Inger had a month to complete the module and Inger's proposal was that they, instead of them being responsible for different parts, they should both try to write on the same topic and build it up together. In the middle of June, they both say that they felt that things were started to fall in place. Solina had contacted the graphical designers at TLEI that do the "look and feel", i.e. design icons, and do the lay out of the course with colours and pictures. Inger got a chance to make suggestions of the design.

The work of creating the modules did however not happen according to the suggestion, instead they wrote different parts and e-mailed them to one another for questioning, commenting and editing.

There has been a lot of discussing, via the e-mails, when to present the module next semester. Since the semesters in Sweden and South Africa differ it has been difficult to decide which weeks the collaboration between the students shall take place. Another cause for this problem is that the students in South Africa are not on campus every day. Instead, they study at distance and only come to campus for so-called block weeks, which for the discussed period are one week in July and one in September.

The frequency of the e-mail contact had been depending on how much time left before deadline i.e. it has been more frequent at the end, May-June, but it has of course also depended on Inger's and Solina's work beside Sesame.

A mailing list was created after a meeting at the Nursing Department in May, and the list has been used since then. However, the e-mail contact between Inger and Solina has not been through the mailing list, they have continued to send the e-mails directly to each other which means that we did not take part of the information during their cooperation, we have instead received and studied them afterwards. When studying them we found that they in some occasions misunderstood each other and that sometimes matters were brought up by one for discussion but were never followed up or responded by the opposite part. The e-mails have been informal and the conversation has been forward and open, also discussing other things beside the collaborative course.

Luvit

There are functions at the virtual worksite on Luvit through which the participants can communicate and there are documents that they can access and either download to their own computers or print out. It appeared at some meetings that the involved people have used Luvit to access the documents and we have gotten activity-reports from Luvit when someone has visited the site. Luvit has however not been used for communicating, instead of sending e-mails or messages to everyone through Luvit they have chosen to create a separate mailing list, using their ordinary e-mail addresses.

Video and Telephone conferences

There have been one videoconference and one telephone conference. These sorts of synchronous communication channels are advantageous since there can be a discussion and a decision made directly, without having to wait for someone's opinions or objections. The negative aspect is that a videoconference between South Africa and Sweden is expensive. The connection via the Internet between the countries is too slow to use IP-based videoconference equipment, instead ISDN is used and to get a good quality of the transmission of picture and sound, up to six channels have to be used. This is very expensive and one conference can cost up to ten thousand SEK.

Due to the fact that we, of unclear reasons, were not noticed about the videoconference that was held in February we could not participate and have therefore no more information about the use of this communication channel apart from what has been said in interviews.

The telephone conference was held in January 2002 and because we were not involved in the project at this stage we did not participate at this meeting. In meetings during which we have been present the participants have mentioned this occasion and it is therefore we take it up here.

- Part 3 -

Conclusion

Outcome of Sesame – so far

The focus of this report is not on the collaborative course that has been created, but in the description of the working process, we have not been able to avoid mentioning certain details around it. We have, therefore chosen to give a short conclusion of what has been decided.

When we leave the project in the end of June it is decided that the course will start on the 9th of September and Solina and Inger have created a module that correlate with 1-2 weeks of full time study but will last for 4-6 weeks. The result of the collaboration between the students will be presented by them at another videoconference in the end of October.

The close collaboration, via the Internet, in this first trial run, however, will only take place during for two and a half days. After these days the students are expected to cooperate by themselves. The content for the module will be:

- Health promoting factors and health risk factors at community level
- Community development characteristics
- The concept of community participation - prerequisites, advantages, possibilities, methods
- The concept of empowerment, methods
- Developed and developing countries related to the above mentioned processes

It was decided, in workshop 2, that the course material such as articles, assignments and other short texts written by the lecturers will be burnt on CDs for the students in South Africa since their possibilities to access the Internet from home are limited and the connection is very slow in South Africa. The Swedish students will not get these CDs, because from Sweden we do not experience the same problem with accessing material on the Internet.

