

RESPONSIBLE E-TEACHING FOR AN EFFECTIVE E-LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I will detail and explain some basic points that an e-teacher should take into account in order to obtain the effective e-learning of his/her e-students. I will analyse the role of the teacher in this new educational environment as well as offering possible manners of creating an e-course and developing it without being an expert in informatics or new technologies. There will also be space for the role of e-students in order to recognise the main problems they encounter when dealing with e-courses.

KEYWORDS

e-teaching, e-learning, e-motivation, e-intercommunication, adaptation.

1. INTRODUCTION

As stated in the abstract of this paper, the intention is to show the position of a teacher who is not an expert in informatics or in new technologies, only a user, but who wishes to use the internet as a way of teaching and learning. From my own experiences as a teacher of e-learning, using official educational programs, and as a student of different e-learning platforms, I will analyse the main problems encountered when creating an e-course, developing it, and teaching it, as well as when receiving it.

In order to do that I will follow these steps:

- Firstly, give an explanation of some of the words used in the paper; not as a dictionary or glossary but as a declaration of principles involved in the context of teaching and learning.
- Secondly, a description of the main problems, at least in Spain, when trying to get access to the internet.
- Thirdly, analyse how to prepare an e-course.
- Fourthly, analyse how to present an e-course.
- Fifthly, analyse how to receive an e-course.
- Finally, a conclusion of the main points contained in the paper.

I have already published different works relating to e-learning or University teaching in general and to the motivation of students in particular. This paper constitutes another chapter in an infinite book about how to become a good teacher.

2. TERMINOLOGY

Before beginning it is important to point out why the dichotomy of terms such as the followings is fundamental: learning / e-learning, teaching / e-teaching, contents / e-contents, course /e-course, motivation / e-motivation, intercommunication / e-intercommunication., and so on. Due to the different educational context with which we are dealing, the necessities of teaching and learning are completely different. The complete explanation of these concepts would exceed the margins of this paper; however it is not difficult to understand that the motivation in class, in which for instance physical interaction is possible, is quite

different from the motivation via the internet. Nevertheless, when saying that these concepts are totally different from one another this does not include the idea that they are opposites, as all the pairs of words have the same objective, such as the motivation of the students, teaching, learning or establishing fluid communication. So, one must underline the first main idea about an educational e-context: Adaptation is a key concept when dealing with any new learning context, and an e-context is not an exception; of course a lot of non e-material will be of utility to a teacher, but it will be necessary to restructure and re-read the material at least, before putting them on the internet and transform them into an e-content, instead of the typical material used in classes. Obviously the same process applies to all the rest of the e-words.

Apart from this, in Spain there are still government campaigns to promote the use of the internet and even the presence of a computer in each household. There are significant differences between one part of the country and another, and some old people, who also form part of the e-students, have a lot of problems when connecting to the internet at home. The difficulty lies in that they must choose from a variety of different companies that offer different packages and the advertising of these packages usually involves a certain level of language specific to computers. Invariably once the decision has been made the actual installation of the package on their home computer falls to the consumer. A lot of people give up at this point and if they manage to install the package, with the initial installation proving so difficult, they do not view the internet as something that they can easily navigate, not even to mention participation in an e-course. Taking this into account it is useful to bear in mind that with e-teaching it is always possible that it is the students first experience of something like this, so we should not take for granted that they understand all the vocabulary or concepts being used, or we should at least ask, as we should do in any class, if anyone has any doubts.

3. PREPARING AN E-COURSE

The teacher is no longer the centre of the teaching and learning interchange, nowadays the centre is the student, therefore the centre is not the teaching, but the learning (see table 1).

Table 1. Change in the roles of teachers and learners. This table shows the difference in the educational context

	Before	Nowadays
Roles in the educational context	Teacher is the centre	Student is the centre
Methodologies have to do with the idea that...	Teaching was the centre	Learning is the centre

Taking that into account and leaving aside the specific context of Universities, although almost everything that is going to be explained can be applied to them, we are going to analyse the role of an inexpert teacher, inexpert in a “technological” sense, when creating an e-course for a private educational platform. The first point is not to be afraid of the computer or of the internet context because all platforms count with a group of experts, or at least one, who will help us, in this sense it is very important always to ask him/her for instructions, guidance, an example of another course...all our initial doubts should be solved in order to concentrate all our efforts in elaborating a competent and complete e-content. However, as we have already said before, dealing with an e-content is not the same as dealing with content, so there are some ideas that we should bare in mind:

