Abstract

Santiago del Estero is a province in the Argentina Republic. It is the oldest province in the country and it has a population of 912,000 inhabitants. There are two universities in Santiago del Estero, one is private and the other one is public, run by the National State. In this piece of work I will refer to the experience of carrying out a Plan to improve the long-distance education.

The School of Innovation of The National University of Santiago del Estero, registered in a semi-attendance modality, has the Educational offer in the following majors: Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor in Pre-school Education, Bachelor in Educational Management and Educational Management Analyst.

Although this proposal is not the most innovative one, it has to be pointed out that within the University framework, it emerges as a proposal with great innovation. It intends to become a valid option to be taken into account since it fulfills with one of the aims of long distance educational courses which is to be an accessible system to a larger population.

In its history, it can be observed that this proposal emerges as something innovative. However, in the last years it did not get significant advances neither in the technological nor in the pedagogical fields.

The modality of the courses with university degrees and the intermediate title has the semi-attendance mode for the theoretical-practical lessons as well as for the workshops undertaken in the different cycles.

This modality fulfills the legislation of the courses registered as the modality of blending learning.

In the Resolution of the Approval it is stated that the long distance modality is a proposal committed to the democratization of the teaching. It coincides with Edith Litwin who considers the long distance Education as a solidarity response against the diversity of problems that hinders the regular class attendance, and it is an innovative option that tends to different styles and possibilities.

Keywords: Access to education, Blended learning, Democratization of the teaching

Initial Stage

The teachers of the School to the Educational Innovation are mostly academic professors, who tried to conform to the source model, but the only thing many make is to propose tutorials as consultation instances. They do not conceive the tutorials as instances of learning. These teachers are mostly people older than 50 who received isolated and disjointed training on topics related to the distance education.

At that time, it was conceived that the resources supporting the system were always on the basis that the central issue was the class attendance.

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PROPOSAL FOR IMPROVEMENT

This plan of work, which was begun by the coordination team in 2010, had the aim of promoting actions tending to a transformation in the practices. It had the intention of being able to reach an educational offer of good quality following a model of long-distance education adapted to the context it is developed.

The main theoretical concepts that guided this proposal were:

Edith Litwin (2003, p. 20) makes the following concept:

The present development of the technology favors the creation and enrichment of the proposal of the long distance education since it enables an agile addressing of the numerous treatments of topics. In the same way, technology can generate new ways of contact between teachers and students and among students themselves. Modern technologies solve the crucial problem of long-distance education which is the interactivity.

Undoubtedly, with the use of technology, the ways of learning, teaching and having access to the knowledge have been modified, which means a challenge to those whose work is teaching. We must give a step aside from the model we have been taught to be able to understand and participate in a new model that demands new roles and new competences. But, first we must be able to understand the features of the society of the information we are in.

Lorenzo Garcia Aretio (2007, p. 27) states the following concept:

It would be relevant to approach a concept of the society of the information, understanding it as a social system based on the support of the new technologies which facilitates not only the access to all kinds of information, data, regardless of temporal or geographical area in which they are embedded, but also the interconnection between individuals. Considering that the information is necessary but not just to acquire such data but also to be used in other contexts, this conception has required new approaches on how to teach in the society of information.

And so that is how the Commission of the European Communities, in 1995, establishes the following objectives, as Garcia Aretio (2007, p.28) stated:

- Learning to learn and developing a lifelong curiosity and desire to learn to enrich life in all its aspects
- Learning to anticipate and solve new problems, devising alternative solutions
- Learning to locate relevant information and transform it into knowledge
- Learning to relate the teachings with reality
- Learning to think in an interdisciplinary and inclusive way, in order to perceive all dimensions of the problems and/or situations
Gutiérrez Martín states:

It is necessary and urgent a multiple literacy with critical-reflective character that transcends the purely instrumental and has as a priority the training to transform information into knowledge and make knowledge an element of collaboration and transformation of the society (2003, p. 24).

The society of the knowledge demands major competitions as regards the aptitude to locate, to produce, to understand, to analyze and to relate the different information to which one gains access to turn them into knowledge. All these actions, imply a landslide at the time of thinking about educational offers at distances, since it is not possible to ignore this new context. Furthermore, these requirements imply other ways of gaining access to the knowledge.

In the society of knowledge, knowledge is the main issue. And the whole knowledge that the people have as regards their work and experience of life is considered tacit knowledge. And when it becomes explicit, it is shared, it is spread out. It means that the one who receives it, transforms information into knowledge.

The means by which it is transformed into knowledge is its dissemination, this is the way the information is shared at first. That is why communication networks are really useful. And this fact, in turn requires new skills, which until now were not considered necessary in the training, which involve traditional, visual, technological and digital or multimedia literacy. That means, various forms of representation due to new technologies. These literacies depend and vary according to social, interpersonal and cultural contexts.