The Swedish students have been informed about the collaboration with South Africa and last semester four of them stated their interest to participate, whereas Solina will have

four or five students in her master course, and for them the collaboration will be obligatory. According to Inger, the students from Sweden were a bit worried about collaborating in another language. They may not be used to discuss these kinds of topics in English, but Inger thinks there will be no problem. Solina on the other hand worries a little about the computer skills of her students and have arranged for them to have a computer orientation before the course.

After this first module has been run, it will be evaluated and modified and the next course will start in January 2003. It has not been decided who will perform the evaluation but that it will be built upon the perspectives from both the participants and the teachers as well as from the students and researchers. People from the University of Örebro and the University of Lund have been asked to contribute with their professional support and be objective evaluators of the project. Different international and/or web based conferences in pedagogy have been mentioned at the work shops and the parties have stated their interest in participating at them to present Sesame. So far there have been no decisions made about the research within the project.

Reflections

We will in this conclusion give further details about our research by describing our thoughts regarding interesting issues and questions we have identified through our empirical work. Both our actions and research bare the stamp of the context that we come from and our reflections are of course coloured by this. In our work, we are not only affected by the fact that we come from a Swedish culture but also by our education at BTH.

We have chosen to focus on different factors that have had strong influence on the planning of the project, concrete examples of how the actual work in the project has been performed, and other conditions we have identified through our participation. These factors will most likely, as we see it, have impact on the continuing work in the project and on its result.

We are aware of the fact that the problems of the cooperation in Sesame that we focus on in this thesis are not unique for this project, nor do we see them as a result of the cross-cultural characteristics of Sesame. We see the fact that the project, at the time of our study, was in a state of constituting.

We are of the opinion that this thesis could be used as a part of a formative evaluation of the Sesame project. By this, we mean an evaluation that takes place simultaneously during the proceeding of the project and the result of the evaluation is brought back into the process to help shape the outcome of the project.

Differences in work culture

Through our participation in the planning phase we have seen how the parties have been working, both with Sesame and with their daily work. We have spent time in respective work environments in both countries, and have attained an insight in their routines and work situations. We can thereby point out some differences between the work cultures in Pretoria and Karlskrona/Ronneby.

According to our observations, the relations between the employees at the departments at UP are more hierarchical than what they seem to be at BTH. Peoples' titles are of more importance at UP than at BTH, as well as the workers' defined roles, i. e. the

outlines of everyone's responsibilities are distinct. The structured distribution of work in Pretoria is, to a great part, due to the fact that there are more than 20 times as many students attending UP than BTH, which seems to entail in different and higher requirements of organisation and administration. The work at UP follow more strict routines and need more accurate planning than at BTH, differences that have shown in the development of Sesame and the collaborative course. One example of these routines are the paperwork in form of written applications, forms to fill in that are to be signed by the main responsible for the act, often the head of department. The project proposal that is to be delivered to TLEI when developing a net-based course is one typical example, which shall contain a complete timeline, a budget, information about the students and the responsible teachers, desires of the graphical design and special features for WebCT etc. The work routines at BTH, as it has appeared to us are more adaptable when it comes to time planning, curriculum, and the workers' fields of responsibility. There does not seem to be any tradition of, or routines for, such detailed planning as the one at UP.

