

COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS WORK: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHER TRAINING

Manuel Meirinhos, António Osório
Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Universidade do Minho
meirinhos@ipb.pt, ajosorio@iec.uminho.pt

In recent years, many research projects related to cooperative and collaborative learning, as well as to learning communities based on these practices, have appeared. Numerous authors have recognised the innovative potential of collaborative networked learning, thus allowing for the growth of research in the field of collaboration connected with education and distance learning. In this paper, through a case study in the context of teacher training, we intend to show that collaborative environments actually work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration in virtual environments is becoming an increasingly frequent phenomenon and can be looked at as a pedagogical strategy, as well as a philosophy or a lifestyle (Henri & Pudelko, 2003). In the same line, Gros (2004) states that, in the specialised literature, studies on collaborative learning multiply day by day: *Las investigaciones sobre experiencias, condiciones de uso, tipos de interacción, no solo son elevadas (en términos cuantitativos) sino que apuntan e inciden en aspectos muy fundamentales del proceso educativo, por lo que están ante un ámbito de investigación y desarrollo de gran interés* (Gros, 2004, p. 2).

In fact, we can note a predominance of empirical studies related to the creation of virtual environments focusing on collaboration, seen as a learning paradigm *per se* (Develotte & Mangenotte, 2003).

Aiming to collaborate in this process, we conducted an experiment of distance training for teachers trying to better grasp the way training can be developed and the importance collaborative environments can have. We believe that the information to be extracted could be highly relevant in solving some of the problems encountered in teacher training (nowadays so problematic) and in its implementation on a large scale, and in overcoming some space-time contingencies that impose such great limitations on teacher training throughout teachers' lives.

Building on the emergence of the collaborative discourse, we describe briefly the environment that supported the intervention. The findings achieved through the evaluation of all data, are also presented.