Therefore, the knowledge management, is the process of identifying, grouping, sorting, and continually sharing knowledge of all kinds. The reason of this process is to meet present and future needs, to identify and exploit existing knowledge resources as well as the acquired ones and to develop new opportunities.

**CONSIDERING THE PEDAGOGICAL MODELS**

Teaching models, as Garcia Aretio regards, refer to prototypes or diagrams that guide and give structure to the thought and action of all the actors involved in the process of education. Behind the different models there are theories, ideologies, purpose, values, norms that try to interpret reality and lead it on the basis of a few goals and objectives.

As Salinas raises (2004):

Having a pedagogical model contributes to the systematic and unified description of the existing experiences, in order to discover, with some degree of provisionality, what and how distance-learning is developed in a particular course or experience. It also supports and improves the design and development of courses in virtual environments for teaching and learning.
As Fernandez (1999) says:

the models serve as organizers of the theoretical, research and teaching practice activity. They constitute a platform for reflection and research to generate new approaches that structure the basis and foundation of new models. This means, as it is also stated by Escudero, models are a simplified representation of the reality.

These guidelines delimited the plan of improvement, which involved action:

- as regards the pedagogical field
- as regards the technological field

Starting this stage calls us on issues, so entrenched of other models, which today have no validity.

In order to make significant changes, a program of training in stages was initially developed.

Training issue from the starting point of disciplinary workshops, by areas of knowledge, in which distance education training is begun. This training would imply: strategies, paradigms and ways of teaching, learning, monitoring, evaluating and also the production of material to work. Everything will contribute to a real change of position as to the modality of blended learning.

**FIRST STAGE OF INITIATION**

The idea of being trained in new skills will be promoted among teachers for them to be able to participate at present in the new scenarios of the educational field. Teachers are already convinced that training is compulsory nowadays.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Promoting a positive attitude towards the use of technology on teachers and students
- Outlining the training according to prior knowledge that teachers and students have in getting trained in a virtual environment
- Stimulating the deployment and use of technologies through learning

At this first stage, the focus will be on the attitude of the learners. Then according to the information we get, we will plan the topics based on the previous knowledge of the recipients. Mainly issues related to relevance and possibilities that provide virtual environments, as well as their impact on distance education will be introduced.
CONTENTS
The content will be:

- New competencies for distance education
- Teaching styles and strategies
- Learning modality

At this stage the focus will be made on the training on new competencies that will have an impact on the roles to be played by teachers and students.
The topics to work with will be:

- Paradigms in the long-distance education
- Pedagogical and communicational competencies
- The teacher as a tutor and as a guide
- Moodle platform and its tools

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Call response: number of teachers who choose to bet rained
- Number of people who have enrolled in the course
- Opinion poll to discuss expectations: participants response
- Record of the teachers expectations drawn from the first meeting of training, through diagnostic surveys
- Number of teachers who use the Moodle platform
- Records of meetings by teams of teachers in each curriculum area

SECOND STAGE OF TRAINING

This training stage will focus on the new roles that should play the teacher today, adapted to the society of knowledge. And it is at this point, where a new way of considering the teacher role in the educational fact arises. Not to be just a conveyor of knowledge, but a knowledge builder. Here new technologies will offer useful tools to achieve this goal, as long as we consider them as tools, not as the main issue. Technologies will occupy a central and significant place for the storage and retrieval of information since the most important thing is education. We must not forget that we are preparing a society that is in constant learning. At this stage the trained teachers will begin to experience different roles in virtual environments.

OBJECTIVES
Achieving the new pedagogical skills in the teaching role
Having skills for the use of the tools of the platform Moodle
CONTENTS

In this stage there will be a greater emphasis on training in new skills, that will affect the new roles to assume by teachers and students.

The topics to work will have to do with:

- Paradigms in long-distance education
- Competences in teaching and communication
- Teacher as a tutor and as a guide
- Moodle Platform and its tools

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Use of the platform tools as students
- Participation in forums as students
- Virtual classroom organization in the teacher role
- Organization and use of the virtual platform
- Use of strategies that foster collaborative activities

It is essential to ensure training and subsequent operation, the existence of a high degree of interactivity (relationship of students with technology) and interaction (relationship of teachers with the students and each other) through the use of technologies in line with the educational foundation that supports it.

The School for the Innovation of the Education has its own server that is active 24 hours a day. This fact gives the possibility of activating institutional mail accounts, the use of Moodle platform 2.0 version, and the possibility of using video conference. The platform allows the implementation of the use of forums, uploading of material, wikis.

The institution has also a virtual classroom with 40 machines, which will contribute in the face-to-face tutorials for the training.

Six face-to-face meetings with supporting work through the Moodle platform were planned. In such training, the teachers who were trained, gradually played the role of the students - inserts in a platform-for them afterwards play the role of teachers.

