

FROM APATHY TO AUTONOMY

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Medium and Technology Education

Access, Equity and Ethics

Innovation and Change

Learning Communities Interaction and Communication

Ongoing Project Description

Innovative Experience

ABSTRACT

This work consists in reporting an innovative experience with low-income medium education students, from public schools in Rio de Janeiro, that received a Professional Qualification Program.

To expand the access to Professional Education and attend the gratuity policy, SENAI-RJ introduced three distance education courses: Logistics Assistant, Telemarketing Operator and Technical Support Operator IT (helpdesk) for young people seeking their first job opportunity. These courses were developed under professional profile basis created by the Sectoral Technical Committees and adapted to the customers by Sistema FIRJAN's experts.

This experience was considered an innovative one because of its concerns about the existing gap between the medium education conclusion and the labor market insertion of the youth, it also provided meaningful behavioral changes during their learning process. As an example of these changes, we can mention self-government, self-esteem improvement, an optimistic vision of the future, a critical analysis capacity and a proactive attitude towards challenges.

Therefore, the proposal of this job is to divulge the contents of this experience that greatly contributed to personal and professional development of SENAI-RJ's distance education team.

Keywords: Professional qualification, distance education, logistics, helpdesk, behavior change, admission, labor market.

Considering the lack of training policies for young people and according to the economic growth scenario experienced by the State of Rio de Janeiro, favored largely by the implementation of major sporting events like the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016, SENAI RJ incorporated strategies used for distance education in professional education.

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Another component that has ratified the classification of this experience as an innovative one, was the information provided by the EAD-BR Census (2009) that only 3% (three percent) of the institutions performs professional education under distance education basis.

1- The experiment

As a way to provide a technical degree for medium education students originated from public schools and seeking to promote their integration into the labor market, three professional qualification courses were organized having as basis: first job-seeking, work-education joint and qualified professionals expansion .

In the Logistics Assistant course, the student is able to develop skills in reception support, storage and shipment of materials in accordance with technical standard procedures. This course supplies market demands for logistics services that employ nearly 150,000 professionals in Brazil and that is growing at a rate of 30% per year. Telemarketing Operators course proposal is developing student-skills on telemarketing techniques to deal with costumers on products and services. 100,000 to 120,000 professionals are expected to be hired, according to Rio de Janeiro City Hall's project in order to draw telemarketing companies` attention to the city. Technical Support Operator IT (helpdesk) course provide students knowledge about helpdesk services to microcomputer users, according to technical standards. Nowadays,

telemarketing operator is considered one of the most required jobs in labor market, because of the technology update process.

Some actions were established during the organization of this experiment such as design, course planning, teaching resources development, partnership with Rio de Janeiro Department of Education and public school mobilization, stakeholders enablement, courses implementation and execution, and students certification.

SENAI-RJ education conception proposal to professional qualification courses to young people includes:

- distance education as a way to benefit a large number of students;
- virtual learning environment (VLE) to stimulate students/tutors and students/students interaction, and to step-up knowledge in forums, blogs and virtual libraries.
- face-to-face interaction to the development of curriculum activities related to Logical Reasoning, Computer Science, Citizenship Education, Ethics and Technical Skills.
- proper distance education teaching resources and proper language to young public (flip books used online and/or offline, containing interactive activities, such as: multiple choice, one-to-one correspondence, match columns fulfillment, games, word search, challenges, cartoons, images and illustrations.
- extra material to the students (a t-shirt, an agenda, a folder and a pen with SENAI's logo) to make them feel as part of SENAI's team.

Each course is structured with tutors (mediators) that are responsible for information, action and resources management to classes monitoring and a team of teacher-tutors (experts) that are responsible for the supervision of a group of students (divided into classes) in activities proposed on the Virtual Learning Environment and for the face-to-face classes.

A systematic operational was realized giving emphasis to the following aspects: definition of Rio de Janeiro Department of Education's main schools in low-income communities, with proper infrastructure (class, informatics room and internet access) and a proactive pedagogical coordinator, publicity, application and registration, special pedagogical activities (study plan and

raising awareness to distance education on face-to-face meetings), contests and interactive games organization to gather the students into the classes and social network sites.