The different work cultures did collide in the planning phase of Sesame, both when developing the course and when discussing the budget, the upcoming evaluation, and research. The process of developing a net-based course differs a lot between BTH and UP. Inger and the other teachers at BTH are responsible for the design of their courses, i.e. to decide the content from the curriculum and make it pedagogically efficient. With support from Learning Lab, they put it up on the web by themselves. Inger is therefore used to be able to access Luvit to edit and continuously make changes in the course. The teachers at UP do not quite have these responsibilities and authorities, instead UP has TLEI, the department specialised in these commissions. The teachers write a tutorial, which is sent to TLEI for editing of language and pedagogy in order to fulfil their requirements of quality and be presented on WebCT. According to the teachers we have interviewed in South Africa, the positive aspect with one department that is accountable for the whole process of presenting net-based courses is that it facilitates their work. They believe that, since experts do the job, the courses will have a more professional and advanced design. They find the linguistic editing and the pedagogical support, given in consultation with the teachers, very well beneficial. TLEI also contribute to make the courses standardized, which helps the students that read many net-based courses, in the way that they are familiar with the design. The less positive aspect with this kind of distributed work over several departments, according to us, is that the teachers lose influence over their own work. They cannot easily make changes in their course when it is already presented on the web. There are manuals and support available to do this but according to the teachers we have spoken to, they only do minor changes of for example

the dates. If they need TLEI to do any big changes the time limit for the operation is so long that there is no point of doing it. The process, as it looks like, requires exceedingly thorough planning in order for the content to become as accurate as possible from the start, and it ought to be handled in to TLEI at least three months before the course starts. These differences in work culture have led to a series of misinterpretations and misunderstandings between the parties.

Educational differences
There exist fundamental differences between the educational environment in which the nursing students at UP and BTH work. By this, we mean the structure of the education and what is provided for and requested of the students. We have not observed either of the student groups but base our conclusion on information that has come to hand at meetings and interviews, i.e. on the involved persons answers and statements.

The South African students at the master level, of which one class will participate in the course in September 2002, study for two years to get their master degrees. Before these two years, they have attended three years on the basic level to get a bachelor degree. The master courses at the Department of Nursing Science at UP are distant courses and the student only come to campus during so-called block-weeks. They receive study material in forms of tutorials and scanned articles and texts on a CD produced by TLEI. The students at IHN in Karlskrona are all on campus and they do not receive the same kind of tutorials, they get instructions that are more open and a list of course literature and are expected to seek their own information sources. The study instructions that have been written by the teachers differ in lay out, content and influence of pedagogical methods. The suggestions for study instructions that Inger sent to Solina were short and composed of open presentations of problems in the subject, as well as recommendations to literature that could be helpful to reach an understanding and knowledge in these problems. These open presentations of problems give the students free space to form their own learning in the frames of the subject. Solina's instructions were more detailed with concrete questions and page references to the literature. These two ways, of designing study instructions show both that there are differences in their educational cultures and that the teachers' definitions behind the concept PBL diverge. Indirect it also shows that their work routines differ since these instructions require dissimilar approaches when it comes to the tutoring of the students.

The reason why they provide study material to the South African students is the fact that the situation in South Africa is both a developing world one and a developed world

situation. Many of the students live in rural areas where they have very low access to computers and where they cannot reach the Internet.

Meetings

At all the meetings we have attended, persons from both universities have participated but it has not always the "right" persons. By this we mean, that persons whose role or responsibilities has been discussed, have not had the chance to participate. This has had the effect that the person not has been given the same opportunity to express her opinion and contribute to the discussion. Instead, a third party has pleaded the absentee's cause. We have seen examples of this at meetings and that it often has led to preventable misunderstandings which in its turn has led to reoccurring debating and postponed decisions.

There has not, at any meeting, been any official keeping of the minutes and this has led to different consequences. When we have talked about previously discussed matters with persons involved we have noticed uncertainties concerning these decisions, regarding what decisions that have been made and who are supposed to carry them out. This confusion occurs both among those who were present and those who were not. We believe that if there had been official keeping of the minutes these had eliminated the risk of misunderstandings and that the decisions made would be final and not continually discussed.

