

Training course of e-trainers – the students' insight

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Abstract

Technological progress and the advent of the Internet led to the emergence of network society marked by sharp changes in the economy and the labour market, boosting the birth of new paradigms, models, educational communication processes and new learning scenarios. Indeed, the relationship between technology and pedagogy substantially changed the paradigm we are used to, breaking with the tradition of a student-centred teacher as "source of knowledge" and the strict observance of a predetermined curriculum.

The introduction of information and communication technologies in different scenarios of human activity, including the training, has contributed to strengthening the working methods of drawing and learning based on cooperation among its members. The acquisition of such skills, cooperative and collaborative, is of great relevance and should be across all scenarios of people's lives.

In this paper we start from an Online Trainers Training course organized around motivating and flexible methodologies, which integrate different teaching resources, dynamic and interactive content, which diversify the channels of communication, ways of working, learning scenarios. In this course students should develop and strengthen skills and knowledge regarding teaching, pedagogy and technologies that could be appropriate to an educational framework of changing and innovation.

In a context of modern network societies that require the consolidation and anticipation of new learning scenarios, the results of the evaluation of the course by the trainees, are important indicators of the quality of this training. It also provide some additional information on the challenges facing the excellence in training processes.

At the end of the course we applied a survey to the students that attended, covering the following aspects: professional and personal characterization; assessment of each module; pedagogical guidelines; pedagogical usability; continuous quality improvement. The results of this survey supplemented with the comments that were being collected by the course coordination team is what we propose to present and discuss in this paper.

1. Introduction

Technological progress and the advent of the Internet led to the emergence of network society (Castells, 2000) marked by sharp changes in the economy and the labour market, boosting the birth of new paradigms, models, educational communication processes and new learning scenarios. Indeed, the relationship between technology and pedagogy substantially changed the paradigm we are used to, breaking with the tradition of a student-centred teacher as "source of knowledge" and the strict observance of a predetermined curriculum.

The introduction of information and communication technologies in different scenarios of human activity, including the training and the continuous education, has contributed to strengthening the working methods of drawing and learning based on cooperation among its members. The acquisition of such skills, cooperative and collaborative, is of great relevance and should be across all scenarios of people's lives.

In this paper we start from an Online Trainers Training course organized around motivating and flexible methodologies, which integrate different teaching resources, dynamic and interactive content, which diversify the channels of communication, ways of working, learning scenarios. In this course students should develop and strengthen skills and knowledge regarding teaching, pedagogy and technologies that could be appropriate to an educational framework of changing and innovation.

This is an online learning course, targeted for higher education professors. It has become an essential and strategic tool for national policies, as it facilitates the implementation of educational media in higher education. And also for the establishment of networks of formal and non-formal learning. In a context of modern network societies that require the consolidation and anticipation of new learning scenarios, the results of the evaluation of the course by the trainees, are important indicators of the quality of this training and its evolution. It also provides some additional information on the challenges facing the excellence in training processes.

At the end of the course we applied a survey to all the students that attended, covering the following aspects: professional and personal characterization; assessment of each module; pedagogical guidelines; pedagogical usability; continuous quality improvement. The results of this survey supplemented with the comments that were being collected by the course coordination team is what we propose to present and discuss in this paper.

2. Online Learning and Teaching

Online learning and teaching in higher education is a particularly demanding exercise when it is related with professors' training. It requires specific models and strategies and the leadership on processes of innovation. That is it requires a special attention to instructional design.

The Online Trainers Training course follows a 'contextualized instructional design' (Filatro, 2004). It has dynamic and recursive characteristics in which conception, objectives, development, implementation, assessment are graphically expressed in a spiral. In this particular course we assume that the assessment is a component linked in spiral with the design and development of the course. It is therefore important to design instruments to support this assessment so that their results can be integrated into the process, resulting in a logic of continuous quality improvement.

The main challenge is to complement activities for the training of instructional designers with the development of skills that allow everyone, to be more effective designers of instruction. For this we developed a science-based approach in which the instructional design has been derived from theory and empirically verified via experimental research (Reiser; Dempsey, 2007). We do agree with Reiser and Dempsey (2007) when they state that instructional design involves both science, in the pursuit of understanding, and technology, related to the artefacts mobilized.

The goal of the instructional design assessment is knowledge about the learning and teaching processes. This knowledge can support organizational strategies on using educational media in higher education.

