
HOW TO LEARN BY ODL (OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING) - PEDAGOGICAL ROLES OF ODL?

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Abstract

This paper discusses an analysis of a training course for ODL (Open and Distance Learning) teachers and designers working in French higher education. The course was provided by Telecom Paris and aims to train future ODL designers through an ODL pedagogical process. This is a *reflexive process* (i.e., learners learn in an ODL process how to design ODL). Another important point is that the trainers were also those who designed the course itself.

1. Pedagogical and theoretical framework

The activities for analysing the training course for ODL were planned in three sessions:

- starting session (face-to-face) (2 days)
- distance work session based on a project activity (work in pairs, 2 months)
- closing session (2 days)

1.1 Theoretical background

The analysis of this course is based on educational research publications, in particular the work summarised in an article by Choplin and Everard (2001)¹. These authors identify 5 possible roles of staff in such training as:

- module manager
- expert
- pedagogical tutor
- technological tutor
- animator

¹ JM Everard, H Choplin, *Le «formateur à distance»: quels nouveaux rôles?*, L'odyssée des réseaux, *Les Cahiers pédagogiques*, n396

Moreover, Postic (1996) in his book *The Educative Relationship*², proposes an approach where the educational relationship presents (at least) two components:

- a psychoanalytical one, showing that people who become teachers use some characteristics of the teachers they had as young pupils, and that these characteristics may be linked with the relationship between their parents and themselves as children.
- a sociological one, in the sense that teachers bring social “values” to their relationship with learners, so that this relationship supports a certain hierarchy.

Further, in this study we took the opportunity to test two methods to this research: the *explicatory interview* of Vermersch (1994) and Moreno’s *sociogram* (1969). The interview allows a practical explication of any *action* from the subject (distance relationship in our case), whereas the sociogram allows a qualification and a quantification of relationships inside a group, an issue explored in depth elsewhere but not in this paper.

2. Objectives and methodology

2.1 Objectives

Our main interest is in the modeling aspect, which consists of finding a definition and a modeling theory of pedagogical relationships that will be suitable for both “presence” and distance cases. This model would help us anticipate changes due to the implementation of ICT for both individuals and institutions.

2.2 Hypothesis

Our hypothesis is that the analysis of pedagogical relationships during a training course will provide us with some useful empirical elements for the development of our theory. Our sub-hypothesis is linked to the guiding roles’ division during the training course, at a form level (effective guiding) as well as a content level (guiding as taught through contents and teaching material). These two inputs lead to the hypothesis that if the training course proceeds well, then we should find the foreseen theoretical role division both in guiding staff activities (foreseen and effective), and in the learners’ representation of the guiding staff (through the course contents). We should find this role division from designers at the beginning, but also mirrored by learners at the end of the course.

2.3 Methodology

The evaluation procedure is as summarised in figure 1. We have used semi-open interviews before and after the training course. Different themes have been identified:

1. Before the course

- Designer/Teacher:
 - scholarship and pedagogical relationship anecdotes (as a pupil, a teacher, during “presence” or distance)
 - definition of guiding roles
 - positive and negative points about the course (foreseen)
 - sociogram
- Learners:

² M. Postic, *La relation éducative*, PUF, Paris, 1996

- scholarship and pedagogical relationship anecdotes (as a pupil, a teacher, during presence or distance)
 - training course objectives
2. *After the course*
- Designer/Teacher:
 - more specific definition of some roles and history
 - feelings about the distance experience
 - positive and negative points about the course
 - sociogram
 - Learners:
 - definition of different guiding roles
 - feelings about the distance experience
 - achieved objectives

The two techniques mentioned earlier have been tested in this context for the first time: the Vermersch interview, which helps explore, identify and explain distance communication actions from a student or a teacher perspective, and Moreno’s sociogram.

