

International Conference
“e-Learning Methodologies and Institutional Policies”
Conclusions

This document summarizes the most relevant conclusions derived from the several contributions and discussions developed in the international conference on “e-Learning Methodologies and Institutional Policies” (April 17th-19th, 2008 Zaragoza Spain). This conference provided useful information for teachers and managers of educational centres as well as people in charge of educational policies.

General subjects

In general, the experts point out the necessity of a full integration of technologies in the current teaching-learning in the classroom. The power of technological resources relies on their availability when they are needed.

The recent studies show that ICT are a good resource for promoting the active learning (the learner learn doing things), individualized (the learner do things at his own pace), but also ICT promote the groupware learning because the activities of the teacher encourage the interactivity between learners.

In the case of students behind their studies, or with fewer abilities, or exceptionally gifted students, or with low social abilities, ICT are a great opportunity for them to make the most of their stay at the educational centre. They endow them with the possibility of meeting the objectives in a much more personalised way. Concerning to this, it should be mentioned the case of students with different mother tongues, to whom the eventual use of multilingual multimedia resources makes the learning process easier.

Educational Context

The fast integration of the different sectors of population (mainly children and youngsters) in the new knowledge society is bringing about a revolutionary impact in their means of communication, in the way they share communication, in their motivation and in the establishment of interpersonal relationships. The world of education, with its rigid structures, finds it hard to respond to these changes, although the arrival of the new “digital natives” to the classrooms, that is, students who have been born within the society interconnected through digital means and resources, it is going to forge an accelerated transformation in the teaching methodologies. Thus, they are deep changes which have consequences in their habits, in their participation in society and, therefore, in the learning process.

New concepts emerge, such as “digital identity”, “social networks”, “virtual communities” and “Internet collaborative scenarios”. We must also bear in mind the ongoing development of digital contents, accessible through the Internet, which brings about radical changes regarding terms like: library, encyclopaedia, dictionary, text book, homework, academic work, etc.

The educational structures, teachers and all the society in general, must be aware of these changes so that they can adapt to them progressively and promptly.

Media and resources

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is very fast. Thus, new solutions and ideas arise as an improvement for the educational world. Under the new paradigm web 2.0, users play a double role as recipient and transmitter of information. Flexible and asynchronous systems such as forums, blogs and wikis, are gaining importance in the new virtual learning environments. A key feature for the success of the use of these resources in the different educational sectors lies on the fact that they should be applied with appropriate methodological criteria.

Resources do not produce innovation on their own, but they lead to important improvements when the media are used professionally on the part of teachers.

Concerning the contents, it is noticeable an increasing variety of these. Moreover, it emerges new contents in new multimedia and hypermedia formats, which progress satisfactorily and quickly, and they will include sooner than later powerful aspects such as “mixed reality”, where real environments go together with synthetic elements, making the information clearer and more accessible. On the other hand, by means of new systems for knowledge management, these contents are integrated within repositories that allow a much easier and quicker access to them.

One of them most remarkable resources is the e-Portfolio, as a digital medium of the evidences related to the competences acquired during the different stages (school, academic and professional).

As for platforms for virtual learning environments, we find the need of complementing Intranet with elements opened to the whole web, but being accessible and easy to use as resources integrated in those environments. This means that the need to establish environments with limited access for specific groups of students must be compatible with the use of open sources.

Another unanimous opinion is that media and resources must be integrated in the teachers and students' habits. Experiences being carried out in relation with the integration of resources in the classroom, such as Tablet-PC for students connected to the Internet, digital whiteboards, etc. guarantee the previously mentioned opinion clearly.

Methodologies

Children and young people are used to handling these resources actively and in a participative way from their initial stages. This fact allows putting into practice active and collaborative methodologies in the different educational levels. The main focus on teaching proceedings relies on the student and his/her learning.

The teacher, whose role obviously continues being essential, turns from being just a transmitter into being a learning facilitator and guide. For this purpose, he/she establishes the suitable conditions so that, through flexible interchange and handling of information, collaborative work and different types of activities; students get a significant learning (able to be applied in real situations).

Consequently, we faced a necessary change in teachers' action approach, who must be more and more expert in tasks such as the coordination of virtual learning communities, the handling and management of the resources, elaboration or adaptation of digital contents for the learning process, management of active and collaborative methodologies, management of telematic tutorship, formative evaluation, etc.

In fact, the evaluation, a fundamental element for the motivation, needs to be constant and well-integrated in the teaching + learning process. e-Portfolio is, at the moment, an especially useful resource for this purpose.

It can be stated that e-Learning resources and methodologies are getting a more and more important role, not only in the distance teaching + learning process, but also as a complement of the face to face teaching + learning. It does not intend to replace the classroom by e-Learning, but to take advantage of these new resources.

Institutional Policies

Institutional policies in this matter have to meet the needs concerning teachers' training on methodologies, development and adaptation of digital contents, hardware-software systems and infrastructures.

In reference to the Spanish case, the Conference put special emphasis on the need to break the excessive existing rigidities in all the levels of our educational system. The excessive regulations and segmentation are incoherent barriers to the new frame of the Knowledge Society.

One of the main critical success factors consists of equipping the institutions and educational organizations with flexibility mechanisms that allow a permanent adaptation to the fast changes taking place, changes whose rate is going to increase. Bearing in mind all the time the true purpose of the different educational stages, it is necessary to approach management of the change underlying regulations and all the initiatives related to Education.

The fast development of new resources and their assimilation by digital natives makes it necessary to establish specific training plans for teachers of all levels. It is necessary as well that the educational institutions promote sensitization actions for teachers so that they understand the need for a change like the great possibilities and advantages this new digital scenario offers. Thus, the change is not a choice to be considered, but a necessity.

It is obvious that these transformations force teachers to put great additional effort that will have to be considered in their work charge, so that the change can be developed in a sustainable way and it does not fall to the voluntarism of a small part of the teaching staff. The regulatory framework must appropriately consider the new model of teacher and must establish mechanisms for the continuous improvement and the recognition of the important work that falls on the professionals of education.

Finally, there is a need to promote the cooperation between the different educational levels (Primary, Secondary, Vocational Training, University, and Adult Education) in order to share innovative experiences with the use of the TIC and to carry out new experiences, which will avoid the gaps in students' training and will make it easier to learn throughout all their life.

References

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