Technical tools

The main idea with creating a virtual project room at Luvit was to offer a space where all participants could communicate via the tools provided on the platform, chat, e-mail or use the forum for discussions. The use of these tools would give them an opportunity to communicate with the whole group and make it easier for all to follow the discussions in a coherent way. Soon it became obvious that the virtual project room was not used in these ways. The principal reason to this, as we see it, is that there was no need for a space like Luvit. By sending e-mails, using their own e-mail addresses, and attach files the participants can keep in contact in a satisfying way. They all check their inboxes at work on a daily basis and this is therefore something they already use, to start using Luvit they would have had to learn an array of new tools and been forced to visit one more website to stay updated on the project. Because of the fact that the project is in its initial phase, no one is currently working full time within it and this has meant that the contact between the parties has not been frequent. In order for a platform like this to fulfil its function as a

virtual project room, it is necessary that the users visit it on a frequent basis and that the platform is updated with valid information. We are of the opinion that is not Luvit with its functions or interface that is the problem, instead we see that because there is no need for a platform like Luvit in this phase of the project it is rarely or never used. The role that the virtual project room has played in Sesame, as a space for sharing documents, could have been replaced by any website where the opportunity to publish, view and download documents is possible.

Even though they have chosen to use email to communicate, we have seen some disadvantages. We see the fact that the answer to an e-mail are more easily postponed than the one to for example a telephone call as a reason to why the e-mail contact did not seem to get going smoothly with the consequences of delayed decisions and misunderstandings. All the involved parties have a lot on their agendas, they are working full time with their ordinary tasks, and therefore matters regarding Sesame seems to have been low on the list of priorities.

The deficiency of a general keeping of the minutes at meetings is something that permeates the work in the project. We think that a general keeping of the minutes would facilitate the cooperation for all parties. Just the minutes of the meetings in a summarized document will however not make much difference, it is of importance that the information is distributed amongst all participants. We believe that it is of significance how the information is shared, it should be easily accessible to all parties. We know that all the participants in Sesame check their e-mails at least once a day and therefore we think that a news mail would be a good solution for this. Another positive thing with e-mail is that they would not have to access a certain website to read the news. Apart from the minutes of the meetings it could also be good to mail a progress report every other week that states what has been done in the project over the last weeks and what is to be done the upcoming week. This is a suggestion that some of the participants have expressed during the interviews. Through such updating everyone could easily see the following up of decisions, get an overview of the progress, and thereby feel more in control of the situation. These suggestions obviously need someone who follows the process in the project, who keeps the minutes at meetings and is updated in the work of the parties.

By the use of more technical tools during meetings and workshops, we believe the participants more easily could visualise their thoughts, problems and their solutions would become clearer. During our participation, there have only been a few occasions where papers have been handed out and discussed. At one occasion, a video projector was

used to show a PowerPoint presentation. We are aware of the fact that this equipment is both expensive and bulky but there are alternatives like a flip-chart or a white board that that most conference rooms are equipped with. During discussions suggestions and ideas could easily been written down on a whiteboard or on a flip-chart. We have when we transcribed recordings from meetings discovered that there has arisen interesting ideas and thoughts that have passed unobserved. If these thoughts had been written down for everybody to see, they would not have been so easy to forget. During one meeting a flip-chart has been used, see under "Observation of a meeting held 020522" (part 2), we are of the opinion that if ideas were preserved the future collaboration in the project would benefit from this.

Expectations on Sesame
During the interviews we made we have asked interviewee to describe their expectations of the Sesame project, both on a personal level and out of a more holistic point of view. Everyone has answered the question but the answers have varied a lot. This has to do with the fact that different persons interpret the same question differently. The interviewees have also got involved in the project at different times, some in the beginning of the planning and others were introduced quite late. To this one has to add that they all posit different roles and thereby have different involvements and line of interests.

Shared vision
In a project like Sesame where the participants come from different cultural backgrounds and have diverse experiences and, added to that, are located on different continents but still need to collaborate, the concept of shared vision becomes very important. A shared vision is a concept difficult to define, it is hard to explain a motion and Senge (1994, s206) compare the expression with a "force of heart". The individuals', within an organisation, personal visions should melt together and mutually create a shared vision that they all strive for, and thereby they all struggle towards the same goal.

