E-learning and blended learning

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Chapter 1

1.1 Blended Learning and Empowerment

To use internet, social media and modern technology to support empowerment, is quite a challenge. In the project of the empowerment college we have made some first steps toward this. The process of implementing this in a thorough way asks for quite some investments and rethinking about learning processes. And we need the concept of blended learning to ensure that face to face contacts between teachers and students and between students among each other is guaranteed.

Blended Learning is defined as combining on-line learning with face to face education. By E-learning is meant: electronic learning, so using the computer or I-Phone and internet to support learning processes. Our specific question is: How can we apply e-learning tools at our Empowerment College in such a way that these tools indeed are empowering? To answer our question we will first discuss different models: a) The Traditional Classroom and b) The learning from experience and c) Blended Learning & The Flipped Classroom

a) In the Traditional Classroom, the classroom is the place where you learn. The focus is on the teacher. What he tells you is important information. You have to listen to him. Important information can also be found in books. Books can be found in the classroom or in the library at the school. Sometimes you have to work at home to prepare yourself for the class. For instance; you have to read a book at home.

Critique on this traditional model is that it is hierarchical: You have to listen to the teacher. He knows ‘the truth’. The focus is on teacher: The teacher talks, you listen. It is disciplining, not empowering. The classroom is separated from people’s lives: You learn by listening and reading, not from what you experience in your own life. It is repetitive. This model of education is developed in the industrial age and is based on repetition. For the student but even more for the teacher. For many students it is boring.

b) Learning from experience is the common approach to educate experts by experience, is also adopted by the recovery approach in mental healthcare. The core of it is self exploration: about yourself and the social context you live in. This process of self exploration is shared with peers and teachers. The result may be a portfolio or story about your life, recovery or empowerment. There is not one truth, information is subjective, ‘truths’ keep unfolding. Because people suppress parts of their being, it is important that qualified persons asks them questions. In the practices of peer experts it is important whether specific truths ‘work’ and fit with peoples values.

Learning from experience is different from the traditional classroom, where it focuses on students: What counts are their experiences. It is strongly connected to people’s lives: People’s lives are the source of information, students are the authority on their experiences. It is less hierarchical: teachers support the students in their processes of self-exploration. It is less repetitive and boring: Each students experience is different. Exploring experiences is a creative act. There is not one truth: So the teacher is not in the position of the one that knows the truth, provides information and judges whether the students listened properly and understood well.

c) The Classroom in the Digital Age has undergone quite some changes. Students can find all kinds of information online (at school, home, anywhere), and are often better in this than their teachers. Students are constantly in touch with each other through social media. Teachers have the possibility of recording (video) their lessons and publish these online, so that these can be watched and re-watched by their students.

Bergmann & Sams wrote a book about the consequences of this for the classroom:1

It is “redirecting attention away from the teacher and putting attention on the learner and the learning (p.11). ... The time when students really need me physically present is when they get stuck and need individual help. (p. 4/5). .. We are no longer the presenters of information we take

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on a more tutorial role. (p. 14)... we used the entire class period to help students with the concepts they don’t understand (p. 5).

So the consequences for teachers are that they must be able to admit it when he or she does not know the answer to student questions and must be willing to research an answer with the student. And they should take the opportunities to demonstrate what it means to be a learner: the teacher is the lead learner in a classroom.

In an empowerment college you learn from experiences and from the classroom. Students explore their own experiences. Apart from that they also get information from professionals and academic knowledge. All there resources of knowledge (experiential, professional and scientific) have equal value. Students learn by communicating with peers and professionals, doing research together on the topic of recovery. Students can use information from any relevant (online) source. The empowerment college so may use the elements of a Flipped Classroom. In the physical class the focus is on conceptual or shared understanding. The role of the teachers is to ask questions: Is that indeed true for you? Does it work?

Using e-learning tools may support this process of flipping the classroom. The goal of this part of the project is to explore how we can use e-learning tools to further flip the classroom. Our starting hypothesis is: The more the classroom gets flipped, the more empowering it becomes! Apart from this we also think that the conditions of co-production which are followed in the empowerment college are empowering. We will explore e-learning tools to involve people, make them active, do (self) research, and create their own education material. We also use them to support talking in a group, giving presentations, role playing, and making video’s together. All these are physical acts that can be empowering.