3. Methodological Strategies

In the context of our study one of the course evaluation instruments is a survey to be completed by trainees immediately after its conclusion. The objectives of the survey are sustained in an wide analysis model that brings together diverse contributions, namely: Dias (2008; 2012); Filatro (2004); Grifoll, J. et al. (2009); Pena, M. & P. Stara, V. (sd); Romiszowski H. P. (2004); Wirth, M. A. (2005); among others. Here we have the following goals:

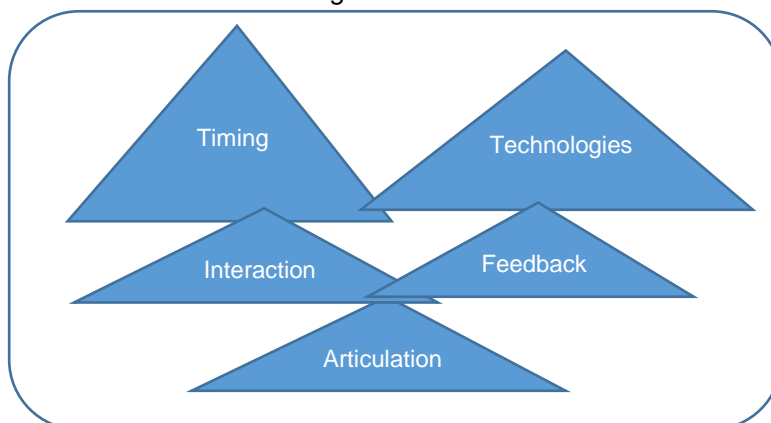
- * In depth knowledge of the profile of the trainees;
- * To know the perception of the trainees about the organization of the course;
- * To know the trainees' opinions about pedagogical usability of the course;
- * To identify weaknesses, strengths and opportunities for improvement of the course.

In this paper we focus on the last ones - weaknesses, strengths and opportunities for improvement. The discussion of the survey results is complemented with other evaluation results performed by the professors involved in the course and other comments posted in the coordination site.

4. Weaknesses, Strengths and Opportunities

The weaknesses that were pointed out were referred by most students and professors. The figure below shows the weakness, the size of the shape indicates the frequency of each reference.

Figure 1 – Weakness



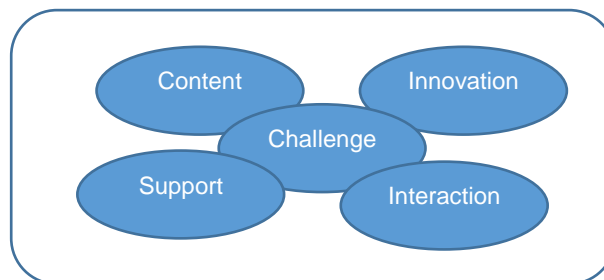


The timing includes time managing difficulties, namely the conciliation between professional tasks, family and other daily routines with the demands of the course. It also includes the timeline of each activity. The time extension of each module was an aspect noticed both by trainees and professors. In fact, this is a central question in theory and research about eLearning (Hasan and Lasser, 2010; Henriques e Seabra, 2012).

On one hand technologies are compelling in every dimension of our daily lives. On the other hand we find high levels of technological illiteracy and even more basic and instrumental difficulties. At the same time, there are comments that point out the need of more articulated links of content, virtual interaction within communities and regular feedback. This meets Siemens (2004) when he states that 'networks and complexity are changing the learning and teaching process and experience' (np).

Let's now see what strengths were identified.

Figure 2 - Strengths



The instructional design has an appropriate content, innovative and challenging. Interaction and support were features also stressed by students. Learning in virtual environments became a self-organized process that requires a personal, informational and open system that could be able to classify its own interaction with a given environment (Hasan and Lasser, 2010). These aspects stressed by the trainees unveil a reflexive process and a professional development. One of the students go further by saying that this course should be required to all professors.

As opportunities referred were coherent with the aspects already stressed, we don't present a diagram, as we did for the former categories. But still it is relevant to highlight the questions of time managing, technologies potentialities, interaction and feedback. These dimensions must be considered as quality indicators of distance learning programmes. As those are important determinants of learner demand, it is relevant for improving instructional design and for research (Lasser, 2006).

5. Final Remarks

In conclusion we must enhance some questions that deserve further discussion. The first one is related to the time management. Distance learning teachers often have to put in extra amount of time in developing and implementing content, tutoring and supervision.

Other issue to enhance is the assessment and quality. We must understand the quality in its broader meaning which includes relevance and impact of the courses. The outcome measures of quality are dependent on the specificities of input parameters. Those are also highly dependent on the quality of distance learning teachers, which requires specialised training (Hasan and Lasser, 2010).

For Hasan and Lasser (2010) 'the central role of research and development cannot be overemphasised. Research is needed to develop new instructional design and course material, teacher training programmes, student assessment approaches and quality systems, and DL infrastructures. To explore the potential of mobile learning, game based learning, remote laboratories and the adoption of IT supported business processes in universities are important issues that will shape the future of network based learning. Another area of research that is especially important (...) is on different cultural contexts in using and implementing eLearning' (np). We will explore this axis in another paper, as we have this course with a group of Brazilian professors.



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