



## The Cyber-Class project

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Cyber-Class is a distance learning web platform, powered by Dokeos (a free learning management system initially created for university e-learning).

Of course, primary school is not the priority target for the LMS developers. But it cannot just be eliminated or put aside; after all, initial education builds the foundation of the learner's school culture and defines a student's future capacities for managing knowledge acquisition skills.

Mastery of an online learning environment is therefore best achieved during primary school.

### Integrating a new tool

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Although the advantages for the pupils are easy to demonstrate, at first we must explain and convince primary teachers that this tool will bring them professional benefit.

Difficulties in disseminating new pedagogical tools have been the subject of numerous studies.

Moreover, they are related to teachers' everyday difficulties. In their day-to-day missions, teachers might face challenges and difficulties such as:

- In many cases, larger class sizes imply heavy workload for preparation
- Delivery and reporting workloads means less individual contact with students
- Heterogeneous classes means having to cope with different levels of competencies
- De-motivation of students
- Personal de-motivation and stress
- Obligation to raise the performances levels
- Obligation to get used to new learning methods and helping students to adapt to the new global environment: the information society
- Lack of time and place of dialogue with colleagues
- Lack of continuous training

The introduction of a new pedagogical procedure must not aggravate these difficulties, it must instead, diminish the negative factors.

Concerning Learning Management System, we must be particularly careful not to increase too much the teachers' work. We know that teaching via LMS quadruples the time for class preparation for an ICT novice teacher.

In my opinion, we must found our dissemination strategy upon the teachers' daily actions instead of founding it upon their needs (difficult to

define ex nihilo).

We have to transform the existing teaching actions into an online learning environment, operating in a web platform such as Cyber-Class.

### **Teachers using Cyber-Class**

During the test phase (year 2004), we noticed three phases in the integration of this new tool:

#### *Phase 1: mobile office*

In the beginning, the teachers used Cyber-Class as a mobile office. They uploaded files to the web platform to use them at home or at school. The pupil was not involved at this stage.

#### *Phase 2: connection school / home*

After a while, teachers sent through the platform some exercises or documents to their pupils... (for example, for absent or ill children.)

#### *Phase 3: teaching with the platform*

After one year, only one teacher had produced, organised and tested a complete learning environment, based on various external and internal resources.

### **What can Cyber-Class do for us?**

Cyber-Class can play a role of facilitation.

Indeed, the observed pupils strategies are very varied: Cyber-Class is sufficiently flexible to allow the student to choose his/her way of learning.

But above all, Cyber-Class will provide end-users with a means of publishing and broadcasting the learning elements.

### **Why such an off-centering of the teacher?**

Primarily to meet two fundamental aims:

- To improve the mediation between the learner and the task (especially with the pupils who need learning support) when the teacher works with the entire class group.
- To allow the usage of Cyber-Class without a physical tutor, at home for example (full autonomy).

### **Conclusion:**

The traditional class cannot disappear, but in the future we can expect a hybrid system.

All systematic and standardised usages in general cause few integration problems. For example, the use of the offline tools such as first generation CD-Roms, is well accepted by the professors. But the implementation of personalised situations of teaching via a Web platform requires of course additional competences.

Cyber-Class can increase the didactic performance significantly. It is, however, necessary to envisage personal tools for the teacher (in particular an initial training for the product).

Cyber-Class will ease the evolution of teachers from class management and content concerns to tutorship positioning. This evolution may facilitate changes in learning and teaching cultures.

It's time to move pedagogy to the centre of the debate and learn how to use e-learning resources!

To contact the author of this Innovative Teaching Award, [click here](#).

