Excellence in Virtual Education: The Tutor Online Approach

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is a fact that the notion of education has been changing over the last years, mainly because of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In this globalized world, we are swamped by information, and the key issue is to surf it and choose the appropriate bit. This wealth of information and the need of constantly updating knowledge in order to carry out our work in the way we are demanded to by society, turn learning into lifelong self-training. This article aims to present the experience of collaborative work in a virtual learning scenario held by the University of Salamanca, Clay Formación Internacional, and Asociación Logo in the continuing education and specialist course Technologies and networked training methodologies: Tutor online. Being former students, now we belong to the tutor and scientific team. The Tutor online project (TOL) is an instance of how to widespread quality continuing education and smooth away the access to it. Its asynchronous nature allows each individual to adapt it to their own particular time and space needs.

Keywords: collaborative learning; competency-based education; e-learning; Internet-based instruction; networked learning; online teaching; student-centered learning

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are having an increasing influence on the working, occupational, and business worlds as they create and generate new occupations and professions, and strengthen other ways of dealing with continuing education.

The development and introduction of ICTs in distance learning systems has been bringing about changes in the teaching-learning processes for years, and therefore, changes in the profiles of students and teachers who see a series of alternatives to classroom attendance in these

The interest and appreciation regarding these initiatives stem from personal and social needs. Adaptability, flexibility, cooperation, overcoming barriers, etc., are all concepts related to this type of learning. However, there is a risk that multiple sectors (politics, business, learning institutions, professionals, and users) will come up with theoretical concepts of no practical application whatsoever. That is why debating and searching for realistic and efficient solutions is still a priority so that it does not all end up being a mere declaration of intent. This type of training is acquiring considerable presence in sectors such as occupational and business training, but according to the latest Estudio General de Internet (http://www.egi.es), only 56.5% of the Spanish Internet users who received online training said they were satisfied with it.

The continuing education and specialist course, Technologies and networked training methodologies: Tutor online (TOL) (http://www.tutoron-line.info), aims to overcome the inconvenience created by the lack of interaction between teachers and students and, which affected first-generation distance education. It is assumed that we are all protagonists (students, tutors, authors, etc.) in an online training space and we can all contribute to the construction of knowledge by sharing our personal and professional experience and playing different roles (student-tutors, expert-beginners, and so on).

In doing so, we have the possibility of becoming active participants in a teaching and learning community in a virtual environment, taking advantage of the possibilities it presents, pointing them out and identifying and collecting ways of improving the course after each edition in a constant pursuit of quality. This initiative, which started in September 2004, has already gone through four editions (TOL I--TOL IV) and is a constantly evolving experience, which intends to continue developing itself during following editions. We can trace its evolution throughout its history.

**OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of the TOL course is to provide participants with a high-level professional course regarding networked training, whether for academia, business, or the working world.

Quality training for a new kind of professional is offered: the tutor online, key to the development of all high-level eLearning, whose function and profile had not been clearly defined up to now. Specifically, this objective can be summed up with the following specific targets:

- To develop the abilities, techniques, strategies, and potentialities required for the training of a professional tutor online.
- To dominate the main psychological, communicative, and methodological abilities used in eLearning.
- To know the quality indicators in online training experiences.
- To learn about and efficiently use the specifications, standards, and technological elements, which come into play in the eLearning processes, especially platforms, as well as collaborative and authoring tools.
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