Therefore, it is expected:

- Physical class attendance with the workshop modality
- Permanente tutorials on the platform
- Class attendance tutorials with technicians
- The use of some tools of the platform: forum discussions, questions and collaborative activity

At the same time, the material to work will also be designed to be used as a complement in the face to face class as well as the other teaching material adapted to the chosen educational model.
Meetings to combine criteria that respond to a common structure of the material to produce

All these instances are completed in each curriculum area. Education and training team will be composed by experts in different disciplinary fields: School psychologist, Bachelor in Educational Management, Computing Systems Analyst.

Tutoring in this project, is a central axis, since it was the tool that gave the possibility to work with teachers, who are already in the system. This fact could be carried out thanks to the use of new ICTs and their subsequent implementation in the Moodle platform. It was not easy to understand the tutoring as an instance of learning, of building knowledge and not only as an opportunity of raising questions.

A large number of teachers was reluctant to use the new ICTs as a consequence tutoring must be considered as a guide and advocate the formation of a new teacher from another paradigm. At first, this role should be considered in the face-to-face class and then in the virtual one.

The aim is to make teachers have the experience of the needs as students on a platform and analyze them when they work on it as teachers. Having experienced the role as students, teachers would understand what a long-distance student may need. In addition, teachers would see that within this learning modality the attention is student centered.

The training was mandatory to all teachers of the School for Educational Innovation. And for those teachers who were trained in this platform modality and made important changes by using it, there was a recognition in their fees.

Achievements

The training program carried out at the School for Innovation, which has provided a different way of working, which constitutes a significant step forward for the institution.

Provided that we are part of the society of knowledge and that the knowledge is diverse and complex, the updating training to work properly has been installed at The School for the Educational Innovation. We understand that we cannot learn by the experience itself but by having a reflection on that experience. And this is what was proposed with this training, not only awareness, but also the incorporation of new technologies in training.

Throughout the whole process, the emphasis was on encouraging the teachers to become active by promoting participation, increasing the length of the chain of messages and improving the process of collective construction of knowledge-oriented. In this way, the teacher as a tutor will help reach more advanced levels in terms of the construction of knowledge. It was in this process that teachers could make progress by reflecting on the strategies used in terms of:

- Teaching style
- Communicative structure
- The style of presenting the learning contents
- Instructions
- Aims and the educational intentionality
• The relationship between materials and activities
• Assessment Criteria, within the specific framework of distance education

Teachers participation was successful and they were slowly assuming the need to “be literate” teachers, who at first, were students and then went on to the role of teachers. At present, be literate involves skills that go beyond being able to read and write. Being literate implies some expertise in management and inclusion of content, on a combination of different ways of processing information, combining it and presenting it, making appropriate corrections and also being a good reader, critical and participative. Coll refers to new literacies, closely linked to the advancement of technology. There is no doubt that all the tools offered by the platform, challenge the roles and skills and invite you to change and add new ones.

Teachers showed good predisposition to be trained. In terms of technological competencies there were some difficulties since they were afraid of making mistakes which prevented them from the exploration and the inquiry needed to acquire greater skills. It was also necessary to work on the need to incorporate this knowledge since the idea that this knowledge was exclusive of the experts in computer science was quite strong. In the model proposed in the School for Innovation, the role of the teacher is to be a mediator – tutor between the materials and the students, whose function is to supplement, update, facilitate and enable educational mediation.

There was hard work to achieve this pedagogic mediation in the teaching role and its necessary competencies.

At this stage of the training there is a need to continue the actions which are already focused on the material itself. In the face to face lessons, teachers were more focused on providing expertise, in their role, and what they had to do in the only face-to-face class that is provided in the modality of the School for the Educational Innovation, the student work would begin afterwards.

The particular semi-attendance modality of the EIE creates interaction between the student and the teacher which is a very important stimulus to take full advantage in the face-to-face meetings and then continue on the platform. It is also important to highlight another axis that has also been worked on and it is the methodology of collaborative work, since it relies on the interaction and the exchange of information and knowledge among participants, becoming one of the most outstanding ways of learning.

Working with forums is one of the most innovative resources, in terms of the pedagogical use, especially when it comes to consider them as elements of high educational value. It was hard work to make people see these resources as favoring of constructivist learning and that they also drive a greater degree of interactivity between pairs. Students get more involved in the activity with these resources.

The most significant of the planned training is the possibility the teachers had to move from the role of students to the role of teachers. In addition, the institutional decision to make them work with the platform was also important. This fact forced and committed to those who wanted to continue with us in this project, that is to say to work on the new modality.

This experience also allowed us to make decisions at the institutional level in order to systematize this training space and delineate guidelines for the continuation of this project in relation to:
• Shared vision
• Access to new technologies, software and telecommunications networks
• Technical devices for teaching presentations
• Professional development
• Efficient technical assistance
• Preparation of standards on content and academic resources
• Community support among groups of teachers
• Relationship with long-distance institutional networks
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