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The role of the online teacher: why they still play a fundamental role

New technologies have changed the role of teachers, who in eLearning have assumed new functions, remaining a fundamental figure for education.

The evolution caused by new technologies has drastically altered the way we conduct various activities in our daily lives. Computers, tablets, and smartphones have gradually become part of everyone's daily routine, significantly modifying the way we perform certain actions or providing opportunities to do things previously unimaginable. Consequently, learning methods have also changed, and with them, the roles or functions of certain professional figures in the educational field. Teachers, in particular, have had to adapt to new technological education. However, their role cannot be replaced by new technologies, and despite the changes they have undergone, they remain of fundamental importance today.

The teacher in eLearning

The shift brought by innovative technologies has also impacted the vast world of education, which has been significantly transformed by the introduction of new teaching methods that utilize digital tools. Thus, the transition from physical classrooms to virtual ones has been swift, and in recent decades we have witnessed a growing spread of eLearning.

Computers and smartphones have become accessible and intuitive tools for everyone, allowing online education to reach a large number of people without remaining a niche opportunity reserved for a few. Today, almost everyone has easy access to new technologies and can attend digital courses from anywhere in the world, as long as they have a device and a good internet connection. The simplification of interfaces on various websites has also allowed people of all generations to participate in tailored online learning, which does not require special skills to access.

In this context, the traditional role of teachers has been severely tested and has evolved alongside the changes induced by digital education. Despite the virtual environment presented to students in online courses, the teacher has not lost their importance, as simply conveying concepts is not enough to ensure proper education for students. Therefore, new technologies have not been able to replace teachers; rather, they have assumed an even more crucial role than in traditional education. The eLearning teacher no longer merely has the task of disseminating the content of the educational program to facilitate learning but also assumes a series of innovative functions born thanks to new technologies.

Responsibilities of the eLearning teacher

The responsibility of the eLearning teacher also includes creating welcoming and effective digital environments for learning, providing meaningful experiences that can help users both in acquiring new knowledge and from a social and digital perspective. Teachers, therefore, are no longer just facilitators of learning but are the ones who bring education to life, choosing from an increasing number of strategies and tools that can be creatively combined depending on each student's needs.

The eLearning teacher can also help their students maintain high motivation for learning by asking them to share their previous knowledge or by proposing realistic scenarios to tackle. This way, the concepts learned during the course can be immediately tested through virtual simulations or role-playing games.

Finally, the role of the digital teacher also includes setting up moments of assessment and reflection with a dual purpose. On one hand, this moment can be directed at students to help them understand what skills they have achieved and what knowledge they possess after a lesson or series of lessons, giving them the opportunity to identify areas that may need further study or review. On the other hand, the assessment can be related to the course or the teacher themselves, allowing feedback on the teacher's work or the platform itself.

Four tips for online teachers

We have already discussed the qualities that a good **eLearning teacher** must possess to ensure the effectiveness of the course they teach. Empathy, organization, and the importance of data are fundamental characteristics that a teacher cannot overlook if they intend to work well with their students. However, in addition to these, an online teacher can keep in mind four tips that make them still a crucial figure in the educational field:

1. **Be multifunctional**: besides being a facilitator of learning, you will simultaneously assume a series of other roles related to the digital age. To best tackle this change, it will be essential to acquire all the necessary skills for managing new technologies.
2. **Design content specifically for a virtual classroom**: remember that starting an eLearning course is not just about transferring the content of traditional education to online lessons. A virtual classroom operates through completely different mechanisms from a traditional one and uses specific tools that do not always allow the direct transfer of traditional content and methods to the online environment. Therefore, it is better to think of specific lessons and adapt them to be effective in a digital environment, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by new technologies.
3. **Connect with your students**: eLearning might risk distancing students from their teachers since the personal component passes through a screen. But this does not mean that it is entirely nullified. On the contrary, digital tools offer numerous means that can be effectively used to create a connection between teachers and students, such as forums and chats, which allow for direct and constant interaction, thereby not sacrificing the social component of learning.
4. **Never stop learning**: since you are called to assume new roles, the eLearning teacher must also possess skills previously not required, related to digital tools. For this reason, additional initial training will be necessary. But this is not enough; one never stops learning, and it is necessary to keep up with the times. Thus, the online course teacher must always stay informed and never neglect their own education.

The eLearning teacher can help students not only build an effective and successful learning path but also enable them to acquire skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Functions of the online teacher

Always seen as a fundamental figure in traditional education, the teacher also maintains a primary role in digital courses within the learning environment. New technologies have allowed them to assume new characteristics and responsibilities toward students. Specifically, the functions of the online teacher are:

1. **Guide**: the teacher must guide their students both educationally and practically. It is essential for them to thoroughly understand the learning platform to guide students within it when necessary. They must be able to demonstrate how to use the platform correctly and the tools available. A good guide should provide all the necessary information to students, ensuring they can use the platform correctly and navigate through the various lesson blocks.
2. **Facilitate learning**: one of the teacher's fundamental roles is to help students effectively learn the content presented in lessons by facilitating their understanding. Therefore, the teacher should strive to find new teaching methods rich in innovative experiences, utilizing the tools the virtual world provides. It is not enough to simply replicate techniques used in face-to-face teaching online, as they would lack effectiveness. Instead, it is crucial to think of new strategies that new technologies can offer, such as virtual simulations, audiovisual tools, and practical exercises.
3. **Motivate**: in a virtual classroom, it is not easy to keep users' attention, as they remain behind a screen. Therefore, the eLearning teacher has also taken on the role of a motivator who must strengthen the emotional aspect of learning to generate greater interest and a more effective connection with their students. This way, users will be more motivated to learn. To achieve this goal, the teacher can provide students with clear objectives to pursue, set deadlines, and offer evaluation moments that serve as feedback for each user. Moreover, flexibility, innovative methodologies, and availability from the teacher are fundamental ingredients to keep motivation high.
4. **Evaluate**: among the functions that the eLearning teacher assumes is evaluating students. This is a fundamental role to ensure effective learning and the successful outcome of the course. Clearly, in a virtual classroom, it will not be possible to subject students to the classic evaluation techniques used in traditional learning. Instead, these must be adapted to the digital format or completely rethought to provide students with feedback on their progress.
5. **Make learning dynamic**: to avoid losing students' attention, the online course teacher must ensure a dynamic learning path. To do so, the teacher has numerous innovative tools offered by new technologies, which allow for lessons that go

beyond simple concept explanations. These tools enable students to become active participants in the learning process through realistic exercises, moments of exchange and sharing, direct interventions, and simulations.

Despite the changes imposed by new technologies in the educational field, the teacher's role has not been sidelined, as one might think given the capabilities of new digital tools that can perform the actions of various professional figures. On the contrary, the spread of eLearning has assigned teachers new roles and functions that, combined with traditional ones, make them still a figure of fundamental importance in guiding students in their learning path and ensuring appropriate and effective education even in the new technological education model.