Distance learning in undergraduate education: the challenges of building a collaborative environment

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Abstract

The objectives were: to develop subsidies that allow a detailed discussion about the format of distance education developed by Describe processes of teaching and learning offered by different educational resources and virtual tools available on platforms and learning materials that support the courses offered; Identify the relationship between teacher and student and the basic principles relevant to the democratization process of education on the view of students autonomy in distance education processes. The data analysis emphasized qualitative aspects and was performed correlating documental analysis, information obtained through interviews and observations.

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1. Introduction

Relationships not established before are now possible because they are building new types of interactions between people and information, weaving a complex web of possibilities (Castells, 1999). According to Weber (2000), education is a basic social right and the maintenance of the quality standard of education offered at all levels, requires adequate school conditions and updated to the dynamics and development of society.

These demands imply the democratization of access to knowledge and the adoption by institutions of practices that incorporate new technologies into the school routine, as an instrument driver for improving the quality of education. In this context, the growing demand for tools for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and to promote students' autonomy regarding the choice of space and time for study, stimulates the construction of an educational practice that aims to help participants balance their needs and personal skills through participation in groups, ensuring the exchange of experiences, questions and results.

Thus, the mode of Distance Education (DE), who initially came forward to the need to address the weaknesses of the reach of conventional education system, today constitutes an important teaching modality, able to complement the regular system of classroom teaching, relying on modern teaching practices, which have technological resources that facilitate communication between teacher and student, breaking time and distance. Many distance learning courses have been created and disseminated worldwide, using the Internet or similar network systems in support of pedagogical communication, from informal courses or technical improvement (food, basic mechanics, among

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others) to undergraduate and post-graduate students in various fields of knowledge. Currently Distance Education contributes to a large portion of the population has access to education and represents a possibility of meeting the new formative demands arising apace, with the adoption of a teaching format that is not restricted to classroom activities and mainly due to its low cost and its high degree of flexibility enables the approximation of the long distances and the democratization of access to education for people seeking better use of time, compatibility and flexibility of schedules, geographic independence, among others.

The undergraduate courses in distance education mode offered by IES has enabled a significant portion of the population has access to higher education and can complete their life project, completing their training, entering themself on the labor market and earning their citizenship. This model requires complex activities that include reflection, critical thinking, seeking answers and their own ways, and the construction and elaboration of personal placements. This new training model contributes to a formation of a creative and critical thinking, responsible for generating dialogue, exchange of ideas and experiences, emerging thus a close relationship between teacher / student and student / student, leading to the formative colloquium.

In this sense, it is clear that distance education requires a different pedagogical proposal, as articulated and picky as classroom teaching. To this must be sought new standards and ensure new mediations in the process of teaching and learning, creating opportunities for interaction and a collaborative environment that allow to suit spaces in different times and in different contexts. (Kenski, 2001).

Nevertheless, the development and implementation of distance education often results in elaboration of projects with inadequate resumes or offer standardized accompanying teaching resources that have no potential for interactivity, undue lessons conveyed in the media and no links with the regional characteristics of the students or their concrete needs education, causing remoteness of the ideals proposed of the real practice of this education type.

According to Valentinni (1998), to understand these complex processes of learning, interaction and communication modality involved in distance education, we need to break with the conception of learning that brings the "logic of transmission" of information and turn to the "logic of communication", creating a different culture of learning.

In this sense, Primo (1999) and Belluzo (2005) reinforce that this new culture of learning walks to the abandonment of a linear and mechanistic paradigm, which base the interfaces of interaction of characteristics reactives and restrictives, and points to the adoption of a paradigm constructivist that emphasizes the construction of knowledge by interacting, in which interactivity is seen as non-predictable and where the contents emerge during relationship, replacing the educational model based on the transmission of a fixed set of information to students, to a focus grounded in processes of construction, management and dissemination of knowledge, with emphasis on "learning to learn" and in lifelong learning. According to Assmann (2001, p.32): "The "product" of education should be the result of learning experiences rather than simply acquiring knowledge supposedly now ready and available for teaching conceived as mere transmission."

Similarly, relations of power and authority associated to teacher / student / knowledge should be viewed differently. The earlier vision focused on teaching, that considered the teacher as the holder of knowledge and solely responsible for the learning process, should now consider the teacher and student in a position of equality, in which both holds expertise, differentiated and relevant and, in equal measure have access to new and heterogeneous information.

Mason (1991), when discussing teaching contexts mediated interactive media stressed that the most important role of the teacher in this new context must be the intellectual facilitator, which implies a continuous focus on discussions of the learners; encourage their participation; review, criticize and seek refinements in their lines of reasoning.

Therefore, as education has been marked by the presence of new media, they fail to focus on the simple transfer of knowledge, the passive attitude of the student, and the development of memorization schemes, and start to appreciate the process of interactivity between student / teacher and student / student, returned to learn and to seek, there is then the relevance of models of courses offered in distance learning mode contemplate curricular designs and features that promote interactivity and integration.

Within this perspective, there is the possibility of setting up communities of learning from the affinities of interests, skills, values and mutual projects established through a collaborative process, whose links are based on the mood and feeling of belonging that people possess.
2. Methodology

Aiming research and discuss how to configure aspects considered fundamental to the development of a cooperative learning environment in distance education model adopted by the institution for the undergraduate courses, conduct applied research with qualitative base, where 160 students participated and 30 tutors teachers from different teaching units of University Anhanguera - Brazil. The analysis of the data highlighted the qualitative aspects accomplished through the establishment of relations between document analysis, information obtained in the interviews and observation.

3. Results

Tutors teachers point in professional issue, believe in distance learning and the duties performed are clear. There is the knowledge of the teaching plans and the material used. They point out that 80% of students often use online means to answer your questions. As for material, 95% use books and access to virtual libraries. Regarding the difficulties encountered, 85% can handle of all technological resources that are available.

Students responded that 85% chose to take the course in distance learning by schedule flexibility and because they believe in distance learning, even not having previous experience. 95% highlights good infrastructure suitable for the proposed course as well as the contents of the disciplines. As for the proposed evaluation system, 85% approve the evaluation methods applied. 90% highlighted the good relationship with tutors teachers.

4. Conclusions

The results allow discussing the format of distance education developed by Teaching Units from Anhanguera Educational for undergraduate courses. Highlight the relational aspects teacher-student that are, in educational process, the foundations for building a collaborative environment, as well as the basic principles relevant to the democratization of education under the view of autonomy of students in the processes in distance education. Are highlighted as good and current settings of the models adopted by the institution and essential for shared learning.

They are the key of teaching-learning offered by different educational resources and virtually tools available on platforms and learning materials that support the courses offered. Identify the relationship between teacher and student.

References