

# AN INTERCULTURAL UNIVERSITY WITH HUBS, NODES AND FEEDS

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## **Abstract**

What are the possibilities to communicate through the Internet when you are living in different parts of the world and with different languages?

We have recently developed ideas about how modern web-based tools could give possibilities to create a sustainable and mutual communication. The ideas are based on the use of technologies in the field of Web 2.0 and refer to tools such as blogs and RSS feeds and readers of such feeds.

Nowadays "Readers" can be set so that the transmitted information is displayed in the individual's own language, although it is written in another language. Similar features are also available for direct real-time translation of such blogs or other websites. Many blogs also allow, by special functions, to read and subscribe to the content of other blogs. By creating structures that link the course blogs "inwards" towards a common hub, portal information is made available in such a way that the individual participant or group courses can easily find relevant information from other participants or from the education provider. The use of such hubs also create incentives to study digital communication tools and how these can operate in different educational models with education and lifelong learning in focus.

Course blogs or group blogs are created on various free sites on the web. Examples include Wordpress.com or Blogger.com. The place does not matter if there's a feed so others can subscribe. If the group wants to link information from other blogs or sites with feedback there is a need for functionality locally on the system. The aforementioned systems have such features.

A study group blog provides feedback to the course blog and a group blog can also subscribe to various feeds for different categories of course blogs. The hub shares in the same way information in both directions with one or more course blogs. The hub may also include links to the various systems and also addresses for individual feeds or combined for different course groups or a common language.

The implementation of a hub according to the above model of intercultural courses also provide experiences that can be used for other courses in which several courses are given to groups that are dispersed geographically and also in time. There is also an opportunity to

communicate and provide material from their own or joint "learning environments". It can be seen as experiments with forms of support to the "Personal Learning Environment" and opens for use of the "Open Educational Resources", especially such as the participants themselves find interesting and want to spread to others.

Keywords: blogs, hubs, nodes, feeds, intercultural, learning processes.

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# To live in between

Communication requires tools to communicate with. Even if we live in different parts of the world, are separated in space and time, today there are new possibilities to share information and jointly create knowledge. The intercultural meeting can be realized not only in that we physically met, but also through various forms of technical assistance. We can create new arenas for individuals and groups to meet through the Internet. To meet on an equal and respectful way, to be open and responsive to the other's experiences and knowledge is also an opportunity to build a more democratic and sustainable world.

Our paper is an attempt to describe an example to realize this.

## Courses as intercultural learning processes

It started with the meeting between Latin and Nordic popular educators already in the 1970s. The common interest was a liberating pedagogy in which the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire gave all of us great inspiration. (Freire 1970)

In the late 1980s we established "The association for popular education in the Nordic countries and in Latin America" and we worked mostly with so-called Jornadas (Perneman 1995). Our basic common ideas were a joint creative work, to establish genuine, dialogic meetings and support self-esteeming group activities.

During the last few decades we have developed intercultural courses mostly together with indigenous groups in the Nordic Countries, Latin America and Africa. The learning activities, educational structures and main content have been developed from the same basic ideas (Cerruto & Perneman 1996).

But we have experienced big difficulties to communicate with each other. Sometimes some of us have had the possibilities to visit each other, but out of about thousand participants in the courses there are very few who have got these opportunities. The need to exchange information, together develop knowledge and give suggestions to changing activities was extremely high.

# **New possibilities to communicate**

The Internet and various communication tools have evolved greatly in recent years and today offer both teachers and students possibilities to interact in new and effective ways. A common technique used for transmission of content is RSS (Real Simple Syndication). The technique is often used to organize and distribute content and range of information available on the web. In a study which Ronald et al (2007) conducted, they found that the use of RSS for sharing new information is perceived as both efficient and useful.

RSS is a unique exchange of information where everyone can contribute with both opinions and knowledge through the use of their own publishing tools. RSS can through the interconnection encourage participation from students who together can create unique collections. By making two-way communication through the exchange of feeds completely new possibilities are also created. Various tools and sites can work together to create the common substance. (Seung J. & Mustaque A., 2006) The use of multiple sites for publishing also creates good opportunities for both scalability and archiving.