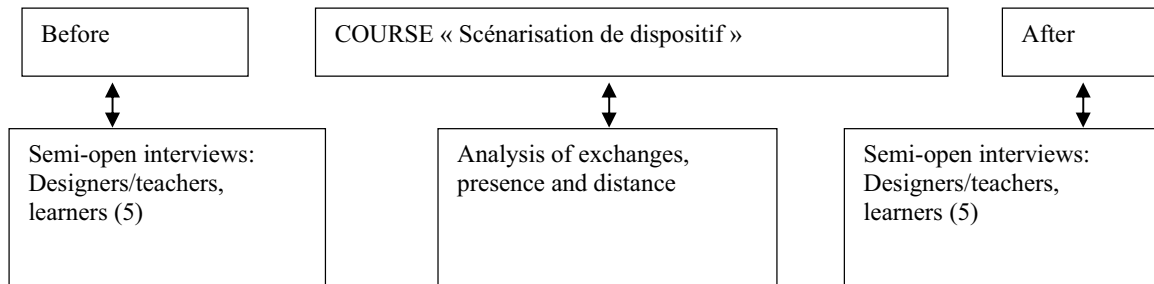


Figure 1: Evaluation protocol of FIPFOD summer school course.

3. Results

Our analysis revealed that very few distance based exchanges and communications took place, with the majority of the work (including reading course documents) undertaken by the students during the “presence,” or face-to-face, sessions. The technical complexity of use of distance tools could be an explanation for that situation, but the analysis of the different pedagogic staff roles could bring some further information.

We have tried to identify whether the 5 roles of the division presented previously were effective during the course or not, and how they were perceived.

3.1 From the Designer’s/Teacher’s side

During pre-course interviews, each designer/teacher has been asked to define each role and to identify which would be their own role(s) in the coming course. Results show that *module manager* and *technological tutor* roles are quite clear. *Expert* and *pedagogical tutor* roles are quite well defined too, except their range of actions are still vague (action before or after course? social role or not?)

intervention on contents or not?). But the *animator* role has the least clear definition and is often confused with other roles.

We can draw some conclusions from these first interviews with designers/teachers. Expert and pedagogical tutors have very close characteristics: the expert designs the course, the pedagogical tutor makes it effective under the “control” of the expert, who intervenes or not. The pedagogical tutor may have different skills than the expert, or the same ones but on a lower level. Unfortunately, the animator has no other coherent definition than being guarantor of the group and that of representing the collective identity of distance learners.

Now, if we look at what roles were foreseen by the participants on the day before the distance course (table 1), we can notice that no designer/teacher was allocated to the role of animator. On one hand, the animator is missing from any course guiding activities: he/she has no existence in the analysed training course. On the other hand, we notice that two persons (Arnaud and Sarah) are in charge of the largest number of (important) activities (8 for each vs 3 maximum for others).

	<i>Arnaud</i>	<i>Sarah</i>	<i>J.Sebastien</i>	<i>J.Luc</i>	<i>Patricia</i>	<i>Hugues</i>	<i>Emmanuel</i>
Pedagogical tutor	regulation regulation regulation exercise exercise	regulation regulation regulation studies exercise exercise	workshop		studies		
Expert	conference					conference regulation studies	regulation studies
Animator							
Technological tutor			workshop	regulation			
Module manager	regulation regulation	regulation regulation					

Table 1: Foreseen roles before course

We can observe that no animator was identified at the beginning, and that Arnaud and Sarah were on the front line at a guiding level. Designers/teachers have confirmed that the progress of the course was in fact less prepared/managed than its design.

3.2 From the learner side

Let’s now have a look at how guiding roles were dispatched and perceived by the learners at the end of the course and what mismatch is observed between the theoretical aspect proposed in the course contents and the effective guiding process. Table 2 presents the roles as listed by learners during the interview at the end of the course (with regard to their personal point of view and the course).