- We are involved in a distance course, not physically present, apart from videoconferencing.
- Therefore, in the text, we must emphasize the usage of auxiliary elements, characteristics of these kinds of courses, such as emails, chats, debate groups, message boards, blogs, photo galleries, themed rooms, real time voice, and so on. They have to form part of our text, explanations and exercises in order to make them active ways of communication, teaching and learning. A way of achieving this objective is by means of the technique called “creation of a necessity”, that implies the introduction of the auxiliary elements as part of our learning and teaching context and interchange, as it was explained before, for instance, making the students present some of their exercises using different auxiliary elements.
- As in any other educational context, methodology and evaluation should be clear from the beginning, but not only for the students but also for the teachers because if we are working for a private platform, we will probably not be free to apply our own evaluation systems or methodologies. So,

before preparing the course itself we have to ask the members of the platform, our virtual “bosses” what kind of evaluation they approve of and what kind of methodology they expect.

- Apart from that it is very important to know all the possibilities offered by the platform, in relation to auxiliary elements, mentioned before, as well as to any other point of interest. We should make the best of the possibilities offered to us, using them in an active way for our students.
- Due to the e-context, it is also advisable to use the internet and other webs to complete some exercises, for instance in relation with possible information searches. In this sense we must always bare in mind that we are not only teaching specific contents but also teaching how to become an autonomous students, a feature which is of crucial importance in our field.
- We must never forget to revise the final product, the one edited by the professionals, before the beginning of the course. And, in order to establish a good relation with the students from the beginning, it is also important to have a list of emails or other details of the students to get in touch and welcome them to the course. E-learning is not a synonym of distant treatment at all.

4. GIVING AN E-COURSE

Following the same ideas as stated before, there are some features that must be underlined when teaching in an e-environment:

- Words are the main point of contact with our students. We do not have visual or physical contact or motivation, apart from the already known exceptions. We have to think about what we are going to say, how we are going to say it (more specifically the tone we will use) and also when are we going to say it, that is, not leaving large time lapses between a question and our answer, like it should be also in our “normal” classes, but in this case with even more relevance, because the student does not see us and does not know why we are not answering. Apart from that, taking into account the obvious pedagogical reasons, if a student give us his/his exercises and we take a lot of time to correct them he/she will not probably recognise the exercise or will have forgotten his/her doubts when we give it back to him/her.

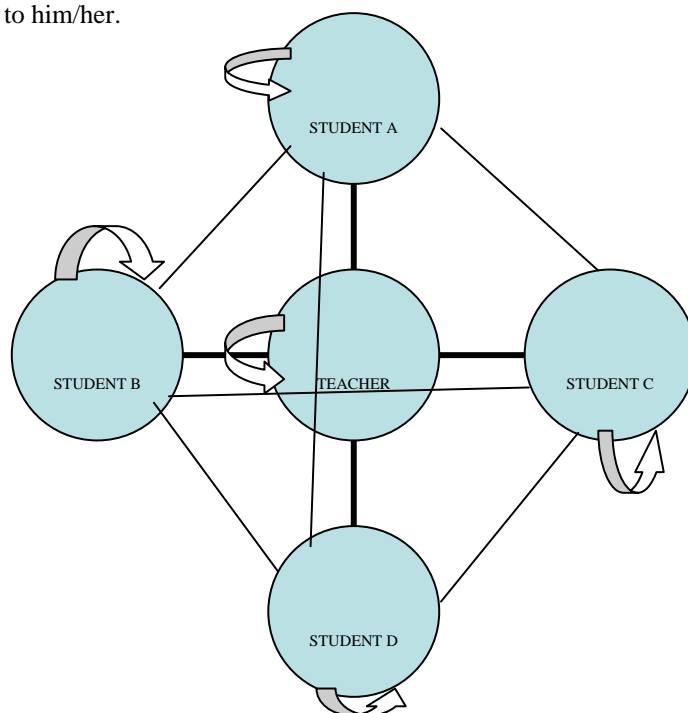


Figure 1. Communication in all every possible way. This figure is adapted from a previous work by the author, “Docencia universitaria y de formación continua a través de internet”, published in cd format, Retos Educativos en la Sociedad Digital. Actas del V Congreso Multimedia Educativo celebrado en Barcelona los días 29, 30 de Junio y 1 de Julio de 2005. ISBN: 84-88795-84-X. 149-167. See references.