Many of the problems, that we have identified, that have risen during the collaborative work in Sesame we see as a consequence of the absence of a shared vision. The participants do not share any mental images of the goals or aims of the project nor of the ways that leads there. They have not, during our time in the project, visualized their ideas in any other way than in conversations given hints of these, nor have they intentionally described their personal visions amongst one another.

Definitions of concepts

To be able to build a shared vision we believe the common understanding on the subject of definitions of concept to be utterly important. We have in several occasions identified situations were misunderstandings have occurred due to the absence of a common definition of concepts in the cooperation we have studied. The concepts at stake are especially, as we see it, *collaborative learning* and *problem based learning* as well as *virtual community*. These are important concepts that are often used in discussions about the project description and the planning of the collaborative course, but we have understood that they do not have the same meaning for the different parties in the project. Since the aim of Sesame comprise these concepts, the differences of their definition also means that they do not have the same view of the goals of the project.

The concept collaborative learning is something the parties do not give the same meaning. Persons from Sweden seem to see collaborative learning as a process of mutual gaining of knowledge where the study instructions should be of such kind that the students have to work closely together to solve the problems and thereby learn from and with each other. The South African participants give the concept another meaning, which leads our thoughts to a lower form of collaboration that we like to call cooperation. We base this opinion on the web-based material that has been presented for us as examples of how their courses look on the web. The study material and instructions where not of a kind that neither requires collaboration nor were there are sufficient tools provided.

Definition of collaboration according to John-Steiner, Minnis and Weber (in press);

> *"The participants in a collaboration represent complementary domains of expertise. As collaborators they, not only plan, decide and act jointly, they also think together, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original framework… In an effective working collaboration, there is a commitment to share resources, power, and talent; no single viewpoint predominates, although roles may differ among the participants."*

Because the cooperation between the Swedish and South African students only will take place during two days in this the first time the course is run, we believe that the goal to create methods for collaborative learning in virtual communities will not be reached in this phase. The students have, in order to call the cooperation collaborative, to work more

closely together and through discussions and dialogues, based on information and their experiences, achieve a goal.

Virtual Community is a relative new concept and it can be explained in various ways, Erik Stolterman et al., (1997) defines it as follows

> *"…a virtual community is a group of people trying to achieve something as a group of people that are using new information technology as a mean."*

According to the definition, the group has a goal in common, to create something or to reach the aim, and to be able to collaborate and to achieve this they use different technical tools. We would like to complement the definition and stress that it is the technological tools, and not the common goal, that provides the frame of the virtual community. Without the use of the technological tools, the group of people could not be called a virtual community. By "new information technology", we mean what is called ICT – Information and Communication Technology – i.e. computerized tools for communication and distribution of information, e.g. e-mail, chat, platforms, videoconference equipment.

To create a virtual community the students, as we have understand it, are allowed to use whatever technical tools they want but the course content will be presented on WebCT and preferably they can start by using the platform to collaborate. The Swedes stress in their definition of a virtual community that it is important that the platform gives a wide space for free action and provides possibilities for the students to take own initiatives in their work. The sites on WebCT however, that has been shown to us, were very basic in the sense that they did not give the students much ability to act in the project room, i.e. to put up and share documents, create discussion groups etc. The fact that the students are supposed to work collaboratively to learn together through sharing of each others' experiences and knowledge states the requirements that it has to be possible to communicate in the virtual community, to have a frequent interaction. This in its turn means that the platform should provide many different tools to facilitate the collaboration or that they are able to use other alternative software.

