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fe|male
Students design technology-supported learning scenarios

LEADING INSTITUTION
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SCHOOLS INVOLVED
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BRG Krems, Lower Austria
Marie-Curie-Secondary-School Berlin, Germany
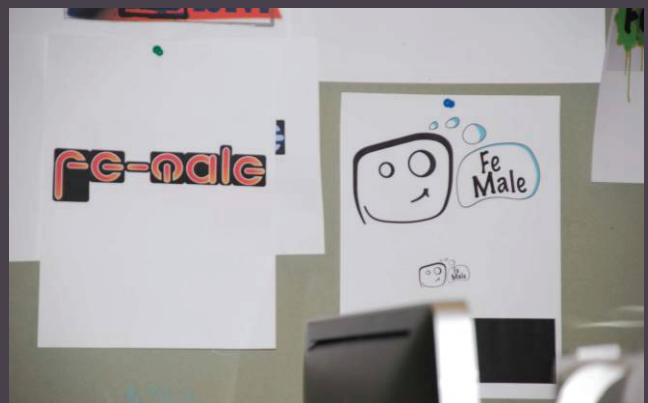
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The research project fe|male intends to inspire girls and boys for new technologies: fe|male explores web 2.0 technologies under the gender aspect and identifies opportunities for their deployment on the basis of the competencies and needs of the students.

New media have increasingly been adopted in education, which is evident from the sharp increase of scientific attention given to this area. It is also established that interactive and playful components foster the learning process. The professional deployment of innovative, technology-supported learning scenarios lags behind this development. Furthermore, the varying approaches of girls and boys towards new technologies have found little consideration in the pedagogical environment.

The research project fe|male is devoted to this theme: fe|male places web 2.0 technologies in education in the centre of the research focus. These technologies are analyzed under the aspect of gender and also in relationship to their didactical deployment within the framework of a gender-sensitive academic education. A key aspect of the project is that the lived-in world of the youths is the point of departure. Popular internet activities such as the social interaction via the networks MySpace, Twitter, SchülerVZ or Flickr, but also the production of content within a community serve as potential starting points for the development of future technology-supported learning scenarios in schools.

Based on the internet usage habits of students, fe|male pursues three goals: firstly, to explore and to develop educational programs with a focus on gender aspects and to hereby contribute that girls also become interested in technical applications, while taking into account their skills, competencies and content preferences. This is based on the assumption that web 2.0 technologies, which comprise the core ideas of the web, namely user-friendliness, standardization, participation, and re-utilization will increasingly gain importance and might be referred to as the "passage point" of the technology-gender-discourse. "The first project results tell us that girls as well as boys appreciate the web 2.0 based school projects. Especially the possibilities offered by wikis are evaluated positively by girls with regard to group work, interactivity and self organisation," the project coordinator Dr. Sabine Zauchner, Danube-University Krems, states with regard to the first evaluation results. Secondly, in accordance with the guidelines of Sparkling Science, students are integrated into the entire research process from the start. The project takes place in collaboration with three partner schools in Austria and Germany (BG|BRG Purkersdorf; BRG Krems; Marie-Curie-Secondary-School Berlin, Germany).

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Based on young people's media-centred lived-in world, web 2.0 applications were analyzed in terms of their feasible deployment in teaching: Given the prerequisite, that students' private matters remain private, the boys and girls participating in the project generally appreciate the use of web 2.0 technologies in class – however, only when the implementation makes sense in their view. "Generally, MySpace is suited much better for private matters than for school matters, as there are too many private aspects (photos, comments, videos, news) that are not useful for school education. There are almost no functionalities which can be used in class", a pupil states during evaluation.

The applications were implemented within the project works at the various partner schools and were evaluated in a formative design by the participating students and teachers. The evaluation focuses on didactical and gender-specific aspects relating to the expedient deployment in education. Evelyn Stepancik, the teacher responsible for the project at the BG|BRG Purkersdorf, analyzes her experiences with collaborative web 2.0 projects, "One of the main challenges for the successful realisation of web 2.0 based school projects is the organisational and topic specific integration and the different skills levels of the pupils."

Not only the active incorporation of girls and boys in this research project, but also the ability of the students to exploit the insights and to share the acquired knowledge is the third focus of fe|male. Selected and interested students of the respective project teams will be empowered to pass on the jointly developed insights in regard to the didactical and gender-sensible teaching and learning scenario within their own educational context and also to other participating institutions of higher education by means of presentations and seminars.

Therefore, students' active participation in the tangible research tasks and increased competencies in the area of content will be completed as they will also actively participate during the utilization and dissemination phase of fe|male. From the start, the project strives to improve technical and media-related skills, but also communicative competencies of the users. The enhancement of technical curiosity is related on the one hand to the general affinity to technology and on the other hand to their experiences with the school projects. This notion is supported by the statement of Heike Wiesner, the project evaluator from the School of Business and Economics Berlin, „Different – and this always also means gender specific – affinities to technology, skills, and kinds of self organisation therefore have to be considered in the preparation phase of school projects especially when talking about collaborative projects."

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