

A BUSINESS CASE FROM PORTUGAL

The Portuguese Catholic University, through the Psychology and Education Faculty, offers, since 2003, a b-Learning master in Education Sciences with a specialization in Education Informatics. Currently the course is on its 3rd edition which allows for a strong pool of data on its effects.

The Context

- MoE of Portugal decided to introduce two new ICT subjects in the national curriculum
- These subjects are mandatory for all students in grade 9 (90 minutes/week) and grade 10 (180 minutes/week)
- The curriculum reform is to be launched as of September 2004
- There is an estimated need of 1,800 trained teachers for the teaching of the new ICT subjects
- The priority would be granted to experienced teachers who would undergo some additional training in ICT didactics
- No formal offering existed addressing this need in the in-service training market

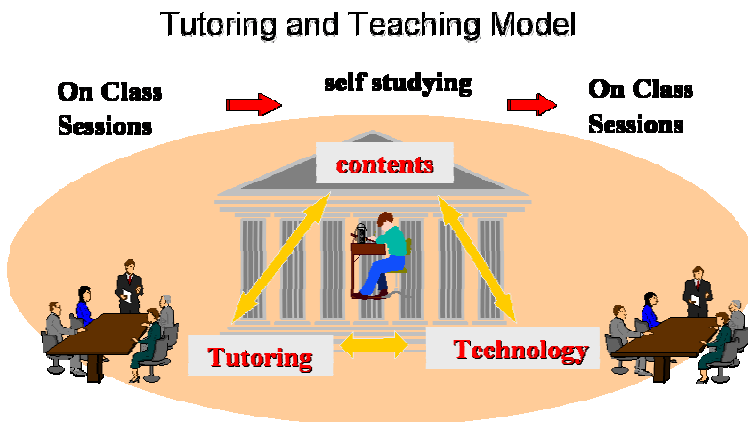
Why doing the project?

- To open new graduate teaching in an area of vital importance for the country;
- To specialize teachers of the basic and secondary education levels;
- To develop studies and research related to ICT
- To allow the training of students that live and work in places where the access to some resources is difficult
- To invest in innovative methodologies (massification of graduate studies)

What would the training be?

- 1st Term: Learning Psychology; Basic Notions of Hardware and Networks (30h + 30h)
- 2nd Term: Design of multimedia materials for web; Multimedia Communication (30h + 30h)
- 3rd Term: Common Software (advanced level); Internet and Education (30h + 30h)
- 4th Term: Didactic of ICT; Research Methodologies in Education (30h + 30h)
- 5th Term: Distance Learning and eLearning; Project Seminars (30h + 80h)
- Dissertation

How was the training done?



The master of Education Informatics is based on a b-Learning model with active tutoring. The tutor has the following functions: motivate; counselling; forum management, clarifying questions; on-going evaluation, final evaluation and coordination of presential class sessions.

The teaching evaluation is

based on five activities: forum participation; individual online assignments; on class evaluation; group online assignment; chats.

The model was designed to take advantage of a reflective posture on relevant past experience (teaching trajectory and ICT- more than 30% of students were already teaching computer literacy at school level). Technologies, learning objects and eLearning platform were designed to foster collaborative learning ventures.

Metamotivation and metacognition were two key elements of this new programme. Active participation in forums (a tool that underwent considerable technological improvement in the course of the experiment) was intended to be the main tutorial and learning instrument.

Results of training

The evaluation was done on the 143 students attending the 1st edition of the master. Our goal is now to replicate this evaluation on the students from the 2nd edition. The 3rd edition is currently ongoing.

Why do I participate in the training?

For 85% it was the first experience in ODL. The main reasons to run the course were:

- Personal skills improvement (65%)
- To be in a ODL course (53%)
- The fulfilment of personal aims in terms of contents (52%)

What did I learn from the training?

The main goal was the reinforcement of teacher's skills at three levels:

- Communicational Instruments;
 - Conception of multimedia materials of the web
 - Applied use of collaborative learning technologies
 - Multimedia communication principles

- Pedagogy for new learning;
 - Learning Psychologie
 - ICT Didactics
 - Internet and Education
 - E-Learning methodology
- Research methodologies
 - Research in Education
 - Project development

How is the training applied to their job?

The aim is to have better prepared teachers in the use of ICTs in their education and training activities. The evaluation of the impact is still ongoing.

If knowledge is acquired, does it effect the organization?

The aim was for these teachers to function as champions for change in their schools and organizations. The evaluation of the organizational effects is still ongoing.

Summary

Attending a master of this length has an extreme personal and organizational investment. After high initial motivation, the “hard work” makes it decrease. With the time and confidence in all learning process, the motivation increasingly rises steadily. On the first and second edition there were high churn rates (14,7% for the 1st edition and 12,2% for the 2nd). One of the main problems was the distrust of the quality of distance learning programs.

The ROI assessment can help current and prospective students to build up their motivation and facilitate the planning and decision making of further editions.