- We have to encourage and promote communication in every possible way, using auxiliary elements, therefore the learning process will be enriched in many different ways:
- Therefore we have communication between all the different actors in the educational process: student-student, teacher-student, student-teacher, teacher-teacher (in case of coordination among classes), apart from the autonomous learning of the student him/herself and of the teacher too. It is an integral and significant part of the learning process with a large amount of feedback and autonomous learning, as already stated.
- It is important to establish a closing date for the receipt of exercises, as well as establishing and explaining a clear way of doing them, for instance via email or using any other of the auxiliary ways mentioned before. This can be applied to different activities that have to be carried out at the same time, for instance a chat. It can be very convenient to have a “welcome chat”, however we have to remember that a lot of people choose this kind of learning process due to its flexibility in timetables so, having “chats” has to be previously arranged with students or offering different alternatives, such as different hours, days or even having it at the weekend.
- As in any other educational context it is fundamental to have continuous feedback of our students’ impressions about the course and about their learning process by means of a continuous evaluation as well as an initial and a final one, which can be different from the one provided by the private platform, that will probably undertake their own evaluation of the course. However, for use, as a professional, it is advisable to have our own final evaluation that can be included in the last exercises of the course, in which the students will have the opportunity to give us their opinion of the course, in all its different aspects, even taking into account individual treatment.
- Again, one has to take into account that we do not have direct personal contact so we must take care of our language in the correction of the exercises or in any other communication, not to seem rude or uninterested has to be transmitted by words and quick answers.
- Always have the telephone number or other contact information of the technical group of the platform, because it is very easy to encounter any kind of problem that they have to solve.

5. RECEIVING AN E-COURSE

In this sense, the table below contains some of the main problems the students encounter in e-courses and the possible solutions, many of them have previously explained.

Table 2. E-learners’ problems. This table shows some common e-problems and their effective solutions

Problem	Solution
Cannot enter some web pages	Continuous technical support for teacher and students
Cannot use some auxiliary elements	
Lack of participation of the students	Motivation of the students by the teacher and active usage of e-resources
Lack of information about the course	Technical management and advertisement techniques
Lack of information after the course (for instance for obtaining a certificate)	Post-course attention is fundamental for the survival of the course(mouth to mouth can be positive or negative)
Distant treatment of students, slow feedback of exercises, not enough explanations of mistakes	Motivation of the students, correct treatment by words and quick answers, fluid communication using different auxiliary elements.

6. CONCLUSION

Many aspects could not be explained due to the length of the paper. E-learning has as many possibilities as the internet has, therefore in my point of view there are infinite possibilities. However, dealing with such a corpus means the presence of many difficulties but, not as many as to overshadow the benefits. Throughout the article some advantages and limitations have already been presented in a general way. Now we are going to specify some of them:

- E-students have the same rights and obligations as any other students.
- E-Evaluation and self-evaluation are of central importance in any educational context.
- All kind of communication interchanges should be encouraged in order to create a significant, integral and global educational e-environment, by means of the proper use of the auxiliary tools at hand.
- An e-teacher must know the principles and possibilities of the platform he/she is working for exactly, as well as its auxiliary elements.
- Technical support must always be accessible.
- If well directed, e-learning can be culturally richer than other kinds of learning due to the possibility of learning with people from all around the world at the same time.
- Communication has to be fluid and appropriate with the students since there is not, generally speaking, eye contact or physical contact.

To conclude, there are some disadvantages when dealing with an e-context, especially if you are not an expert in new technologies, there can be technical problems. Nevertheless I would never talk about limitations because I do not think that this method has limitations, since advances are present all the time. Apart from that, other problems are derived from teaching in a new educational environment, as is possible with any other context, we have to get used to our students, their new necessities, and so on.

On the other hand, its advantages and possibilities are infinite, it drives a critical and selective management of information and at the same time that encourages an autonomous and heterogeneous learning, open to the world and directly related to nowadays exigencies in work environments/the develops seen in today's working environments.

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