Present time and prospects of Latin American e-learning

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The present time of the e-learning in Latin America it's uneven and presents big ups and downs. Although the virtual education crosses a period of sustained growth; the lack of clear state politics is a barrier for the incorporation of the technology to the education processes and training. Therefore, the evolution of the sector experiences serious problems. This would be a true lack of strategic vision, since the conditions of geographical dispersion of our region, make that the virtual education be a variable of growth and socialization for the integration of our communities.

Formally the politics exist, but in most of the cases it isn't a declarative enunciation, but rather gives an image of "modernity" to the educational politics. An integral, deep and compatible legislation with the rest of the region and of the world it is an important pending debt in all Latin America. But in spite of what could be supposed, this Latin American context so uneven, fortunately doesn't outline situations of stagnation of the modality, but unequal growths.

In Chile, Mexico and Brazil undoubtedly the step should be taken toward the technological world and recent economic growth reaffirm the benefits of the digital direction. If we seek to be a developed region, these three countries undoubtedly should:
- be able to "mass" the training and to arrive to places which today are not available,
- allow people to access to the new world of Internet, through an effective application,
- be able to socialize the use of the technology.

Some indexes are encouraging:
- During last year, the growth of the registrations of virtual students grew 60% in America (Conference 2003 of the Bank of America Securities).
- According to a recent mensuration made by AXG Tecnonexo (http://www.tecnonexo.com), the company leader of the region in provision of solutions of e-learning, and the specialized magazine e-Learning América Latina (http://www.elearningamericalatina.com), 64,79% of the Latin American companies manifested to be implementing or considering to apply the online learning in the processes of upgrade and formation in a next future.
- In fact, as 90% of the work it is still to be made, each step means a significant advance and the region is impelling the indexes of the rest of the continent.

Quality: a recurrent problem

"In the countries of Latin America there is a lack of mechanisms that regulate the virtual education", pointed out the rector of the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Juan Ramón de la Fuente, who attacked with hardness institutions that offer diplomas for Internet without rigor, neither official recognition, in Latin America. An accusation that grows quickly begins to alert more and more on the possible "educational frauds" and "digital educational fantasies".

In many countries there isn't a legal mark that defines the quality of the educational offers that appear in Internet. But the problem doesn't emanate of Internet neither of the e-learning.

The point is that this technology will be used more and more, but with the rigor that requires such a sensitive question as forming a person. We are talking about technologies of quality that are implemented through processes of teaching of quality, to satisfy a demand of people's formation: an extremely sensitive matter for the society, because of that formation depends the professional future of people.

In front of the enormous legal hole that there is in Latin America, it is imperatively necessary to generate a simple legislation, white and overwhelming regarding those who can impart virtual education.

Integration: the key of growth

We don't need charismatic individual projects. We need projects in which we demand collaboration and regional cooperation, forming a community, in which each country maintains its characteristics and values, but such, in which we all can defend our interests as region.

At the present time we can see an incipient tendency toward this desired cooperation, mainly in the university world and in the government environments.

From the academic sector, it is worthwhile to highlight the efforts of the ten Colombian universities that are part of the denominated G-10, a group of institutions of superior education that have united for:
- developing combined investigation processes in the area of application of ICT in the superior education, to propose a model that helps to improve the quality of the education,
- real concern to find the form of integrating technologies to the teaching processes,
- strengthening the extension studies.

From the government environment, in August and for the first time in the educational history of Latin American, representatives of education of 14 countries of Latin America and international experts, met in Santiago de Chile to analyze politicians of introduction of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the school system. At the meeting, the governments launched the Latin American Net of Educational Portals and formalized an agreement of regional cooperation as a first step to generate combined efforts in front of the challenges that face the school systems in the introduction and use of the ICT in the educational environment.

The Latin American Net of Educational Portals is based on an integration spirit and an effective cooperation, that makes possible for each country member to exchange national content in a regional project guided to improve the quality of the education.

Tendencies of e-learning in Latin America

- Explosive growth during 2005. World revenues are of approximately 2,100 million dollars, and in 2005 it will grow to 33,600 million dollars, according to forecasts of Gartner Group Brasil.

- Although a participation in the world market of training (that is considered in more than 100,000 million dollars) is still relatively small, the market of virtual learning will

have next year a third part of the used training, since it grows 100% approximately every year.

- While in 2001 the market was in a maturation phase, in 2004 the challenge will consist on integrating the virtual learning with other applications.

Advances 2005

In Latin America, the 2005 afford us a deeper understanding of e-learning, reinforced by the first measures of the real impact of the virtual education in companies, educational institutions and governments. This way, bigger realism will be achieved and that will help to justify carried out investments.

In Latin America the public sector will be one of the main motors of development of the industry. Although the corporate sector is also making grow a lot the e-learning.

The meaning of e-learning in a Latin American environment will begin to achieve a bigger differentiation of what works in United States, Spain or other developed countries. The same can be said about an effective strategy in Latin America.

Latin America will abandon the systematic replica of practicals, to pass progressively to a more active list of the companies in the formulation of projects to measure of its necessities.
The discussion of e-learning has moved of the "are we able to?" to "can we make it well?", "can we make it hiring?", and "can we make it globally?".

The "preparation" is becoming the key of the success. Preparation to hire, to train and to re-train, to change the business when it was necessary, to move the product toward the market, to integrate the learning to the work process.

In Latin America the necessity to translate the platforms and contents to the language characteristic of each country or region stands out more and more, but the necessity is also glimpsed of locating them, according to the uses and customs of each place.

Today there exists a strong consent that "oneself size doesn't fit for all the organizations" and it is necessary to adapt the implementations to each client's necessities. "In the virtual education we cannot only speak of solutions just in time; we should also incorporate the expression "just the amount" (in the precise dose). A long reign is predicted for the applicable pills of knowledge to the daily formation.

Also, at the present time a strong necessity to develop re-usable objects is proven, and consequently a growing importance of the standardization. While the increase of the online implementations of simulations and virtual games are remarkable.

Conclusions

The growing insert of technologies facilitates communication. But we should remember, that for the time, the days only have 24 hours. Let us be realistic, people don't have time to verify all these messages if they want to maintain the rest of their lives. The innovations have to be adapted to the contexts in those they arise, in order to achieve a continuity in the time. There is no longer space for the extremely pretentious proposals that then drive in deep holes of

anything. But tendencies begin to be shown which arise as viable answers to the requirements which outline the society.

The great challenge of Latin American e-learning will be open windows where today exist walls.

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