



ROC Eindhoven



Lifelong Learning Through the Fronter Platform

CASE STUDY

A 'normal' school day at ROC Eindhoven has taken on a whole new meaning in the last 5 years. New education methods are combined with new e-learning tools, as the Fronter Platform is used to carry out new strategies for Lifelong learning in 23 schools across the 'Silicon Valley of Europe.'

Policies laid out in the 2005 Lisbon Strategy said Lifelong learning is central to achieving a healthy and sustainable economy that can meet the needs of globalisation and general 'change.' Apply this theory to educational institutions, and we see learning slowly being measured by the skills we acquire, formalised in the newly signed European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF lays the foundation for an assessment framework, measuring the skills and competency gained during different educational programmes, degrees and vocational diplomas.

Willem van Dinther started as the head of IT at ROC Eindhoven's Trade and Marketing School. This school is only one of 23 vocational education centres included under the Regional Education Centre (ROC) in Eindhoven, in The Netherlands. Moving away from traditional 'final exams,' Willem and his

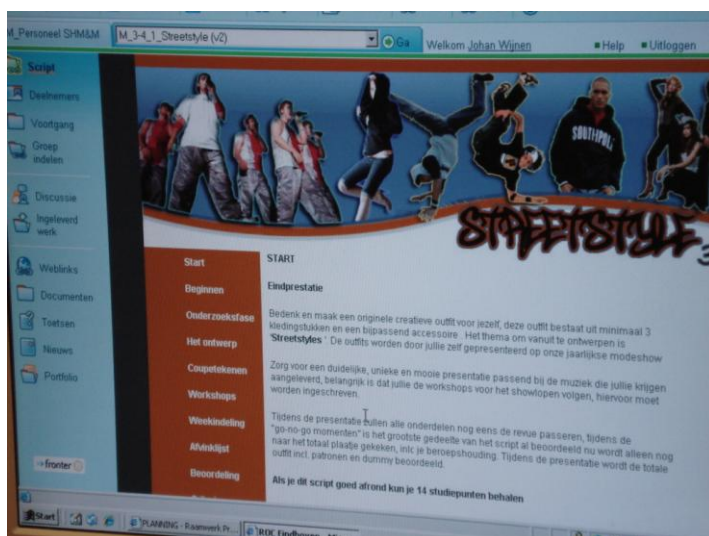
colleagues met in early 2004 to explore the idea of implementing a new method of learner assessment. But not only a new assessment method, they were looking far ahead of their peers, dreaming about dismantling the boundary between a student's 'working' and 'learning' life. Attendance at an educational institution, they thought, should be a period where students, young or old, learn skills and gain competency that prepares them for the next stage in their career. These ideas, once 'thrown' around in a meeting room in Eindhoven, are now formally known as Competence Based Education (CGO), a learning assessment model based on measuring a learner's skills and learning outcomes.

At this first meeting, the IT team not only discussed a change in assessment, but also the IT solution they would need to practically underpin this new system. They needed a product that was simple, and at the same time flexible – a tool that could facilitate and help integrate a 'real life education.' After an intensive selection process, the Fronter Platform was introduced through a small pilot project of 300 students and 10 teachers - one step closer for Willem and his team.



Willem van Dinther, E-Learning project leader at ROC Eindhoven

During the pilot program, the Fronter Platform was used to create a virtual school building, copying the physical layout of the Trade and Marketing school. Rooms and departments were setup, connected by corridors, and filled with different learner/teacher groups. In these rooms, students could access all the material and information they needed to complete their studies, hand-in assignments and communicate with their tutors and teachers.



Screen shot showing one of ROC Eindhoven's 'virtual classrooms'

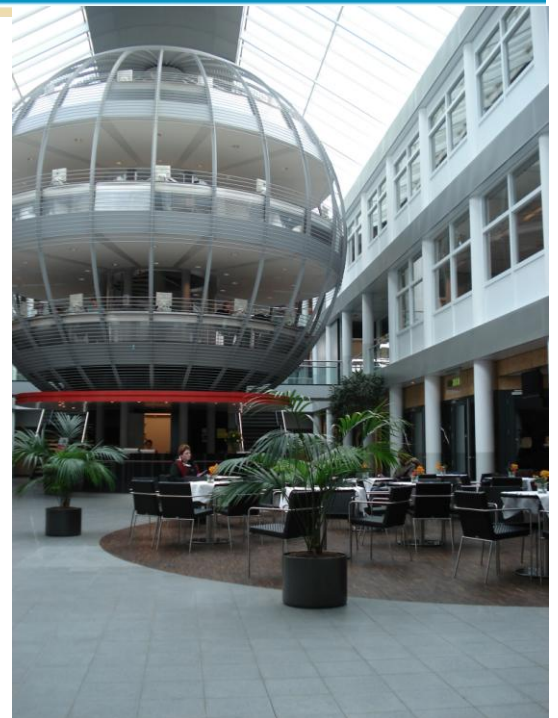
Central to CGO is skills assessment, achieved at ROC Eindhoven through Fronter's online portfolio tool. Different tasks and assignments represent different skills, and all completed assignments and projects are stored in a student's personal portfolio. This, in collaboration with an oral assessment, is used to assess whether learners have received their 'education' and gained the skills they need to crossover, or return to the 'working world.'

More than a new virtual school was created during the Fronter pilot programme, a physical transformation also began. ROC Eindhoven

found the most effective way to learn skills, is in an environment which simulates the 'real' world. Learners need to be prepared for the dynamic and competitive conditions of the job market.

The 'new' schools in ROC Eindhoven, physical and virtual, embrace an idea of preparation and partnership. Learners work in large carpeted rooms, with smaller rooms on the side for short theoretical lessons and discussions. The curriculum is not divided into many separate, disconnected parts; rather the links are emphasised and group work mandatory. All students work on their own computer online, and have regular meetings with an assigned peer group to discuss each others' progress and problems. 'Working together is the most important foundation for our success.' (says William van Dinther), and an important simulation of a 'real life' working environment.

Even closer to 'real life,' students set up their own 'business' and take part in practical internships with local companies. The Fronter Platform serves as the glue for this new system – a standard online location where resources can be accessed and delivered, even when working externally with businesses and companies.



Cafeteria at ROC Eindhoven with learning centre shown in the background



Edwin Verlangen (Pedagogic Director), Ron Kamping (Fronter BeNeLux Manager), René Jansen () and Willem van Dinther (Fronter Project leader) meet to resign their contract with Fronter in April 2008.

While ROC Eindhoven changed 'inside and out,' education policy experts started to recognise the same value of measuring and emphasising skills and competency. In our knowledge based economy, change is constant, meaning new skills are soon 'old,' and need to be continuously updated. Life is not neatly divided into 'school' and 'work,' but is always changing between the two - or as some have suggested, loses all boundaries altogether - in a process called 'Lifelong learning,' or 'active learning' – learning on the job.

But at the end of the day what you need to get a job, is the right skills, and the tools to help you measure them. ROC Eindhoven with the Fronter Platform is practicing what the European community has begun to preach. What a small group first dreamed of is 4 years later implemented on a large scale and part of a European wide economic policy. Competency Based Education (CGO) is the foundation for all programmes at ROC Eindhoven. Learners young and old come to gain skills preparing them for the 'real working world' and the journey there and back again.