Finally, it is important to point out that in 2010 SENAI-RJ performed the pilot program for young people qualification under a distance education basis, and assisted 354 low-income students. This project is expanding in 2011 and it will help 1,500 youths in Rio de Janeiro.

The learning process evaluation included a self-evaluating system during the course, VLE participation and on-line activities participation. Approved participants received a certificate.

We consider as critical points of this first experience, the importance of reviewing the location of some schools, since they discourage tutors because of community violence and the need to include a selection process that involves the student and his/her family in order to build up the commitment (to establish the importance of receiving the vacancy).

2- Apathy x Autonomy

To realize this Program, it was necessary to obtain the adherence of a high number of students from the schools involved in the project.

The first action was establishing a partnership with Rio de Janeiro's Department of Education, which determined the nine participant schools to the project.

The next step was gathering school representatives to present the courses and raise their awareness to the importance of disseminating the project in their schools.

After the established deadline to fill the vacancies, we realized that the adhesion was under our expectations. So, we decided to visit the schools to verify the reason for that.

We visited some of these schools, talked with the students and observed the same scenario described by the representatives, as apathy, inertia and low self-esteem, as if the proposal does not attend the students' real necessities. No enthusiasm or interest was demonstrated by the students, even when

informed about course gratuity, qualification to labor market that would provide employability.

We increased the number of adhesions and started the courses with 354 (three hundred and fifty-four) students. 87% (eighty-seven percent) of these students had never studied under a distance education basis.

We scheduled a face-to-face meeting to raise their awareness to the courses and after that the students began the distance education courses and started attending the biweekly face-to-face meetings at school. Besides that, they interacted with their colleagues and tutors in forums, blogs and in co-participative areas, among other Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) interfaces.

We also need to highlight a VLE contest and an interactive game activity with challenges such as searching texts, articles and photos related to the school subjects. The use of these strategies in accordance to student's profile (young, medium education student, user of communication technologies and interaction) is based on Pallof & Pratt (2001) proposal that suggests the use of challenging activities as virtual activities to cyberspace students.

As a rule previously established for the contest, to be the winner, the school should obtain the largest number of virtual environment participants. As a way to reward their participation and not encourage team exclusion, at the end, the prime rule was changed so all the students became winners and received the award: a T-shirt, an agenda, a pen and a DVD about the course.

What a surprise when these students turned from apathy to an active, autonomous, knowledge seeking profile. They left their traditional paradigm to a new one. During their statements the students demonstrated autonomy, optimistic view of the future, a critical analysis capacity and a proactive attitude towards challenges.

They increased their participation in forums, blogs, bulletin board, commenting, suggesting, inserting individual and group photos presenting school tasks. We perceived an increase of their self-esteem.

This Project attracted media's interest. We were invited by television station, journals and radio to spread our experiment out to young people looking for their first job.

We invited some students to participate in the television show, some were filmed at a professional environment. From this moment, some

businessmen offered to SENAI-RJ, 400 (four hundred) vacancies for students employment.

Based on SENAI's national monitoring methodology, this process will be evaluated after the one-year period of the courses ending.

3- Experiment evaluation

Distance education qualification courses, realized by SENAI / RJ, achieved a high percentage of satisfaction among the students.

In the course overall evaluation, the items that received "great" and "good" comments were: Logistics Assistant (99%); Telemarketing Operator: (94%) and Technical Support Operator IT (helpdesk) (97%).

The main points highlighted by the participants are: course content, learning process, activities and evaluations, tutors' work, dynamism and course organization, communication/interaction between students and tutors, visits to companies and study hours flexibility.

We obtained a high level of customer satisfaction that is reinforced by the fact that 100% (one hundred percent) of graduating students would recommend this course to a friend or acquaintance.

These young people reinforce our belief in human beings to overcome their limitations, to open new possibilities, to recognize themselves as challenge winners.

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