## **To create a hub**

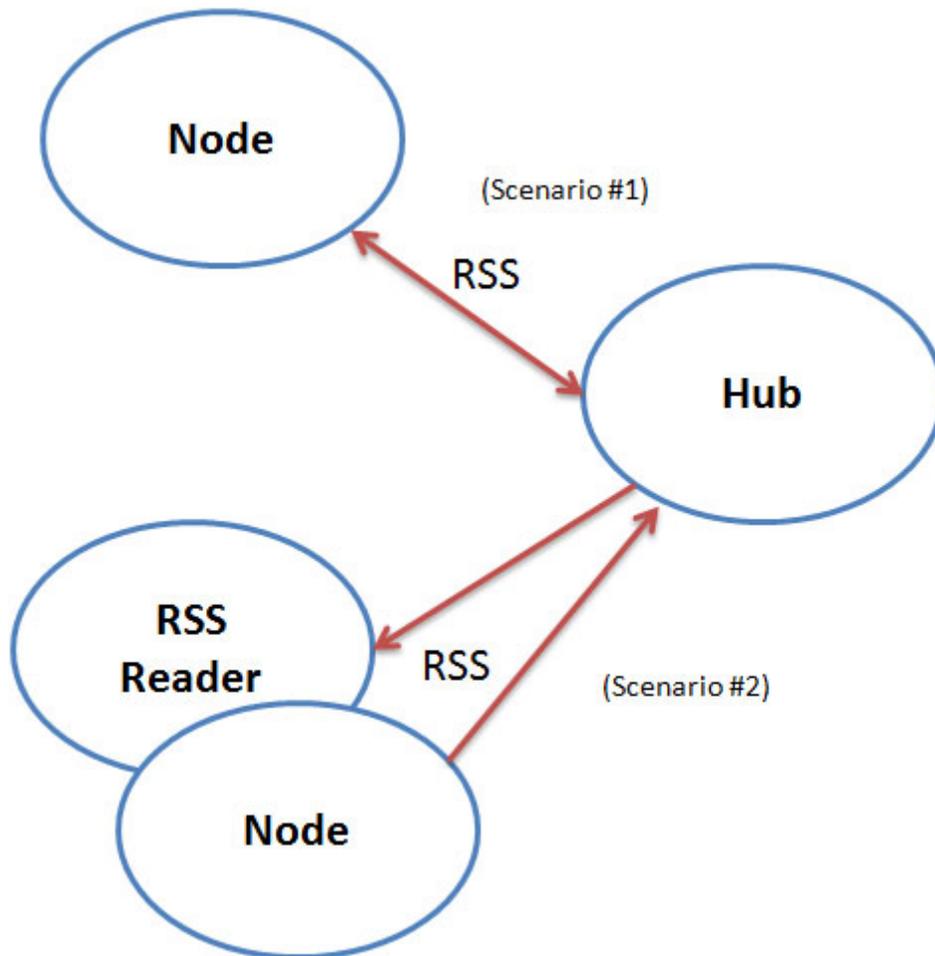
The early ideas for how the groups would work together to create dialogical meetings and support self-esteemed group activities remain. The basic ideas were created in a time when the Internet was not accessible to the large number of people as it is today. We have kept these thoughts when creating the idea of a digital hub for collaboration on hold fast to the first ideas. We have been able to see and use new tools for ICT that meets the requirements stipulated from the beginning to support the self-governing groups.

An important basic idea in our proposal for communication and collaboration is for participants to choose their own tools and use their own language. In order to create synergy between the various systems and tools a standard transmission is required. RSS is a standard that makes it possible to transmit information between different systems through subscriptions. RSS is widely used by various blog systems and other tools that can be said to be "new" two-way Web, Web 2.0.

One user, participant or a group that studies together may choose to use a blog as its main publishing of results, discussion and comments. They themselves choose the language they want for their publications. The only requirements are that the tool provides a standardized (RSS) feeds, a stream of employ additional information that others can share through subscription. The local utility is one of several nodes in a single system.

Participants feeds are collected and reported in a single location, a hub, where the participants can find other feeds within a course or a country. Participants then choose whether they want to create their own subscriptions with their own publishing tools (scenario #1, image below), or

if they want to see the content by reading directly to the hub. All feeds can pass a translation and the individual who reads the translation to choose their own language. You can select the language of each individual post or on the entire site. If participants instead choose to obtain feeds to their own RSS reader (scenario #2, image below) it is recommended that this tool allow for translation. Such RSS reader is e.g. Google Reader.



By choosing free tools and transmission through standard RSS feeds the participants have their own choice to create and build their tools for their participation. The standardization and decentralization also provides the possibility of translation into the language the participant chooses.

When participants select tools and have the power of deciding what they want to write, without any moderator, they can more truly express themselves.

## An interactive perspective

Why do we think in this way? Our philosophical and epistemological standpoints are based in the tradition of liberating pedagogy, experiential learning and academic consciousness

building. It is also about skills in the meeting of each other. Thus an approach based on dialogue, qualities of reciprocity (thinking both about ourselves and others), hope, love, respect, criticism, delivering feedback and interactivity is essential (Freire 1971). This is what we have to deal with, this balancing both philosophically and technically.

## **Kentron - a prototype**

In order to test the ideas we have created a hub that is now known as Kentron (<http://intercultural.ei.hv.se/>). It is created with a Wordpress blog as a basis. Connecting the external RSS feeds is made by using a special plug-in that allows you to put feeds on pages. Each RSS feed has been given its own page. On each page is then further additions installed which makes it possible to select the translation of the current flow. The translation can be made to the language added to the current needs, but it can also be enabled for all languages that are supported by Google Translate. On the actual page the current URL for the current feed is also published so that the visitors can subscribe themselves through their own RSS reader.

To the translation function has also been created links in which the entire website is translated using Google Translate. These links are marked with flags for each country. When the translation is done that way, the entire hub will be translated. Translation is also included, so if a visitor clicks on a link the display moves to the place where the link leads, and that site will also be translated into the chosen language.

For the prepared prototype there are today feeds from various blogs but also from a page on Facebook. There is still some work to be done such as promoting the site so that a large enough number of users with multiple streams will be created. The amount of flow is probably critical for a sufficient quantity of information to be created and exchanged. The quantity and content need to be realized in a way that users experience it meaningful and interesting.

## **Communication as empowerment building processes**

An important conclusion and a challenging question for the future is how we as pedagogues can support the experience-based, everyday learning and the use of ICT tools in a supportive context. This demands a broad competence by the teacher. The educator's role and knowledge, her or his sources and references, the participants different cultures and experiences are essential to be aware of when conducting the learning processes. (Bremer 2010)

## **The democratic communication**

We are convinced that a mutual and respectable intercultural interacting development of knowledge leads to a more sustainable world. This form of human communication grounded in broadening educational and cultural perspectives is essential for the survival of mankind and the

world as a whole. Now we have the possibilities to work with this effort in a more stringent way and in the light of Aristotle's expression "the stringent of emotion and the empathy of thought".

We want to stress the importance to choose perspective; what you want and perhaps even dare to see, who you want to communicate with, what information you want to get and how you will develop knowledge for the present time, the future and between generations.

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