Collaboration and Network Construction in Distance Education

Maximira André
SENAI, Brasil, maximira@gmail.com

Abstract: Distance education not only captures the ones who are apart, but also brings people with common interests and needs together. Recently, distance education has included and helped optimizing important concepts such as collaboration and cooperative work. Also known as web 2.0, the internet and tics have enhanced the human inner wish of building and sharing knowledge worldwide. As a result, many social networking, as well as educational and professional networking, have been emerging in the web. The big question seems to rely on what makes a social or educational networking successful. What to do or offer users so they come to participate regularly in the community or group, and more, come to constitute a truly collaborative and cooperative network. We could easily name a few facilities virtual environments should offer its users in order to build a network. But would that be enough? And how to explain the absence of people (regular users) in that case? How to explain some successful networks which have established themselves despite those facilities? We shall argue that building educational networks based on collaborative and cooperative work demands a different kind of knowledge or competence we have been able to apply in education in the last four centuries at least in the Occident world. It depends on planning, but planning together; it has to do with taking decisions, but taking decisions collectively, and sharing information, responsibilities and feelings, but under mutual respect. Summing up, collaboration and cooperation should not only be the final goal of an educational programme, but its own means, and since the very beginning. Education and Technology for a Better World is the theme of this conference, and also a need. And the present workshop aims to highlight how education can be enhanced by technology for that end. The workshop is to offer participants 3 different moments so we can handle some aspects of what it takes to build an educational collaborative network in the web. The activities follow next.

1. The first activity to be carried out is a Role play

The aim is to think of and discuss some key-concepts considered to be of crucial importance in order to build a collaborative network. They are: mutual respect,
unilateral respect, tolerance and lack of tolerance. Some participants are expected to role play those concepts in pairs or groups, so others can decide which concept the role play refers to and move to the corner of the room that represents that concept (there will be 4 charts, glued previously in each corner of the room; 1 for each concept).

THE AIM HERE is to provide participants a way to express themselves, get together and work collaboratively. Also, make them realize people think differently, and that it can be fun, not necessarily stressing.

LENGTH OF TIME: 10 minutes

2. The second activity takes place in the web: Getting in touch in a network

   a) introduction to and subscription @ Paltalk + Paltalk facilities brief presentation (free rooms, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, private talk, whisper IM)

   LENGTH OF TIME: 5 minutes

   b) Choose a room they like best and start watching/participating if they feel like in order to experience Paltalk facilities (free rooms, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, private talk, whisper IM).

   THE AIM HERE is a moment to practice.

   LENGTH OF TIME: 15 minutes

3. As follow-up, the last activity is to be a Group reflection @ Paltalk

I shall invite participants to join me @paltalk, @ the room I have created for this use so the group can share points of view, difficulties, doubts, fears, happinesses, achievements… negative and positive experiences… and how they are experiencing interaction in a collaborative and life-long network.

THE AIM HERE is Group reflection, collaborative learning, sharing.

LENGTH OF TIME: 20 minutes
Possible themes/suggestions for discussion:
1) What they believe to be:
   a) the very best;
   b) the hardest constraint regarding working together;
2) Think of two limitations, at least, of the activity they like best to join and work together;
3) Think of one activity they have joined and worked together that they would like to try again soon and why and why;
4) What roles they would like to find out more in order to feel ready to propose a collaborative network to their students.