The digital learning environment in dance pedagogy: Experiences of students physical education

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Introduction
Recent research (van Eijl & Pilot, 2003) states that most examples of ‘good practices’ of an electronic or virtual learning environment evolved from pilot projects that were optimized. Multiple lecturers of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel that participated the project “Innovations in Education and Blackboard” examined by means of an action research the benefits of the use of a digital learning environment. At the beginning the central digital learning environment Blackboard was used. Recently the DLE was changed to PointCarre having a more open and flexible structure with more possibilities to connect to databases and portfolio systems.

A part of the project, the availability of digital mpeg movies in support of the education program “Rhythmic and Expressive Activities” of the faculty LK was evaluated. The aim was to support students in their individual work, to make dance more attractive and clear to the students and to stimulate them to work independent or in small groups. The main objective of this project was to determine the experiences of first year physical education students with the digital learning environment.

Methods
Short Mpeg-files of basic dance steps (groupfitness or aerobics) and Mpeg-files of dance sequences learned during dance class (streetdance) were recorded, processed and integrated in a digital learning environment. The syllabus offering the theoretical support of both disciplines was also presented on the learning environment. At the end of the academic year, following the exam of dance, a written questionnaire was presented at first year and second year physical education students who had completed the education program "expressive and rhythmic activities" in the past academic year (respectively 57 and 49 students). Exactly 100 students completed the questionnaire, respectively 52 (91%) from first year and 48 (98%) from second year physical education.

Results
According to a Tracking Tool and the questionnaire, it seems that the majority of the respondents (93%) attended the digital learning environment to retrieve additional information, without being obligated to do so. Within this group, 27% indicated that they consulted the digital learning environment more than once a week, whereas slightly more than a half of the respondents consulted the learning environment less than once a week. 75% of the respondents share the opinion that the dance-sequence showing the choreography of the exam (streetdance) is valuable to strong valuable. Only 46% of the respondents reported the dance steps of aerobics as valuable to strong valuable. Concerning the presentation of information on the digital learning environment, evaluations went from moderate (29%), conveniently (35%) to very conveniently (20%), while 13% reported the presentation of information as inconvenient. The majority of the students claims that the digital learning environment, especially the Mpeg-files, are an informative support for the education program. Information was consulted together with other students by 39% of the respondents. In case of practical problems concerning the use of the environment and technical problems, one third of the students did not know who to consult.

Discussion/Conclusion
The digital learning environment, which offers course material and Mpeg-files concerning dance, is believed to be a helpful tool to the students PE in addition to the practical sessions. Especially the ‘additional’ aspect is of great importance. An equilibrated combination between a real and virtual context tends to be essential (Marchiuoni, 2003). Clarke (2003) defines it as ‘blended learning’. In addition to this, it is important to make the distinction between information transfer and experiences (Geerligs, 2003). In the present learning environment of “Expressive and Rhythmic Activities” information transfer is quiet obvious by means of ICT. In case of a more intensive way of using ICT in education of dance and fitness, integration of students in recording and processing movies and creating a DLE including feedback using digital movies made by themselves or others, would be a possibility. This implies a bigger institutional support, not only from a central service, but also by a local (someone from the faculty) and gradual technological assistant and docent training (Ali, 2003; Wang & Chen, 2003).

References