Chapter II

E-Learning and New Teaching Scenarios: The Mediation of Technology Between Methodologies and Teaching Objectives

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes the reciprocal influences between various teaching methodologies supported by information and communication technology (ICT) and the teaching objectives that are pursued by means of these methodologies. The authors present the main characteristics of the conceptual model which has led to the definition of the teaching objectives and the results of the experience of the “eLearning@LIUC” project, where the validity of the hypotheses underlying the model has been tested through their application within concrete contexts. They believe that the presented model, with its analysis of the possible correlations between teaching objectives, teaching methodologies, and technological tools, can provide a new awareness of the opportunities offered by the adoption of ICT in teaching.

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The Point of View

The use of tools based on information and communication technology (ICT), and on the Internet in particular, usually aims at pursuing economies of scale by reducing distribution costs and/or increasing the number of users. The focus is therefore more on reach or quantity than on richness or quality (Weigel, 2000). E-learning projects do not escape this tendency. Although direct interpersonal relationships are generally recognized as more effective than those mediated by ICT, their lack of reproducibility makes them expensive, from the point of view of both:

- The teacher, since each new edition requires the replication of many of her/his costs; and
- The learner, due to space and time bonds which demand her/his here-and-now presence.

This leads to a prevalence of strategies which tend to interpret e-learning as a tool for reducing the organizational costs of education rather than as a method for improving the quality of education. The common emphasis is on efficiency in the management of educational processes (D’Angelo, 2003), particularly with respect to the distribution of and access to teaching material and the remote interaction among the subjects involved in the process.

The Objectives of E-Learning

In the design of an e-learning project, two general objectives can be sought (Keeton, Sheckley, & Krejci-Griggs, 2002; Mayes & de Freitas, 2004):

- **Efficiency**: In the attempt to reduce the space and time bonds of teaching processes, e-learning operates as a substitute for traditional education, thus increasing some of its quantitative features.
- **Effectiveness**: In the attempt to improve teaching processes, e-learning operates as a complement to traditional education, thus increasing some of its qualitative features.

For organizations whose business is education, as in the case of our university, and for whom e-learning can prove a good opportunity to pursue their own mission (Moore, 1993; Trentin, 2000; Piccoli, Ahmad, & Ives, 2001; Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2001; Syed, 2001), these poles represent the extremes of a continuum of
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