



Virtualizing Art Historiography: An Experience With Rooda Lms

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Abstract

This paper presents the project Art Historiography 1, approved under the Edital 14 SEAD/UFRGS titled Development to offer tutoring in courses with the use of ICTs and distance courses in undergraduate classroom courses. The Edital of UFRGS is part of a larger program, sponsored by CAPES, that aims to expand the use of ICTs in undergraduate classroom courses and to promote innovation in distance education. The Brazilian government wants to increase access to education by encouraging actions related with distance education.

The Art Historiography 1 course, object of our Project, is offered for the first time at the first semester 2011, as part of the curriculum of a new UFRGS undergraduate course, Art History. The main instructional technology tool used in the course is ROODA, an LMS created by the team of the Faculty of Education/UFRGS. For the course we have chosen the following ROODA resources: Lessons; Library; Webfolio; Forum; Survey and Diary Board. The Art Historiography course proposes many readings and the planned LMS activities are designed to stimulate discussion and provide exercises on the main issues raised during the study day, involving the student in a continuous and shared reflection on the topics covered during the semester.

1. Introduction

Patricia Behar, one of the responsables for the creation of ROODA LMS (Learning Management System) at UFRGS, says that

In the last decade, Brazilian universities are undergoing a process of very significant change, with regard to the introduction of distance learning (ODL) in the educational process. We could say that we are experiencing a moment of transformation, where the paradigms already present in society are not enough to explain the relations, needs and social challenges, and a new educational model is emerging in a process still in construction. [1]

In this scenario, projects involving ICT and the use of LMS begin to appear at the Arts Institute of UFRGS, a sector of the University that had not yet committed to using these new teaching technologies. Such is the case of the Art Historiography 1 Project, approved in the Edital 14 SEAD [Departament of Distance Education] / UFRGS, Development to offer tutoring in courses with the use of ICTs and distance courses in undergraduate classroom courses. The Edital of UFRGS is part of a larger program, sponsored by CAPES (Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel), that aims to expand the use of ICTs in undergraduate classroom courses and to promote innovation in distance education. The Brazilian government, as advanced by Behar, wants to increase access to education by encouraging actions related with distance education. In this paper we present, briefly, the environment ROODA, the current Brazilian legislation on distance education, our proposal for use of ROODA LMS in the course Art Historiography 1, as well as the results seen so far, with their strong and weak points.



2. About Rooda

ROODA is a virtual environment for teaching and learning, developed by UFRGS, to meet the demands of the teachers of this institution for distance education and to allow the use of ICTs in presential and semi-presential courses. It is used throughout the academic community, in undergraduate, graduate and extension courses. Behar et al., creators of this LMS, define the ROODA in the following terms:

ROODA—Cooperative Learning Net ([http:// www.ead.ufrgs.br/rooda](http://www.ead.ufrgs.br/rooda)) is a software platform that supports long distance as well as presential education. The source code is available at SourceForge and may be used in all WWW. It is a free software, user centered, that makes synchronous and asynchronous interaction/communication tools and publications available. Its first version started being developed in 2000 and, since then, it has gone through changes aiming to add new functionalities and improve performance. [2]

It is a free software, user-centered that, by adding synchronous and asynchronous communication tools, seeks to provide an interactive environment. Of the 22 features, 12 are always available and 10 can be chosen by the teacher according to his educational proposal. According to Behar et al., "Considering the issues of adaptability and usability, the environment can be assembled and configured by the teacher according to their educational goals". [3]

The interface is user friendly and intuitive, has a design that aims to ensure the usability and accessibility, and three interface themes are available, Graphite, Aqua and Photographic. The user can choose the theme of his preference.

The Education Department of UFRGS is attentive to the needs arising from the practical use of the LMS by students and teachers, and ROODA is in constant process of customization. The institution also offers training courses focused on the use the platform, and an accessible help system, consisting of text with pictures and small video tutorials.

3. Legislation

In Brazilian high education there is no need to request permission to offer semi-presential courses in courses that are already recognized, if followed the requirements of the Ordinance 4.059/04, being relevant the § 2 of Article 1 which states that "may be offered the subjects mentioned in the caput, in whole or part, provided that this offer does not exceed 20% (twenty percent) of the total workload of the course". [4] It is noteworthy that this value is relative to the whole course, i.e. a course can be half presential and half in distance mode, since the assessments are presential and the total hours in Distance Education on the undergraduate course does not exceed 20% of credits.

