Chapter 17

Special Educational Needs
Workshop Online:
Play Activity – Homework in the Jungle

Danny Barrantes
University Teaching Department, University of Costa Rica, Costa Rica

Maurizia D’Antoni
University Teaching Department, University of Costa Rica, Costa Rica

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes an educational setup experience implemented at the Department of University Teaching at University of Costa Rica. Its relevance lies upon the process and implementation of a didactic strategy based on a digital exercise, its mediation, and the resulting learning scenario that enhances and promotes accessibility and inclusion as a crucial discussion in higher education. A game activity involving a board game is one of the activities included, and its purpose aims to encourage changes in teachers’ attitudes through creativity. It is relevant to foster appropriate curriculum arrangements and support measures as required, ensuring effective learning resulting in positive outcomes in higher education and wellbeing of students and staff. It is important to develop sector-wide technology facilities and staff development to enable colleges to provide an education capable of speaking everybody’s language.

INTRODUCTION

Education and universities currently face great challenges in terms of setting themselves as spaces that conceive humans as integral social beings. The interest, of course, lies in the need to read a context that surrounds students in each of their disciplinary cultures, so that they can be aware of a world that moves easily between standards and trends; being this an unsafe understanding because of its very nature that opens up exclusively to those who meet the standards.

Therefore, our current educational thinking and subsequent educational development, which

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is shaped in the various teaching strategies, must build learning processes that mediate interactions with “tools that promote learning, sociality, community, autonomous and creative intercourse among people, and the interaction of people with their environment,” (Kahn & Kellner, 2007) a big concern that is held in the foundation of this present experience.

The Department of University Teaching (from now on referred to as DEDUN) belongs to the Teaching Training School in the Faculty of Education, at University of Costa Rica (UCR). This University strives to provide an environment free from any form of discrimination and, therefore, it is committed to non-discriminative and inclusive teaching practices, as for a deep interest and concern about diversity and inclusion, reflected on UCR’s policies that beyond any speech or ethical standing, are official and mandatory into the diverse development and processes in the different realms of our institution (Barrantes, et. al., 2011).

Article number 3 on the University of Costa Rica Constitution expresses the following: The purpose of the University of Costa Rica is to attain the changes society needs to accomplish the common good, through a policy aimed at achieving true social justice, integral development, full freedom and full independence of our people (Consejo Universitario, 2001). At the UCR, DEDUN is the department responsible for training and updating professors on issues related to teaching, education or inclusive education.

Moreover, in accordance with the enactment of Law 7600, the University aims to generate a teacher training process to address the issue of disability, as it is apparent from the University Senate agreement N. 4919, 2004, article N. 8 (Consejo Universitario, 2001). “To request the Department of University Teaching, Teacher Training School of the University of Costa Rica to include in the University Teaching course contents related to the implementation of the provisions of Act 7600 of Equal Opportunities for people with disabilities in Costa Rica (Consejo Universitario, 2004)”.

“University teaching” is a 15 week course that is intended for in-service UCR’s professors from all the different disciplines that involve teaching. It promotes a critical and reflective approach to educational practices in the university classroom. Its nature and intention is introductory, so attendees can analyze different frameworks that exist in university teaching regarding different disciplines, every time a professor is planning and constructing educational scenarios.

There are two versions of the course: (1) blended: 50% online and 50% stationary meetings- and (2) an online version (Figure 1). In both cases, there is a department committee that defines the materials to be used as well as the order of topics and various logistical and administrative details. Thus, many of the materials are designed with the expressed intent of digital use, in order to promote interaction with teachers through the institutional spaces available, such as Mediation Virtual1 and DEDUN webpage.

Within the range of different didactic material used, there is a special interest to develop customized teaching elements, this after given learning styles that come up in different combinations, specific to the diverse population who attend this course every semester.

This fact matches what Bolter remarks “HCI (Human-Computer Interaction) researchers critique existing and developing computer systems. Their critiques may be severe, but their purpose is to enable these systems to respond more effectively to the needs of those who use them. HCI aligns itself with social sciences in using qualitative and quantitative methods to come up with the principles of good design. In its practical intent, however, HCI more closely resembles the theoretical aspects of the industrial or fine arts such as graphic design.” (Bolter, 2004). This could be one of the main variables to discuss since from its technical and didactical understanding, the priority to fulfill one’s need remains as the major goal.

It is interesting that Illich’s claim seems to be right when we talk about education and standard-
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