1.2 The starting situation of the partners in relation to e-learning

Implementing blended learning is at this moment for most partners in the project not an easy nor a self-evident thing to do. Before the program started none of the partners used ICT in their courses and educational programs to support the learning processes of the students. Some do use websites and email for different administrative aims. Some ask students to apply for courses by email and they ask to send the necessary documents for registration by email. Students communicate by email to ask questions and they receive the informations by email and websites.

Being doubtfull about implementing e-learning has much to do with presumed and/or realistic thresholds for the to target groups of the empowerment colleges to use ICT and internet. Most participating groups are however familiar with using emails and to do the research on the Internet. It happens that in case that somebody doesn't have an email, the group is helping the person to create an account. The teachers are willing to help, so the person who doesn't have the experience of using the computer can get acquainted with the communication through the Internet.

In some countries, like in Germany and Holland, most of the people are using internet via their smartphones, or have computers at home. Around 90 - 95% have Internet access and email. But people are hardly used to using these smartphones and computers for learning goals. Some might however have used internet to find answers to their questions about services or about specific (mental) (health) problems. Some have quite some experience with social media and participate in groups. Not many, but an increasing number, have some experiences with e-health and e-peer support. The large majority in all countries, especially when they are people with severe mental illness, don’t use internet for any other purpose than entertaining (like watching videos in YouTube) and, occasionally, reading news or looking for some specific information. When students are living in an institute, many of these clients have e-mails, but not many of them use it. One of the partners announced an incoming course on the Facebook profile of their Agency, but it elicited no interest from any other group. Severe mental illness does not prevent people from using ICT, but it appeared that clients who decided to attend a course are not used to check mails and to use internet to keep in touch. For those who do not have a computer, it helps when the Agency gives them access to Internet
on computers of the Agency, even if this is for a limited periods of time. For most students with a background of severe mental illness it is, at this moment (anno 2018) not very realistic to expect them to use ICT in the learning process.

In relation to specific e-learning programs, there is one practical problem to be mentioned specifically, which is the subscription. In all specific e-learning programs one has to subscribe with a username (or email address) and a password. Many are used to these procedures and also to the procedures what to do when username and/or password are forgotten, but not all want to make this effort. In different contexts, experience are that up to 60% of the participants did not manage to use e-learning programs, even when they are committed and stimulated to do so. From this experiences one may conclude that when a special e-learning program is implemented, even than not all would use it.

1.3 Choice of a tool

Looking for e-learning tools, a choice can be made between organising your own web-site in such a way that it can be used for E-Learning or to use an existing program for E-learning. Various free E-learning software programs are available on internet. We made the choice for MOODLE since it is free and because it is easy to handle, although it does take some time to become skilfully using it. It is most used software for e-learning, creates pages that you can open in a browser on your computer or phone. You can make a layout / content / time frame for a course. You can add texts, pictures, video’s, files to construct courses. You can create different forms of access for students, teachers, content managers. You can create platforms which can be used by students to communicate and work together. You can create multiple choice or other structures within which students can answer questions. There are many ways to survey the activities of students. There are many ways to automatize the evaluations by students.

There are tools in Moodle which encourage flipping, but it can also be used in a traditional way, disciplining students and only programming one-way communications. We want to focus on the tools of Moodle that encourage coproduction and empowerment.
Chapter 2

2.1 Introduction to the Moodle site

We installed Moodle on the website of IGPB: https://www.igpb.nl/moodle/. If you go there, you come to the home page:

![Empowerment College](https://www.igpb.nl/moodle/)

This is the homepage of the e-learning program for the Empowerment college. When you scroll to the end of the homepage you will find a link to a short manual for using this website as a student (see appendix 1).

![Handleiding voor de website](https://www.igpb.nl/moodle/)

Figure 1: example of homepage of the site empowerment College in Dutch language

Figure 2: reference to the manual of the site for students
And there is an overview of courses which are supported by an e-learning program:

![Figure 3: Overview of the courses on the Dutch site](image)

When you click on one of these courses, you come in the program and are led through the courses in a way which is dependent on how this is programmed by the designers of the course.

### 2.2 Designing a course in Moodle

To be able to design a course in Moodle you first must get the authority for that and you get this by assigning the specific role of a manager or course creator. We used the role of the manager for this.