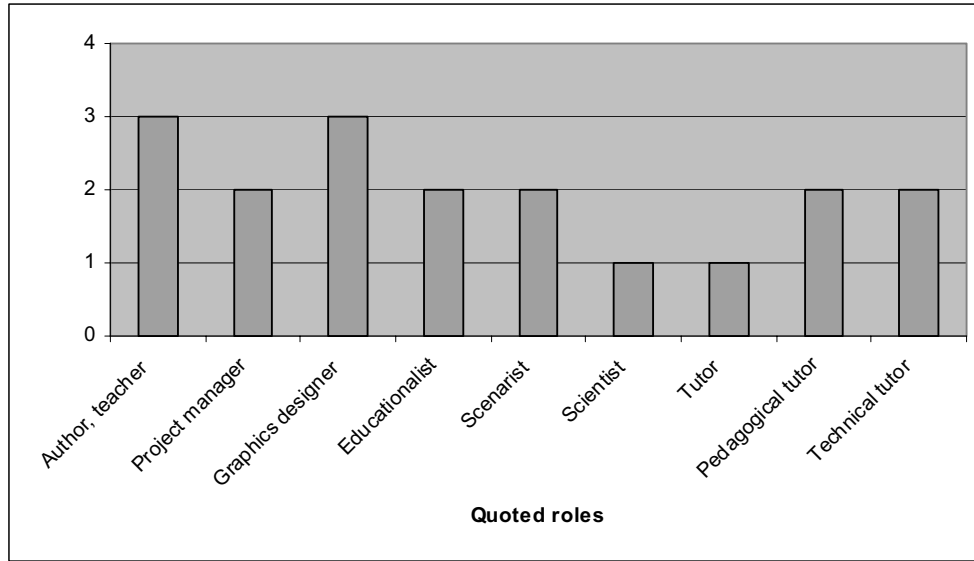


Table 2: Roles of guiding staff seen by learners (5 people) at the end of the course and number of quotations

We can see here that all the interviewed people mention more “designer” roles than “progress” roles: author, project manager, graphics designers, scenarist and educationalist. We can therefore notice on one hand that the imbalance between design and process is also present in the learners’ minds: design actors are more quoted than process actors. On the other hand, the “animator” is totally missing from the view of learners, even if this role is present in the course contents. The most quoted guiding role is the (pedagogical) tutor, without a specific definition. One of the learners has mentioned Sarah and Arnaud as examples of this role, as they were more present during the process.

4. Synthesis and perspectives

These results demonstrate that the transmitted roles are those present among the staff during the effective process, and not those present in the theoretical course contents. We can also deduce that these contents have not been properly studied, concerning guiding at least: learners have not been properly guided, and have not been efficient in online distance work. These results are also evident in group projects. The animator is missing from guiding design, and the distinction between “expert” and “pedagogical tutor” is not clear: these two roles have more or less the same functions. No online animation, nurturing a group identity, for example, was mentioned in the interviews.

The reflexivity of the training course (ODL about ODL) implies a double status of theoretical guiding roles for learners: on the one hand, content brings knowledge, and on the other hand the effective process brings “know-how”. We can therefore estimate that learners have mainly based their representation of guiding on this “know how” (i.e. knowledge gained through experience and observation), and not on the knowledge present in the content.

This “know-how” constitutes a theoretical element in distance relations that is still poorly explored in ODL literature, but we can find some information in psychoanalysis and sociology.

This work has allowed us to consider a generalisation of the evaluation methodology for FIPFOD courses³. These ODL courses deal with ODL, so that there is always a mirror link between course

³ <http://www.educnet.education.fr/superieur/fiches/fipfod2.htm>

contents, and effective course process and any mismatch between the idealised scenario and the reality of practice is readily revealed using such an approach and framework.

References:

JM EVERARD, H CHOPLIN (2001), *Le «iformateur à distance»: quels nouveaux rôles? L'odyssée des réseaux*, Les Cahiers pédagogiques, n396

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