In the case of presential courses that have not been recognized, for example, newly created courses, there is no legal provision to offer semi-presential or distance courses unless the course in its initial proposal to the MEC [Ministry of Education and Culture] already contemplates these possibilities.

The BA in Art History is a UFRGS presential undergraduate course started in 2010, however, some teachers, aware of the new paradigm that is being created, chose to entering gradually the technology in their disciplines, providing materials and distance activities, through virtual learning environments maintained by the institution (Moodle and ROODA).

It should be noted that the classes remain characterized as presential mode, complying with the minimum hours required and offering these online resources to supplement learning. This occurs because there is no legal regulation for the provision of semi-presential courses in undergraduate courses not yet recognized, as is the case for most undergraduate courses in Art History in Brazil, because they were created recently.

4. Proposed use of ROODA

Donahue-Wallace et al. mention that many of the case studies on new technologies in the teaching of art history that are in their book on the subject deal with introductory level courses. According to them, this occurs "in part, to the well-known problems associated with lower level classes, which include large lectures covering too much material often attended by apathetic and passive learners, who



frequently have no experience with art and yet are expected to be inspired and prepared for advanced study at the end of the term". [5] This is certainly the case with Art Historiography 1, object of our Project, offered for the first time at the first semester 2011 (course's third semester), as part of the curriculum of the new UFRGS undergraduate course, Art History. In order to introduce the students (many of them without previous experience with art history and art historiography) to the intensive utilization of LMS, we choose ROODA, created by the team of the Faculty of Education/UFRGS, because of its accessibility and attractive interface.



Fig. 1. Homepage of Art Historiography 1 on ROODA.

For the course (Fig. 1) we use the following ROODA resources: Lessons (with the material presented in class, in pdf format); Library (with the translations into Portuguese of seminal texts on art historiography, from Cennino Cennini to Thoré-Bürger; this translations are made at present by Daniela Kern, Professor for the course, with the help of the student Ana Carolina Azevedo); Webfolio (with extra material for the students, as links and some works in foreign languages); Forum and Survey (for the debate on themes related to those discussed in classroom seminars) and Diary Board (an "intellectual journal", for individual reflection on learning processes). After this general view of ROODA features, we will show in greater detail the Forum.

The course has two kinds of Forum: general (Doubts Forum, Bulletin Forum, Wailing Forum) and of evaluation (Vasari Forum, already started, and Aleijadinho Forum). Among all the forums, we highlight the Wailing Forum (Fig. 2). The idea of creating it came on the first day of class, talking with the students. This is an entertaining space, open to any kind of whining, from those relating to the use of ROODA (some students resisted the idea at first) even to those that may go beyond the limits of the course.