![Figure 4: Attribute the right authentications.](image)

As a manager you now have the right to implement the course in the way you want it. Moodle offers a lot of devices for programming and presenting a course. We only used a limited number of these possibilities. For the empowerment college we used the following functions:

- Information
- Starting up
- Running a course
- Evaluation
2.3 Administration and management of the site

For administration and management functions you turn to the relevant option:

Figure 5: the functions for site administration

At this moment, we only use the enrolment of students

Figure 6: enrolment and administering students

Students are added and invited to use the Moodle environment. In order to do so they have to subscribe with a username and a password.
2.4 Entering the program

After a student has subscribed he can enter the program. At the beginning he is asked to fill in some questionnaires about empowerment and his learning goals.
When the course has started he is asked to enter the program and follow the instructions for reading articles which are downloaded or linked, see films which are downloaded or linked, add homework, and react on questions. Here we see:

+ forums per sessions
+ sharing of tips
+ A film

![Example of programs for different sessions](image)

Figure 9: example of programs for different sessions

At the end of the course participants are asked to do an evaluation of the course.

![Evaluation questions and a film](image)

Figure 10: The final session with evaluation questions and a film which was made by a group of students as an end work

Finishing one of the courses, participants in one groups made a movie about the subject of the course and this was also published on the site as a common result of the course. It will be used in a next course on the subject.
Chapter 3

3.1 Blended Learning – Where we are now

The goals of using E-learning were, as said, to add new possibilities for learning by use of social media and ICT. Another was that it leads to certain didactics in which students are more active, more prepared, more also in a creative and co-producing role. Flipping the classroom means that the classroom is more used for debate and mutual learning while at home students use the e-learning program to start the lesson and practice the stuff. At the same time it was stressed that in the courses of the Empowerment colleges the mutual and direct contact between the students is the most important. It is important for them to go to school and also to accept to be a student and get used to be a learning individual with access to schools. Empowerment processes may well be supported by ICT and e-learning, but at the same time we think that, at this moment, direct contact between students and between students and trainers are the more important parts.

In our meetings we discussed blended learning, concepts of learning and of education and empowerment. When testing courses we took some steps and explored various possibilities for blended learning. In our discussions we opposed ‘the traditional way of learning’ with “the flipped classroom” and suggested that the flipped classroom is more empowering than the traditional classroom. “The more the classroom gets flipped, the more empowering it becomes!”

After our first experiences we must nuance this a bit. We must be clear that we did not realize all these premises. Other processes asked for more attention than those which are stressed in e-learning or blended learning:

- It is important that we generate a social process in the group.
- Co-production means that teachers or trainers are present form both the professional and the mental health client background.
- Creating safety and trust asks for physical presence. In general our target groups are quite mistrusting. If we present digital information beforehand, the risk is that people also start to complain and gossip beforehand.
- The learning and processing of information online should be the result from social processes in the classroom.
- In the flipped classroom the students work digitally by themselves and experience problems (‘getting stuck’) while doing this. They come to the classroom with these problems which takes too much time.
- Trainers and organizers of empowerment colleges see it as their primary task to provide structure and safety. A consequence of this is that we want to meet people first and guide them into the e-learning environment.

3.2 Implementing e-learning

Implement e-learning courses in the Empowerment College has started with general information about the college idea and the general approach like inclusion, tandem work, coproduction, and experienced based learning, which we could use for all courses. Websites and the Moodle system concentrated on sharing learning materials and so are used for additional materials such as links, films, documents, research and texts. There has been some preference for special participants access to the companies’ website, because people would by that way visit the company’s website. The website of the empowerment college has also been used during the project to give information to the students about empowerment and about the backgrounds of the project. The English language on the project website was however a barrier for many students to consult this and they were dependent on the translations.

All partners stress the relevance of blended service. In order to support the empowerment process the focus has, however, been on the face-to-face interactions between trainers and students and students
among each other. For that all partners created small student groups that came together on a weekly basis. The discussions in these groups were moderated by trainers, also on a face to face basis.

E-learning was most of the times and by most partners done by using e-mails and other social media. It supported communication between the students and trainers. It was used to ask questions, explain the homework and share informations. Internet was used via links that were sent by emails or were put on websites or e-learning programs.

