Combining knowledge on a screen.

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Summary. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, physical meeting spaces changed forcibly for students from face-to-face to virtuality; we know this because we experienced it at the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente and on the entire Planet. But with the progressive return to the classroom and with the end of the health emergency, why do the professors at this university continue to meet in a digital academic space with guests from multiple specialties? The consolidation of the Aprendiendo en Ambientes Virtuales Seminar was a circumstantial proposal of the time, which sowed a seed to continue growing until today with a dialectic work method between expert education professors and professors interested in improving their practices in the face-to-face, virtual or hybrid modality. The expectations of its satisfactory results are still high, as digital resources and institutional networks help the expansion of learning communities on topics of higher education in Colombia and around the world.

Key words: Learning communities, Teacher training, Conferences, Knowledge management

1   Introduction

The Learning in Virtual Environments Seminar (SAAV, by its acronym in Spanish) emerged in 2020 as a collaborative initiative of the Pedagogical Support Group (GAP, by its acronym in Spanish) of the Academic Vice Rectory of the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente (UAO) of Cali, Colombia, in response to the opportunity to build a permanent dialogue forum around the experiences and learnings derived from the approaches and understandings about what pedagogical work mediated by technologies means. The UAO Institutional Educational Project recognizes its professors as an academic community guided by principles of and for training. One of these principles calls for merging a pedagogical culture as a learning community and, precisely, this seminar advances in that direction (UAO, 2023).

After overcoming the difficulties in the improvisation of the use of digital media in the virtual modality in the 2020-01 academic period, and with the extended obligation of social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic for the following semester, the SAAV is proposed and installed institutionally in the future.

2   Theoretical Framework

The UAO is aware that technologies do not in themselves lead to pedagogical change (Blázquez and Lucero, 2004), but it is undeniable that their right incorporation into training processes can be a way towards active and transforming processes of teaching and learning. Therefore, it is a commitment of all to approach other work alternatives that respond to the demands of a democratic society, in a context in which technologies have a significant place (UAO, 2023).

Teacher training should not only teach aspects such as didactics in their classroom activities, thinking in terms of learning, and attitudes towards students, but also change teachers' views on the act of teaching itself (Guzmán, 2018). With the SAAV, it is intended to cover the need for teachers to be prepared to achieve teaching that corresponds to the preparation of their students for the future in the profession and in life, considering their personal and professional affirmation as a pedagogue (Álvarez et al. 2021).

3   Methodology

Initially, conferences were scheduled with UAO professors, and the range of guests was gradually expanded with the personal references of close professors. Since 2021, the Ministry of National Education's Co-Lab has also taken part, a strategic partner for the exchange of experiences and inter-institutional collaboration that seeks to promote educational innovation and digital transformation in higher education in Colombia (Co-Lab, 2021).

Currently, four virtual meetings are held each semester. The seminar is held through the Webex platform (See Figure 1), on a Tuesday of each corresponding month and lasts 90 minutes from 5:00 p.m. (Bogotá, UTC-05:00).
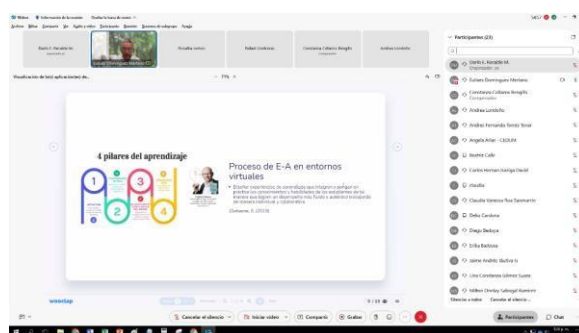

Fig. 1. Image of a virtual session led by a guest speaker at the SAAV.

The event structure follows the fundamental structure of seminars (Piña, Seife and Rodríguez, 2012). The first, the pre-event, where technical tests of the audiovisual material used by the guest are carried out before the start time. The second, the seminar,

which develops through the introduction (presentation of the expert and the moderator in charge), the conference on the scheduled topic, and the questions and contributions of the professors. And the third moment, the closing, where the highlights are collected in a report of the discussion between the participants.

The moderation oversees professors from the UAO, who are related from the discipline to the topics of the event or to the training of the expert guest. This role looks to incite dialogue with valuable contributions to the conference and the compilation of the most interesting questions that are collected in the live chat of the attendees.

4 Results

The Learning in Virtual Environments Seminar has 3 years of experience with the joint management of the members of the Pedagogical Support Group. It also has graphic design and communication professionals for the dissemination and editing of videos through the official channels of the UAO and the Co-Lab. (see Figure 2).

Fig. 2. Example of a graphic piece to massively promote the SAAV.

The seminar has already held 33 virtual conferences with nearly 50 guests, which has been configured as an audiovisual archive for the public to consult on the university's Teacher Portal at the link https://sitios.uao.edu.co/docentes/aprendiendo-en-ambientes-virtuales/ (see Figure 3). The videos have been organized from 2020 and include the expert's profile and a brief overview of the topic.

Fig. 3. Examples of the conferences are available in the SAAV digital archive.

Teachers' knowledge of the possibilities of these media, as well as the constraints they impose on the teaching-learning process, will help their choice and the continuous research on other technologies for the classroom (Ruiz et al., 2008).

5   Discussion

The value of learning communities is in the dialogue between those who speak and those who listen. Speakers, teachers who are experts in a subject or teachers with successful experiences, have a space to present their ideas and find in their listeners, novice or former teachers, an audience willing to continue learning with contributions and questions as they do habitually with their students.

The support for institutional initiatives to create or maintain academic collaboration networks is the best way to strengthen the learning communities of the participants in two perspectives: the first, that of the teachers who receive an update of their pedagogical competencies; and the second, of the guests who disseminate their knowledge and strategies in favor of themselves as research authors and of the universities they represent.

6   Conclusions

With institutional academic projects that promote free management of pedagogical and didactic knowledge through ICT, a wider, more dynamic, diverse and frequent coverage is achieved than what would be the large educational events that an organization or university can do.

Teacher training is a priority need for all universities, and with free, massive, scheduled and attractive seminars, teachers and administrators could learn about new educational resources for themselves and improve learning activities for their students.

7   Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of the Seminar would be the economic issue, as some expert guests may charge for their work in sharing their knowledge. Their work decision is understandable, which slows down the achievement of speakers with whom the UAO would like to have for purely academic and non-commercial purposes.

Future research may include the measurement of the impact of the talks on the attending teachers, through follow-up indicators or personalized advice from the guest in the application of the methodologies or tools as proper.

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