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## Asynchronous e-Learning: pedagogical challenges and advantages

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What is communication - this vital action for life in society? Since the beginning, communication has been the basis for the process of social development. For communication to be effective, it is necessary to have a sender and a receiver that decodes the message. Before the invention of paper, language (the first basic communication tool) had its codes materialized in pictorial records left on stones, allowing humanity to pass on and store information.

The condition in which transmitter and receiver do not need to be connected at the same time is not new. The paths are different. With the advent of the computer, this machine appears as an intermediary between the agents of the communication process. Although the interaction formula is maintained: transmitter-channel-receiver, in asynchronous communication two characteristics are decisive: the breaking down of space-time barriers and the possibility for the receiving agent to modify the message transmitted, adding new information to it.

Although asynchronous communication is widely disseminated and used by young people and adults through well-known tools such as e-mail, discussion forums, wikis, and co-editing documents, its applicability in online educational processes (e-learning)

still raises questions about its real potential and challenges.

One of the important characteristics of asynchronous e-learning is the fact that physical and temporal distances between teachers and students and between the latter and each other do not become an obstacle to communication and interaction between these actors in courses or disciplines offered in hybrid or fully online teaching modalities. Communication can be one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many, according to the didactic activity proposed and the personal availability of each one (rhythm and time), and

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it is not necessary for all of the group in question to be connected simultaneously.

Regarding the issue of physical distance between teachers and students, it is important to highlight what was pointed out by Michael Grahame Moore (Emeritus Professor of Education at the State University of Pennsylvania). In any educational situation, whether online or face-to-face, distance is not defined by geographical separation, but by the psychological and communicational distance between the subjects involved in teaching and learning. The greater the dialogue and flexibility, the shorter the distance between the parties.

Another feature is that in asynchronous e-learning, the teacher can plan and perform didactic-pedagogical actions that favor and stimulate the intellectual autonomy of the student to think about a proposed topic. Online debates or co-writing a document are



activities that require students to reflect, analyze, question and position themselves in a more refined, precise and in-depth manner. Such activities also require more time to be thought and answered. The precious time to think is possible. Having time is favored, and the time (individualized rhythm) is respected.

The linguistic skills of synthesis and argumentation, the clarity of expression, and the objectivity of communication, which are little covered even in the traditional classroom, can be worked on and developed by the teacher in asynchronous e-learning. To this end, the teacher should make students aware of the need for prior maturation of ideas, before they are shared in discussion groups and/or in the preparation of joint documents so that they generate relevant, pertinent and meaningful exchanges and contributions for the group.

Linguistic aspects worked by the teacher and students in asynchronous communication are the driving force for the development and, later the mastery of good writing, an important requirement for any professional who wishes to stand out in the job market.

Other aspects that can be explored and worked on in asynchronous e-learning are those related to soft skills: interpersonal emotional and behavioral skills (empathy, collaborative-sociability), and the ability to self-manage knowledge.

Building and sharing ideas in an online group in an asynchronous way do not happen spontaneously. There is a need to create an environment of active dialogue for the exchanges and consequently for the joint construction of knowledge. At first, it is up to the teacher to establish coherence and balance in the participation of members, even if there is an alternation of leaderships between students and teachers or shared

leadership among participants. What is fundamental is the generation of a cordial and affective climate that seeks in common ground, the effectiveness of communication and dialogue and respective learning.

As for the performance in the online group, it is not only the effective participation and interaction that must be taken into account but also participations with emoticons, and the virtual silence of those who for some reason do not manifest or want to manifest themselves. In these cases, it is important the role of the teacher/tutor in motivating for real performance and in breaking the silence. An invitation to participate, the welcome and the integration of all members of the group can make a difference.

The possible sense of isolation generated by asynchronous communication can be minimized or slowed down by the teacher's frequent direct interventions with each student or by leadership that encourages everyone's participation in the learning process.

In asynchronous communication activities, it is important that the teacher/tutor show that each individual has contributions to make. If there are disputes or conflicting positions that may cause noise, it is up to the teacher to promptly settle such issues so that they do not harm and/or interfere with the educational activity. The teacher must always ensure respectful participation and interactions, even if there are disagreements of opinions and points of view. When these differences appear, they should be placed in such a way that they are not misunderstood or cause discomfort.

Another point to be highlighted is that although students can participate in asynchronous activities, in the discussion forums, for example, at the time they

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like, this freedom does not occur in a totally random way, since it is essential that the teacher establish and require the fulfillment of deadlines for the success of learning objectives.

More than ever, it is possible to see in the didactic-pedagogical actions carried out in e-learning, the fundamental roles of the teacher as coordinator, articulator, animator, curator (among other roles of teaching), in the definition of the starting points and objectives to be achieved. Moreover, it is up to the teacher during mediation to orchestrate the dissonant voices, i.e., to balance the manifestations of shy students and conversationalists; those who have assimilated the concept under discussion and those who are still in the process of structuring previous stages of knowledge; those who agree with the theory and those who disagree, expanding the argumentation with new points of view.

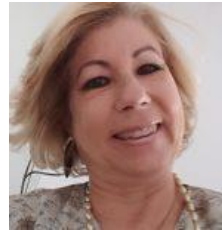
The students, in turn, start to act more effectively in the learning process, developing their own performance rhythm and contribution in online workgroups and start to administrate and manage their study time.

Asynchronous e-learning can bring good benefits if done consistently and according to good pedagogical planning.

There are many aspects to asynchronous e-learning teaching/learning that must be considered, and many dilemmas to be solved. Obstacles and challenges to constructivist, collaborative and emancipatory learning are set to be discussed in order to favor students, the object of learning in online teaching situations.



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This article is a result of the authors' ascertainment and analysis, without compulsorily reflecting CEST's opinion.