In the Moodle surrounding the implementation of e-learning was a more elaborate way. The following functions were used:

Information:
- General information about Empowerment Colleges
- Information about which courses are available and when they start and end

Starting up:
- Enrolment and registration of participants
- Assessment of learning goals and learning plan (ILP)
- O-measurement of empowerment

Running the course:
- Information about the goals of the course

Per session:
- Information about the topic
- Theses, oneliners and “truths”.
- Downloaded literature
- Downloaded films
- A possibility for participants to add material
- Homework assignments
- Space for participants to add the homework done
- A Forum for participants to react to each other
- Space for trainers to react on the homework done

Evaluation
- The evaluation forms which can be filled in digitally

Using these possibilities has led, for those who used it to some routine, in using the computer and internet for empowerment. It was however not the main thing, because, indeed, the meetings during the sessions, the direct contacts were far more important and having impact. Doing homework for a next session was sometimes quite elaborate and not limited to reading some texts. It was also about doing exercises, writing, doing research, performing a duty, being aware about yourself at special moments. By doing so students prepared for the next session and in fact did in some ways flip the classroom. But anyhow the classroom remained the most important place for learning as a part of empowerment.

3.3 learning to get used to it

When we focus on the use which has been made of the e-learning platform of Moodle we see a difference between the beginning and later on. Starting to use Moodle, we encountered a lot of practical difficulties with administering, subscribing, passwords, download of homework, etc. A real problem was also the planning of students. We had not foreseen that students should really make strict planning to enter the site for reading stuff and doing the homework. We had misreckoned
that in courses with a session once a week, and adding homework on a weekly basis directly after each session, it only allows students to enter the homework 6 days before the next session. In practice it appeared that most students had full agendas and hardly had enough time to do the homework. Most of the times at the beginning it appeared during the meeting sessions, most of the students had not been in the program and so missed the input from the program. This was evaluated after the testing of the first modules which had been using e-learning. When we started to implement e-learning in new modules, we were better prepared for this kind of problems and the results were much better. Much more participants succeeded in subscribing and joining the program on a weekly basis as a preparation for the session. In the module on self-exploration in the Netherlands, 80% of the participants used the Moodle program to prepare themselves and make the homework. 20% did not because they still had difficulties to register themselves and/or to login with usernames and passwords. We conclude that the students, using the e-learning program, were quite enthusiastic about it and profited from it in an interesting way. In fact it was effective as an opportunity to work on the goals at home, do the homework, talk about it at home, try out at home and come to the meetings of the lessons to discuss the results, ask questions, and find out about experiences of other participants.

The practical points, which can be held responsible for the minimal use of the E-learning tool in the beginning, were more or less overcome in the implementation in a later phase. We also can conclude that using a tool like Moodle on a one-time basis is not very effective. Participants must get the opportunity to get used to it, both to the technical aspects as to the didactic principles which are behind it.

A second point of attention is that, of course, using a tool like Moodle, also asks some special efforts from the co-producers of a course to implement e-learning. In general one can say that co-producers of a course are very well used to use email, internet and websites or the network of computers in an Agency to exchange, share and store documents they work on. For implementing e-learning they have to do some extra things. They have to adjust their website, download forms and information, program interactive devices, make links to Facebook or program the Moodle, all according to the program of the course. Those using Moodle enjoyed the program and its possibilities. It helped them to program the course and it was easy to share all materials and exercises and homework. However, although there are no important practical reservations toward the use e-learning devices, there is a strong belief that much of the benefit of Empowerment Colleges derives from face to face contact with other peers and professionals, learning from each other experientially, challenging self-stigma in the classroom on an informal basis. E-learning programmes (like Moodle) need additional training for the coproducers. The trainers do not have special problems so far, but it is another additional thing to do in daily work, which must be managed to do so.

At the end we must conclude that only limited use has been made of the Moodle site during the project. It took quite some time to find the right balance between face-to-face learning and e-learning and to make the relevant choices. During our project meetings we entered in a discussion about blended learning and although all of us subscribed the goals and importance, most of us did not see broad possibilities at this moment and in this project anno 2018, for putting the course they were designing, in a broad e-learning environment.

Some practical thresholds were mentioned:
- It takes more time to get used to the IT
- Students having no access to computers and internet
- Students being afraid subscription in internet because of privacy threads
- Problems with passwords etc.
The first experiences with e-learning in the empowerment program, thinking about it and using either minimal or more elaborated devices, using general programs like email and websites or specific like Moodle, have brought all partners to a next step in this area. They say that it is in general a good idea, but it depends also on whether the expected participants will have access to Internet and have skills to use appropriate applications, which might require additional specifically designed investments of time and efforts to achieve. When implemented in a specific location it stimulates the agency to provide accurate computers or laptops and appropriate access to internet for those who attend or visit the location as a student. For people who live further away from the place where the college is located it also creates a chance for distance learning. It might be appropriate in rural areas, small cities and villages, or for housebound students. Implementing the e-learning in the Empowerment College will create the possibility for many more people to participate in the course. When starting this it is important to know which different courses are already available on the internet. It would be important not to duplicate those already available. It also would need more time to prepare the right materials and for that training is necessary and also the funding which will lead to producing high quality courses. Only then there may be opportunities to develop more sophisticated e-learning programs where students can share experiences and undertake group work via the web, but this has not yet been tried in the empowerment colleges.