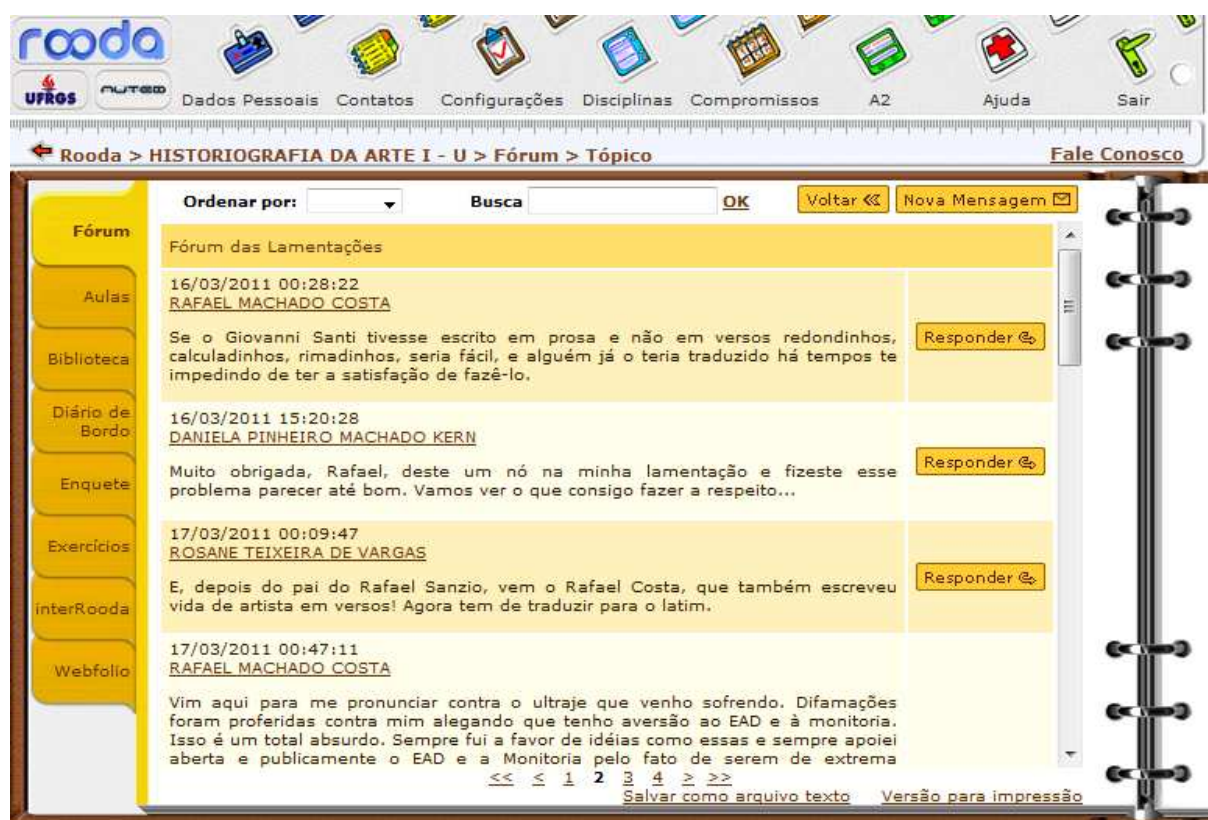


Fig. 2. Wailing Forum interface on ROODA.

The Art Historiography 1 course proposes many readings and the planned LMS activities are designed to stimulate discussion and provide exercises on the main issues raised during the study day, involving the student in a continuous and shared reflection on the topics covered during the semester, without neglecting the specific characteristics of the class.

5. Concluding remarks

By the time we observed in our experience with ROODA some strengths and weaknesses. Among the weaknesses we can mention the technical issue and the access to the environment, which, by having navigation certificate, displays warning messages and slows down the process in some browsers, discouraging students to join the LMS. In this (and others) cases the students count with the help of Ana Laura Benachio, course tutor. The organization of the environment is very intuitive and its tools are affordable, yet many students are not interested in exploring all the possibilities or do not understand some features.

Many participants, as we have seen, initially rejected the idea of using ROODA to complement their classroom activities, not because they have difficulty with technology, since most had used other LMS and even loose tools on the Internet (forum, upload files, surveys, etc.), but because they believe that their participation would require an extra effort, considering that they already have many others activities. It must be noted that this is a night course in which the majority of the class works eight hours a day and is enrolled in all or almost all offered courses.

After these initial questions, the class has regularly participated in forums and accessed the reading material in the library, as well as responded to surveys, although we have not achieved a full response, some even filled out your online profile, which prevents communications via ROODA.



We had some surprises in the monitoring of access, for example, students who are often on the Internet (users of instant messaging, blogs, twitter and social networks, among others) and had a low rate of access as well as students who have demonstrated against the use of technological resources in the classroom and who are regulars on the environment.

It is confirmed in our experience the hypothesis that people with difficulty in verbally expressing find their space in the virtual environment, contributing effectively and eloquently for the construction of the knowledge of colleagues via text written in the forums and Diary Board. Those who normally communicate in the classroom, also are collaborating in the virtual world, especially in the space for informal conversations.

In this context the Wailing Forum, the main virtual meeting point for students of Art Historiography 1 in ROODA, proved to be important for the construction of a more affective teaching and learning virtual environment, and has helped in their familiarization with ODL resources that can be used with much advantage in presential and introductory courses like this.

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