The pedagogical thoughts behind the learning situation that is to take place between the students in Sesame shall, according to the project description be *Problem Based Learning*, PBL, i.e. the teachers shall present a problem area and give the students a goal to work towards. The students shall express questions within that field and seek

information to answer these questions, which shall lead them to an understanding of the field and reach the goal. The roles of the teachers shall not be to supply them with relevant information but to be tutors in the students' search for the information they believe that they need to comprehend the topic. PBL is also a concept that is interpreted on basis of the education cultures at BTH and UP. Both IHN and at Nursing Department has elements of PBL in their education but to different extents, and from what we have understood, it is more applied at IHN. The teachers that we have spoken to at IHN have declared that they think that it is important for the quality of the learning that the students themselves are free to seek information. They believe that it is more stimulating and increases their motivation for learning. The students at the Nursing Department receive their study material burnt on CD and we have seen a suggestion for study instructions to the site on WebCT with both page references and precise study questions to the literature. There are clear differences in how they interpret PBL and the reasons to this disparity in pedagogical approach lies in the education cultures, but in this example, we believe that it is also a matter of accessibility to the information. The students in Pretoria do not have the same opportunities to search information on the Internet nor can they easily access libraries or other sources of information because many of them live in rural areas.

Other concepts of which there have been many discussions around and that have seemed to be unclear are, *discussion groups*, *tutorial* and *project proposal*. These concepts are not difficult to understand but they have been interpreted by the parties from their education- and work cultures and the differences in these are reflected in how they use the mentioned concepts and what meaning they put behind the words. Some of the concepts were cleared out by time, for example in the discussions about the budget and the content of the course the different definitions of "project proposal" was revealed. The Swedes first used the concept from what it comprise at BTH which is not very precise, whereas the South Africans had a clear defined image of a proper project proposal and TLEI had, unlike Learning Lab or IHN a format of how to compose it. At the second workshop in Pretoria when the format was discussed the misunderstandings were cleared and the Swedes got answerers to their questions about why certain information had to be specified in the proposal. Since the proposal should be handled in to TLEI, they simply used their format to write one. Such misinterpretation in the planning phase did lead to unnecessary misunderstandings and delays in the work.

Workshops

We think that if the workshops in Sesame had been better planned all parties could have gained more from them. According to our experiences a workshop is a participatory, actively environment for problem solving and learning, where the participants work together to achieve a common goal i.e. solutions to given problems or overall understanding of concepts. The goal can be reached through "talking" (discussions, scenarios, seminars) or through visualization (video taping, mock-ups, drawings). Preferably, both methods are used, but the main purpose is that it should in, some way be creative.

To prepare the participants for a workshop we think that there should be sent an e-mail to say what is planned to be brought up so that they have a chance to prepare themselves with questions and ideas to that issue. It could also be the basis of an agenda. We think that it would be beneficial if they used more tools to help visualize and explain problems and matters such as whiteboards, videotaping, flip-charts etc.

Through discussing concepts like virtual community, PBL and collaborative learning as well as similarities and differences in their cultures we believe that the parties could achieve a more shared view of the project and get aware of differences in their mental models and personal visions. Awareness of their mental models and understanding of each other's cultures could most probably help them in the cooperation. The definitions of the often-used concepts would become more comparable, they would thereby not talk at cross-purposes, and some misunderstandings could be avoided. A strengthened team spirit and a shared vision would stimulate and motivate them in their work and the result of the project would be better.

Aims and goals of Sesame

According to the project description of Sesame as it is stated in the granted application to Distum the aims and goals of the project are:

> *"To initiate research in, and test and evaluate by means of practical demonstrations how a method for collaborative learning and work in cross-national groups over the net can create interesting dynamics as well as contribute new perspectives for students and instructors at both sites. Does it work to have student friends in virtual project rooms who have never met one another in real life? How does a course/method designed in this way work, and how do those involved respond to the method relative to other courses? Do the different national, social and cultural*

*backgrounds add new values and dimensions to the course? Will the sharing of
instructor duties and the supervision of the various groups work well in practice
from the point of view of the instructors?"*
(Project Description, Appendix A)

As we describe in the introduction and under the headline Sesame the aim of the
Sesame project to create methods for collaborative learning in virtual communities as
well as to initiate research in this field. By creating net based courses in the field of public
health and test and evaluate their ideas they will try to reach their goal.