Most important conclusion at this moment is that the underpinning principles of democratic, experiential learning are more facilitated through face to face learning rather than accessing courses on the internet. Due to that the use of e-learning will be slow to develop.
Appendix 1: Short Manual for the use of Moodle in the Empowerment-college

It is important to have one or two people who have access to the users version of the Moodle environment

They are responsible for

– site administration, adding new users, notify, force password change.

The site has a homepage about empowerment colleges

When entered, then:

– shift to a module

– overview meetings and subjects at the meetings

– creating clarity, providing a structure, like the traditional model of learning ‘taking the students by the hand’

– A user about learnbng style: “for me in relation to my own recovery, my parents were not able to take me by the hand in learning something, most of my life i experienced discipline as something negative, not as something positive and loving, that could help me in being constructive and creative.”

Each course has a closed part of the website which is meant as an e-learning device. To garantee your privacy thiese parts of the website are not open for public. You need a password to log in.

To encourage people it is necessary to explain that this is complicated with a difficult password. But this is necessary because it is a real risk that the website otherwise gets hacked etc.

Log in
If you want take part in the e-learning part of a course you have to send an e-mail eto the administrator of the empowerment college. From him/her you get an e-mail response inwhich is explained how to log in.

Good thing about the e-mail is that you get the names digitally, so you don’t need to communicate about misspelled names which makes it impossible for people to get logged in.

Ask people to open their users version

Browser
Use Safari, Chrome or another browser to visit the website. The website we use now does not work at Internet Explorer.

This is a problem yet of the IGPB-site. Will hopefully get solved in the future.

Website
The address of de website is https://www.igpb.nl/moodle/. At the right upper side is a button to log in.

Courses
When you are logged i, you are able to inscribe for a course.

Course sessions
Each course consists of a number of sessions. You enter a session by clicking on the name or number of that session. You can always return to the overview of the course by clicking on the button at the top with the name of the course or “My startpage”.

**Separate sessions**
A session becomes only accessible when the trainers have opened it. A choice can be made to open all at the beginning or to open the next session after a session.

- *Important thing that is more traditional than flipped, we will hide the blocks till they get revealed after each meeting. To avoid people getting lost, develop judgements about the material and/or start gossiping about the work*
  - *Hidden part 2, reveal it*

**Own profile**
Participants can construct their own profile. For example by uploading a photo or adding information about themselves.

**Background information**
Most background information contains links to websites of other organisations. Together they may be used as a kind of social map for both user and professionals

- *Explain a bit about the background information we used*
  - *This is very nice about working with a moodle environment (no piles of paper), it is also important to stress that people can return to the course, and don’t need to get lost in the endless amounts of information that are on the internet*

**Personal goals and evaluation**
All assessment and evaluation forms mentioned in the manual of the empowerment college are accessible and can be answered via the program.
Filled in answers are only accessible for the trainers.

- *For us a way to evaluate the course*
  - *This is only information for the people to guide the course*
  - *It is also a way to take people by the hand, it communicates ‘we care for you’*

**Feedback on the meetings**
Every session can add a feedback form about the session with questions about the session. These questions are multiple choice and/or open-end.
Filled-in questionnaires are only accessible for the trainers.

- *Similar as above*
  - *For us a way to evaluate the course*
  - *This is only information for the people to guide the course*
  - *It is also a way to take people by the hand, it communicates ‘we care for you’*

**Forums**
Every meeting also has a forum where you can share your experiences or opinions with other participants, start a conversation, react on others:

- *This will be the most interactive part of the e-learning environment*
  - *It will be an experiment how this works*
  - *a thought i had was that we could do the whole course in this format, now we choose to work with more structure*
  - *This is also the part that people can really fuck up, by posting some nonsense for 30 times etc.*
  - *In the proces we can experiment by adding different parameters to the fora*
I asked questions as a sort of titles to the different fora. This will give a direction to the discussion that could develop, but in fact everybody can post anything.