UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

Summary 19th of April 2021 @Zoom

University Forum

Digitalization of Education

Digitalizing Education

The vision document states that most of the student-student interaction is already initiated by students themselves and that the university does not have much to offer in that respect. It is true that students already successfully shape the vast majority of their mutual interactions themselves and that the UvA should not want to replace or disrupt this with digital means, but it is too easy to say that

1

Student-student:
Brainstorm: Digital resources (of the UvA) do have added value for the contact between students. How? (p. 8-9)

2

Teacher-student:
Digital resources can help with small scale, personal feedback, activation, and accessibility. Is this correct? If we have to set priorities, which forms of digitization deserve priority? (p. 9-11)

3

Student-content:
Digital resources improve access to and quality of educational materials and the way students study them. Is this correct? If we have to set priorities, which forms of digitization deserve priority? (p. 11-12)

4

The role of the teacher:
With more digital resources, a teacher must be more of a facilitator of the learning process, a designer of study materials and a provider of online interaction. Is this correct? What do we think about this?
(pp. 12-13)

5

Boundary conditions:
Under what conditions does digitization enrich education? Do we recognize the conditions as mentioned in the vision document, and are they sufficient? (pp. 16-18)

Guest Speaker

Monique Volman

The theme was introduced by Monique Volman, professor of educational science at our own university. In recent months, she has led a study into teachers' experiences with digital education. The final results will take a while, but the University Forum had the honour to take note of some preliminary observations. Teachers appear to have learned a lot from the past year and appreciate that very much. Volman shared the various advantages and disadvantages mentioned by teachers and emphasized that the differences between faculties are very large. For example, people are clearly more enthusiastic at the FEB than at the Faculty of Humanities.

Most of the positive experiences were related to the teaching materials and flexibility of online education, in addition to the fact that teachers greatly appreciated learning so many new things. Interestingly enough, student participation was cited as both an advantage and a disadvantage. In terms of drawbacks, it was mentioned, among other things, that teachers found it difficult to see whether or not students were compliant with the course and about the general lack of spontaneity. University-wide, about 60% of teachers believe that digital education could be a good addition to physical education. The University Forum has started to work on the question of what that could look like.

1 Digital resources (of the UvA) do have added value for the contact between students. How?

the university could not do anything for them in this area in addition to what it already does via, for example, Canvas. In the break-out the members of the Forum brainstormed about a possible instrument that could be of value. For many courses, the students themselves take the initiative to create a WhatsApp group for all students who take the course. This promotes mutual interaction and also helps teachers because students can easily ask each other practical questions instead of just the teacher. The tricky thing about these app groups is that they (1) are not always equally inclusive because students who don't know anyone else in the course often do not have a way in and (2) they are not equally desirable for all students due to the risk of spam. A possible solution for this is a chat to which everyone is automatically added who is registered with the course and is separate from WhatsApp in terms of software. Employees already regularly use programs like Slack for this purpose, but there is no universally organized equivalent for students.

A similar idea that may even be realized within the same software is a platform with digital study places, such as the one that the University Library has recently been experimenting with. For the UvA it is very difficult to initiate socializing, but it can create the public spaces where it can arise on its own. Especially when the goal is to get more interaction between Dutch and international students, it is important to create spaces where they meet and rely on each other. Digital resources offer many opportunities for this. It also helps for social cohesion to have more continuity regarding which students you take courses with. This can be done via longer courses, but other strategies are also conceivable. Certainly in the coming year when we want more attention to this cohesion because of the social disadvantage that has arisen, it is important to think about these kinds of things. Something to take into account in the context of the transition to the new normal is that students will need some time to get used to the many social contacts. In all the enthusiasm of teachers to spend more time on bonding and getting to know each other, it can quickly become too much. Building slowly is wise in that regard.

- ► **Offer a chat function that automatically includes all students in a subject, separated from WhatsApp.**
- ► **Encourage interaction between international and Dutch students through digital means.**
- ► **Investigate whether it is possible to achieve more cohesion within programmes, for example through more continuity with regard to which fellow students you take courses with in the first year.**
- ► **Build up social activities slowly so that students have time to adjust after the long lockdown.**

Digital resources can help with small scale, personal feedback, activation, and accessibility. Is this correct? If we have to set priorities, which forms of digitization deserve priority?

2

In the ideal scenario, we manage to digitize the most passive parts of education, such as lectures, and instead organize a live workgroup (or another form of interactive education). Digitization can be a nice addition in this way, but should not be at the expense of the amount of physical contact hours of students. By focusing on the idea of a campus university, the vision document also seems to be in line with this, but does not really come up with any plans for the problem that this entails: the risk that we will ask too much from lecturers. On the one hand, the possibility of reuse saves the time effort of teachers in the case of digitization of lectures, but when we want more than recorded traditional lectures (for example knowledge clips), the time required quickly increases to many times higher than the physical lecture. If this cannot be compensated for with more resources, which is likely given the funding of higher education, then it is unlikely that we will be able to realize more small-scale interactive education through digitization. Digitization may seem attractive as a cutback, but in the first place it will mainly cost a lot of money if we want to do it right.

Spending time is not the only thing we ask of teachers. We also expect competencies that not all teachers already possess, which can cause a great deal of stress. It is therefore good that the vision document emphasizes the importance of professionalisation. Last year it turned out that when given the opportunity, students were often better able to design education using digital resources than the teacher. In order to lighten the burden on teachers, it is good to continue to look at what students could offer to education based on their own competences and creativity with digitization. Via the 'flip the classroom' principle, students become, as it were, co-owners of the course and are encouraged to actively contribute ideas and get started with new teaching methods. In short, digitization offers many different opportunities, but we must ensure that we do not expect too much from our teachers. We must provide them with optimal support and that also means investing in personnel and professionalisation.