The participants in Sesame are aware of the problems that we focus on in this thesis and
we are of the opinion that these problems are possible to solve within the project through
their progressing cooperation, collaboration, and their continuing discourse. All of these
problems have not arisen due to the fact that a Swedish and a South African university
cooperate, they might as well have risen in a national cooperation or between other
countries. Working routines and opinions of how knowledge is distributed, how learning is
achieved, diverge not only between the cultures of different countries but also between
different work places within the same country, universities in this case.

The process of creating and running the net-based courses in Sesame will give the
participants erudition, along with what they learn from evaluating these courses, through
many of the problem areas we have discussed and they will be able to move forward with
reaching the aims of the project. We also believe that the participants can learn from our
work and research that has resulted in this thesis. Together this knowledge will become
the basis for the initiation of research that is one of the goals.

We do not believe that we can tell weather this project will be a successful one or not,
when it comes to reach its goals. We have only followed Sesame during its first six
months and in this period the project has been in a phase of developing the first course.
No course has been run and there has been no evaluation and because this will be the
main basis for the research in the project, we are of the opinion that we do not have the
sufficient amount of information to draw any conclusions. However, we do believe that
the problems we have identified, in this planning phase, and described are of importance
and will affect the continuing cooperation in Sesame. If our thesis is used as a part of a
formative evaluation the project will benefit from this in the sense that the future
collaboration can be approved and therefore increase the possibilities to accomplish a
better result, i.e. reach the goal of Sesame.

Reflections upon our methods

When we started working on our bachelor thesis we new that we should follow and study the cooperation between the parties in the initial phase of Sesame, but we did not know exactly in what situations this would take place, and therefore we did not know what methods we would come to use in our fieldwork. When starting to gather information we were asked to take responsibility for the project site on Luvit and writing the project's history. This made it possible for us to create situations and conditions for cooperation between the parties, which we could study. That is how we became more than observers and our role as action researchers was shaped and as we have written earlier in this report we found this method very good in order for us to get a picture, of what was going on, from within Sesame. Since we became actively involved and learned to know the parties in the project we, ourselves, decided who we wanted to interview and we made the arrangements.

The parties, both in Sweden and South Africa thought that it was of importance that the development of Sesame was documented and therefore they accepted us in the project. Our entitlements and our roles were, however, questioned by the involved in Pretoria. We believe that one reason for this is that they work in a different education culture with other traditions than BTH, where students at our level are not usually involved in projects like Sesame the way that we have been. Another reason can be that our role as 'investigators' has been unclear since we have performed other tasks than just observed from the periphery. It is possible that this could have been prevented if we had written a contract with Learning Lab that stated our entitlements.

We could not have done the research in 'action research' without our technical tools. The MDs and videotapes have, for us, been invaluable in analyzing our material from the filed work, since we did not have time for much reflection during our participation.
As we spend more time in the project, our participation evolved and we found ourselves as the best informed participants regarding information, such as what had been said and decided at meetings and the line of history in Sesame.

We could have put more effort in trying to make the parties communicate and cooperate more through the site on Luvit, but when we saw that there clearly was not any need for that kind of communication tool in the project yet, we concentrated on other tasks.

Finale

To do action research in Sesame has been both interesting and exciting, but has also implied certain complications. We have, when analysing our empirical material, experienced difficulties to maintain a higher level of objectivity that is required to do an accurate report. On the other hand, action research as a method has given us the possibility to reach the profound insight in Sesame that we have achieved. If we had studied the process from the periphery we do not think we would have gained the same understanding of the ambience in the project or the progress and challenges in the cooperation.

The use of ICT, as well as internationalisation, is two contemporary approaches in education. ICT creates new possibilities for learning and collaborating at distance, and we think that it can be a constructive aid for PBL, which is the pedagogical approach that Sesame aims to apply. Through their work to reach the goal of the project, the parties will see the potentials and limitations that ICT and internationalisation entail to both learning and cooperation. We have, in this report, described how these factors have affected the planning phase of the project. We look forward, with excitement, to see what interesting aspects they will give to the learning and the collaboration in the virtual community in Sesame.

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