

A global e-learning model to develop social and professional teachers' identity

Abstract

This presentation aims to introduce the development process of an experimental Programme on educational cooperation between Europe and Latinamerica "ALFA-MIFORCAL", which focus is teachers' training for quality in secondary education. Ten countries participate currently to this project: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Spain, Portugal and Italy, being this last the leadpartner.

In this article we will introduce the interim results, being the experience in progress, and expecting definitive results by 2009. Some of the hypothesis that allowed the research team shaping a global e-learning model for teachers' training and social/professional development are introduced:

- the creation of a complex Virtual Learning Environment to respond to quality in teachers' education as much as respecting cultural diversity;
- the efficient use of ICT's in teachers' training, in several socio-cultural contexts;
- the creation of a methodology to promote teachers cultural mobility, therefore "enlarging" cultural learning contexts, with impact on teachers' perception of the importance of their own role in the knowledge society.
- Building a stable structure to train researchers on teachers' training.

Miforcal The Educative Model Dimensions

Main Elements of each dimension

Curricular Dimension	Didactic Dimension
Teachers' training at the post-graduate level for the secondary teaching; training of trainers (professors from teachers' training programmes) at the university level, preparing them for the initial training of secondary teachers (freshmen)	Cooperative Learning - Action Learning, Internships and practices in educative institutions
Core curriculum	Cultural Mediation, Customized tutoring and career counseling, International Virtual Environment, campus and local "classrooms"
Modular triadic by Discipline areas: Historic and Epistemological foundations, Didactics (teaching methods) with emphasis on discipline, Laboratory of teaching methods	
Personalized planning of Curriculum through knowledge, competences, mastery	
Interdiscipline and lifelong learning (the methodological and conceptual characteristics of disciplinary areas are emphasized, aiming to think them in its structural and functional interrelations; the cognitive strategies displayed in the training profile are represented by the core thinking skills and the critical skills, as much as the interrelation between knowledge that are pointed to perspective and complex thought	Instructional design process TTOM (Teachers' trainers organizational models) - Implementation of training course - Flexible and Customized training - e-learning (blended modality)

Team Work

- International Scientific & Academic Committee
- Researching & Education Coordination Central Teams
- International teaching body
- Local Didactic coordination team

The Virtual Learning Environment



Two platforms, one international network

One of the International discussions

One of the Trainer's room: cooperative working at distance

Room for informal communications within an euro-latinoamerican teachers' community

Formal discussions about disciplines state of art in every country: the differences in discipline evolution and implementation

Observatory for international/ foreign practices

Reshaping Professional Identity

Interim Outcomes Report

Results from a second phase of project implementation indicating some of the key assumptions that are guiding the training experience

- A stable structure for teachers training have been built, delivering courses in 4 countries (Spain, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina) having finished the first year with high students' satisfaction and good learning results -according to the Evaluation System and local assessment means-
- Accepted hypothesis of a learning/training model, institutionalized in three countries with reference to national systems (Paraguay, Brazil, Spain). In other countries, the problem has been bureaucratic constrains (Argentina).
- An international board with 57 teachers of the nationalities involved into the project, and 28 tutor online referring to the 4 countries that deliver courses.
- 48 Tutor online certificated in Spanish and Portuguese in 2006, preparing them to work within internationalization of teachers' professionalism, knowing the state of art of the debate both in Europe and Mercosur.
- 208 participants (teachers and educators) from European and Latin-American countries interacting in the several training activities, on the period 2006-2008.

This results permitted the research group to hypothesize an e-learning model that is being tested in its social and educational impact. The second phase of this projects implies the study of online interaction to understand a) the impact of participating in global communities to develop professional identity b) the role of mobility in teachers' and trainers' professionalism.

Method: A Case Study

Ethnographic Approach & Online Forum participation Analysis (Walcott, 1993; Paccagnella, 2006)

- Participant researchers, the authors of the presentation have been involved as part of the Scientific Committee or Training Coordinators, being responsible for leading discussion of the several researchers, training of trainers, Instructional Design Processes, dissemination and evaluation. They conducted the whole development of e-learning strategies and participated as trainers in the online platform that allowed teachers from several nationalities to interact in the course of project actions.
- Following-up the group of 81 teachers for two years now, entering the second training year, participating in three international meetings sharing the VLE from April 2005.
- Questionnaires (to the whole group) and interviews (to a part of the group) were done after the first training year.
- Participation in Latinamerican Monitoring - discussing strategies for the evaluation of the training programme, with regard to social and educational impact on local contexts participating to the project.
- Analyzing 5 online fora, with 67 threads: tutor online interaction with central/local coordination (in progress)
- Analyzing 12 online fora, with 123 threads: students interaction within the programme development (in progress)

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The Case: Project Alfa-MIFORCAL

We introduce a case study of an international master program in process. "ALFA" (América Latina - Formación Académica), is a program of international cooperation between Europe and Latin America aimed to get institutional building and excellence through international academic networks. The teachers' training project "MIFORCAL" (Master Interuniversitario en Formación de Calidad para la Enseñanza Pre-Universitaria) intend to prepare university graduates for teaching at the secondary/high school level, with an innovative curriculum and an international expert staff and two lingua franca: Spanish and Portuguese.

