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Title: Towards inclusive b-learning in Higher Education

#### Synopsis:

Although, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have provided a potential for change, allowing the development of comprehensive approaches regarding teaching and learning, there is still insufficient knowledge as to best practices in Higher Education Institutions (HEI), mainly concerning the use of online learning environments and communication tools.

Literature underlines that the learning environment is favorable when teachers are organized and motivated. Further evidence, suggests that course content is the most important organizational issue in relation to student's satisfaction, as well as the importance of course websites to support conventional teaching. Furthermore, we also know that the reorganization of the teaching-learning process (by teachers and students), through phenomena, such as social networking, collaboration and connectivity, requires the establishment of complex roles in the process of learning and knowledge construction. In addition, from a global perspective, it is important to remember that the process of technology integration takes time and also requires a substantial systemic engagement.

Educational systems and HEI working together could be strategically guided to influence society. In this sense, a main concern for institutions should be to understand the real meaning of individual's multiple identities - multiple socio cultural identities, embedding the sound of equality and diversity issues. In addition, the impact of globalization from the combined perspectives of the different dimensions of e-community and e-identity may justify innovative methodologies in the design, implementation and development of the teaching-learning process. Unfortunately, in HEI is not so easy to identify practices that respond to students' special needs; however, in order to get relevant improvements in the educational process it seems clear that the most innovative changes should embrace inclusive and universal principles to develop new or improved methods of e-teaching and e-assessment.

In our communication we will present a b-learning case study in higher education to illustrate the users' profiles and their needs, revealing a clear diversity and heterogeneity of users' profile (directly) and courses (indirectly). Users (teachers and students) were motivated to use the online learning environment that seems to be flexible and user-friendly. The findings suggested important signs that reflect the emerging need of a new and more inclusive model in techno-pedagogical strategies, in order to develop technological, pedagogical and methodological teachers' e-skills. In summary, distinct teachers' profiles, i.e., activities-oriented, interaction-oriented, assessment-

oriented, and collaboration-oriented, and students' profiles, i.e., interactive learning environment-oriented, training-oriented, teachers' beliefs-oriented, were identified as key issues, representing the socio cultural framing of educational thought and, perhaps, practices on online distance education.

In terms of recognizing, understanding and responding to the academic community's specific needs, this study can support an inclusive, multi-dimensional and holistic ICT knowledge for choosing adjustable teaching strategies. At the same time, a more concrete awareness of the profiles enables teachers to choose more accurate teaching strategies to meet the students' specific requirements, something that could be of particular interest for students with special needs, enhancing, therefore, the level of co-responsibility and educational value about accessibility issues for inclusive blended learning scenarios in HEI.

More specifically, the focus on teachers' technological training seems to play a key role in supporting learners to access online learning opportunities in a proactive and personalized way. Also, it seems important to remember that technology and teaching-learning applications do not of themselves immediately solve inclusive learning. On the other hand, from a holistic perspective, b-learning can really have positive impacts for both teachers and students, particularly in making accessible, flexible and encouraging more independent learning.

Inclusive b-learning can truly represent an opportunity to enhance an institution's position, expand access to institution's educational offerings, facilitate social dynamics, and also reduce operating costs.

We also intend to scrutinize the emerging concept of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) recently introduced by Downes and Siemens. Globally speaking, the MOOC (i.e., free online courses designed to be an all-inclusive learning experience) methodology are based on a wide blend of traditional tools, such as video lessons, evaluation tests and final exams combined with Web 2.0 tools (e.g., community of learning, wiki, blog, social media), already offered by the top institutions like Harvard, MIT or Stanford. Based upon connectivism and considering particular characteristics, such as diversity, autonomy, openness, self-organization, interactivity/connectivity for sharing knowledge, this approach can represent a unique opportunity to discover more about how, where, when, what and with whom people can learn in large open networks.

To discuss curriculum issues related to the preparation of experts to manage distance learning activities we will support our talk on EUROMIME course. Euromime is a Erasmus Mundus Master CourseEMMC in Media Engineering for Education, developed since 2005 at UniversidadeTécnica de Lisboa (UTL) – Portugal, Université de Poitiers (UP) – France, Universidad Nacional Educación a Distancia (UNED) – Spain.Up to the present we had 136 students from 31 different countries in this Master.

EUROMIME master is a multidisciplinary training and formation program with a competency based approach organized in five complementary fields: technology; educational engineering, management, research methods and tools; and communication competencies.