> ► **Digitization can be a nice addition, but it should not come at the expense of the amount of physical contact hours.**
> ► **We must be careful not to ask too much of teachers, both in terms of time and expertise, without the necessary investments.**
> ► **Make use of the proficiency of students in using digital resources in courses, for example via the 'flip-the-classroom' principle.**

3

Digital resources improve access to and quality of educational materials and the way students study them. Is this correct? If we have to set priorities, which forms of digitization deserve priority?

Something that falls under student-content interaction is the method of examination, something that absolutely deserves attention in the context of digitization. Exams are difficult to digitize, that is the conclusion of the past year, but it is quite possible that exams will have to be taken digitally after the summer and possibly during another pandemic. Proctoring evokes a lot of (justified) resistance and is also not waterproof. Sometimes the material or the available time does not lend itself to open questions or essays, and so a way is needed to test multiple choice in a way that does not lead to large-scale fraud. Two concrete recommendations for this emerged in the break-out: have students sign a kind of integrity statement and use randomly generated exams based on a large collection of questions, so that no one takes the same exam.

Another interaction between students and content is the preparation of courses. Here the group links up with the previous break-out: move the passive contact part (lectures) to the domain of preparation, so that students and teachers can make optimal use of the time they have together. Digital tools can then also be used during that interaction to explain the most complex parts of the content. Digital content for preparing workgroups does not have to be limited to recorded lectures or knowledge clips, as there is also a lot of existing material available that we could draw on. The vision document states that large-scale physical lectures are not popular among students. Although the University Forum confirms that the digitization of lectures offers opportunities, it is also good to emphasize that physical lectures are indeed important for some of the students and teachers. This is evident, among other things, from the turnout even when a recording is available. As Monique Volman also emphasized, the differences in this regard are large between the faculties.

> ► **Try to take exams on location again as soon as possible, but if this is not possible, new solutions are needed that do not depend on proctoring, such as an integrity statement or randomly composed exams.**
> ► **Use digitization to make preparatory work easier for students (such as knowledge clips instead of large lectures), so that the contact hours with the teacher can be optimally used.**
> ► **The valuation of lectures differs greatly per department, so it is wise not to impose their digitization from above.**

With more digital resources, a teacher must be more of a facilitator of the learning process, a designer of study materials and a provider of online interaction. Is this correct? What do we think about this?

4

It is plausible that the role of the teacher will change due to the digitization of education. In the past year we have already seen how teachers were forced to think much more about working methods, pedagogy and the creative use of digital resources. Ultimately, however, the transfer of knowledge remains a core part of the role of teacher, precisely because inspiration often takes place through that transfer. Knowledge transfer can largely be digitized, but bear in mind that this could be compared to the difference between listening to a concert and to a CD. If teachers were only to guide them in a process in which the student himself takes in all the knowledge, it threatens to become difficult to inspire the student as a teacher from the content.

A division of tasks can help here, in which starting teachers mainly sit on the supervision and the teachers with more research experience take on the role of transferor and inspirator. The latter is very important, especially at the start of a study program, to set the tone: what are scientific standards, what characterizes the field? It would be a loss if we only offer such knowledge

only digitally. The different roles already exist, but digitization is now putting them in a new light, precisely because one is easier to digitize than the other, but both are extremely important. Because of the past year, we are automatically inclined to think about digitization as a replacement for existing education, but it does not have to be (and for the most part it should not be).

> ► **The role of the teacher is changing due to digitization, but knowledge transfer remains a central task.**
> ► **Digital transfer of knowledge instead of listening to a teacher on location is like the difference between a CD and a concert.**
> ► **In particular, the introduction to a field and the academic norms and values are valuable forms of knowledge that can be communicated more personally.**
> ► **We should see digitization as a supplement and not as a replacement for education, which it sadly was in the past year due to the corona crisis.**

Under what conditions does digitization enrich education? Do we recognize the conditions as mentioned in the vision document, and are they sufficient?

5

Digitization is not easy, there are several things that absolutely must be in order if we are to succeed in making digitization really add value to our education. The first is a good digital infrastructure. This means that investments are required and partnerships with reliable and capable external parties, including commercial ones. As the UvA, we must keep a close eye on what happens to students' personal data for all external parties. Compliance with the GDPR is a minimum, but we will sometimes also have to go further to protect the privacy of our students. Digital applications offer the possibility to keep a detailed record of student behavior, something that is already happening at an aggregated level under the guise of learning analytics. We must keep a close eye on the fact that such collected data could have undesirable consequences for students.

Another condition is that we never lose sight of the higher goal when digitizing: improving the quality of our education. This also means that we must continuously look at how we restructure our education from a pedagogical perspective and not digitize it for the sake of digitization. Also part of this is finding the right balance between differentiation, flexibility and continuity in the curriculum. If the latter is disturbed too much, it could also have negative effects on the social cohesion in a study program: something that we find very valuable. In doing so, we must be careful not to try to do everything alone. Digitization is an issue at almost all other knowledge institutions, where they are sometimes well ahead of us. Let us learn from them and especially exchange digital teaching materials when it would be valuable. It is also easier in a partnership to guard against too great a role for commercial parties in the provision of educational material, if we work together it is easier to carefully research this and make the right agreements.

> ► **A good digital infrastructure is essential.**
> ► **We will have to look for reliable public and commercial parties to work with.**
> ► **The privacy of students and employees must absolutely not be compromised. Sometimes we will have to go further than the GDPR.**
> ► **We must ensure that we do not outsource too much of our education to external partners.**
> ► **Collaboration with other knowledge institutions makes it easier to make good agreements with external partners and to learn from each other's best practices.**

Vragen? Neem dan contact op met secretaris
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