The teachers' training, through a plan of mobility for (teachers) students, as much as for researchers that follow the whole project development, was founded on an strategic approach of institutional building and scientific collaboration, respectful of local and cultural differences. The main goal is to achieve quality in the teachers' training, in a process of internationalization and university Bologna Process and the development of the MERCOSUR' educational space).

The Alfa-Miforcal project is then a complex global field, where to experiment innovative methods in teachers continuing training, in order to promote the revalorization of their social/professional identity.

What and why? An enlarged cultural context to learn

- Which kind of tools and methodologies should be used to build a global learners' community?
- What dimensions, events and issues identify and describe in the different approaches to the whole instructional and social processes in diverse cultural contexts?
- Which tools and methods would account better for a holistic study of teachers and students within learning communities with constrains of a large cultural diversity?
- Which could be the impact on teachers' professionalism and then on social inclusion?

Background

- Internationalization and Universitization of Teachers' training (European Commission, 2007): the importance of high quality in teachers' training, being considered the professionals at the center of modernization in education systems, in the Learning Age (Carneiro, 2007)
- Internationalization of Higher Education through e-learning: Virtual Universities networking, the need of quality in HE's e-learning programmes, considering variables as cultural diversity of participants and the relevance of global curriculum for local societies (Margiotta, 2005) Knight, UNESCO, 2006, mention: Diversification of education plans, opportunities of mobility, quality standards, collaborative working and value of professional expertise.
- The Virtual Learning Environment, beyond platforms (Barajas, Owen, 2000; Banzato, 2002), learning communities: importance of social presence, teaching/learning strategies, cognitive presence (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Palflof & Pratt, 1999), institutional participation, intercultural learning (Bélisle, 2008), as an online, community, situated learning process that in time becomes a developmental process of maturation of narratives on professional representation, with impact on professional identity (Kuzmic, 1994; Margiotta, 2007) Mobility as a crucial element on a global professional identity. Higher Education Crossing Borders: A Guide to the Implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for Cross-border Education, A Report Prepared for the Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO by Jane Knight <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001473/147363E.pdf>
- Virtual Mobility and Learning for a new professional identity: there's the assumption that the importance and significance of virtual experience has impact on better learning processes (Garrison & Anderson, idem) and also on professional/personal identity (Turkle, 1996). Virtual Mobility is possible in global programmes that make evident some intercultural/international elements of the learning experience. Virtual Mobility <http://www.being-mobile.net/http://www.online-educ.com/>

Conclusions

We hypothesized that participating in enlarged cultural contexts support positive learning with impact on (professional) global identity. The whole project have focused the necessity of build a complete set of tools within a learning environment that allowed international exchange without making feel the participating people "colonized" (Latinamericans) or enough motivated to know realities other than the own.

By introducing the structure, characteristics and educational criteria followed in the selected case, we attempted to demonstrate the complexity of the operation, leaving behind too optimistic unidirectional models where there's an expert (central) University, that delivers a programme where assumptions of quality and competencies are centralized. We conclude that the international project could represent, in its structure, a valid training approach to improve teachers and trainers' professionalism, in a process of changing of social identities from local or global to glocal, and thus giving them the possibility to play the crucial role that society is asking them in the Learning Society (Carneiro, op.cit); but only in the case local identities and problem are respected and represented within the curriculum, instructional design processes, teaching staff, and students.

In this case, the emphasis have been put on the importance of knowing other teachers' contexts of practice, recognizing the common challenges (i.e., the problems in classroom when working with the screen generation) but also the importance of a crucial social role in personal students development as much as school and local communities development.

The motivation of students, involved for more than one year in an international training programme which is mainly delivered at distance; and the participations on online for a, allows the research team to conclude that the participants perceive positively the fact of participating in international online community, and expressed that this kind of affiliation is giving them a new sense to their profession, strengthening professional identity and hence, promoting an internal motivation to go ahead in a difficult situation for teachers' social role.

In the research group view, some effects are: higher teachers' and trainers motivation, changes in pedagogic conception, cultural awareness with impact in teaching methods, but most of these results have to be further analyzed and studied within the programme social and educational evaluation strategy, wich is the third and last part of project's implementation.

International Studies and Academic mobility among an "eurolatinoamerican" network on the issue SECONDARY TEACHERS' TRAINING

Curricular studies, Didactics, use of ICT's in Education, Universities capacity building to cover organizational features of teachers' continuing and initial training

Junior Researchers Training
Aimed to build a "Research Community" on the field of TT

Advanced Training
Aimed to offer training to a wide secondary teachers' community from Europe and Latinamerica

Main Points
Instructional design in e-learning for TT
Interdisciplinary and Disciplinary Didactics
Processes of convergence in TT among Europe and Latinamerica
System of Evaluation (Summative, Formative and Quality evaluation)

Study Plan
Common area in Educational Sciences (first year)
Three disciplinary areas on demand (second year): Social Studies and Humanities, Natural and Exact Sciences, Language and Literature

Experimental Curriculum and Didactics
Main Elements
Core Curriculum, Local adaptation, Multilingualistic and international virtual learning environment, virtual + real mobility