**Original article**

# Contributions to Teacher Preparation in Distance Education

*Contribuciones para Preparación del Profesor en Educación a Distancia*

*Contribuições para a Preparação do Professor na Educação a Distância*

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## Abstract

The objective of this work was to identify how higher education teachers are prepared to teach distance disciplines, due to the complexity of this form of education. To do so, it initially describes the main characteristics of distance education and summarizes the methods that support its theoretical basis. It presents the concept of learning context and the proposal that looking at distance learning can help in its specific theoretical basis and indicates the need for a careful preparation of the teacher for the development of these courses. It then presents the data of a survey that points to indications of how teachers of higher education institutions are prepared to teach semipresential disciplines. It is concluded that the teachers participating in this research develop, to a large extent, isolated and independent actions for their formation in EaD and the institutions where they work such training is done through superficial courses. From the idea of EaD as a learning context,

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it is understood that such preparation should be a productive partnership between the actions of teachers and their educational institution.

**Keywords:** Distance education. Learning context. Teacher preparation.

## Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio fue identificar cómo los profesores de educación superior se preparan para enseñar a los sujetos en la distancia, dada la complejidad de este tipo de educación. Por lo tanto, inicialmente descrita, las principales características de la Educación a Distancia y resume los métodos que apoyan su base teórica. Se trata, pues, el concepto de contexto de aprendizaje y la propuesta de que el aspecto de la educación a distancia de este enfoque puede ayudar en su teórica específica e indica la necesidad de una cuidadosa preparación del maestro para el desarrollo de estos cursos. A continuación se presentan los datos de una encuesta que muestra evidencia de cómo los profesores de las instituciones de educación superior están preparando para ministrar disciplinas semipresenciales. Se deduce entonces que los profesores participantes desarrollar esta investigación, en gran parte aislada y las acciones independientes de su formación en la educación a distancia y de las instituciones en las que trabajan este tipo de formación se realiza a través de capas de rodadura. A partir de la idea de la educación a distancia como un contexto de aprendizaje, se entiende que tal preparación debe ser una asociación productiva entre las acciones de los maestros y su institución educativa.

**Palabras clave:** Educacíon a distancia. El contexto de aprendizaje. Formación docente.

## Resumo

O objetivo deste trabalho foi o de identificar como os professores do ensino superior se preparam para ministrar disciplinas a distância, tendo em vista a complexidade dessa forma de educação. Para tanto, descreve inicialmente as principais características da Educação a Distância e resume os métodos que sustentam sua base teórica. Apresenta-se, então, o conceito sobre contexto de aprendizagem e a proposta de que o olhar

para a EaD a partir desse enfoque pode auxiliar no seu embasamento teórico específico e indica a necessidade de uma preparação cuidadosa do professor para o desenvolvimento desses cursos. Em seguida, apresenta os dados de uma pesquisa que aponta indícios de como os professores de instituições de ensino superior se preparam para ministrar disciplinas semipresenciais. Conclui-se, então, que os professores participantes desta pesquisa desenvolvem, em grande parte, ações isoladas e independentes para a sua formação em EaD, e, nas instituições onde trabalham, tal formação é feita por meio de cursos superficiais. A partir da ideia de EaD como um contexto de aprendizagem, entende-se que tal preparação deveria ser uma parceria produtiva entre as *ações* dos professores e suas instituições de ensino.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação a distância. Contexto de aprendizagem. Preparação do professor.

## Introduction

Since the origin of Distance Education (EaD), several authors have raised questions about its correct definition. In this way, numerous attempts have been made to conceptualize EaD, taking into account the pedagogical strategies and the emerging technologies.

Lemgruber (2008) highlights the following question: What is EaD? And begins with two points that do not characterize it: it is not a modality of education, nor a conception of education. It goes on to say that, although it is often referred to as a modality, "the term may be confusing with educational specificities, such as Youth and Adult Education, Special Education, Vocational Education, Indigenous Education; these are educational modalities" (LEMGRUBER, 2008, p.4). The author also points out that such are the inaccuracies, that there are even legal norms describing EaD as "an educational modality that can be applied to different levels and modalities of teaching" (LEMGRUBER, 2008, p.4). For this reason, the author prefers to use the term educational form.

For Moran (2004), distance education is the process of teaching and learning mediated by technologies, in which teachers and students are separated spatially or temporally, but can connect by technology, such

as the Internet. But, you can also make use of mail, radio, television, video, CD-ROM, telephone and fax, among others.

Briefly, one can point out four characteristics that would allow a concept of Distance Education:

1) the teacher/student separation in space and time, except the moments in which the synchronous interaction occurs through the technological fields;

2) the independent study, in which the student controls the study time, space, pace and, in some cases, the itinerary, activities and evaluations;

3) the mediated communication of multiple paths between teachers and students, students and students, teacher and technical staff, students and technical staff;

4) the institutional support that plans, designs and develops didactic materials, evaluates and promotes the learning process through mentoring.

Distance Education, or EAD, is a form of education where students and teachers do not need to share the same physical space or interact at the same time. Most of the teacher/student communication is accomplished through a communication technology, making it essential to have a quality interaction between all the actors involved.

After this conceptualization of EAD, we will briefly present the main models that support it theoretically, highlighting the need for a theoretical development that accompanies the growing rhythm of communication technologies and new educational practices.

In this work, EaD is considered as a learning context. This approach consists of a significant contribution, since the view of the EAD under this approach is a topic still little discussed in the literature of the area.

As EaD becomes increasingly present in Higher Education, the need arises for a careful preparation of the teacher for the development of these courses. The university professor's challenges to the EaD are then discussed. In order to contribute to the discussion of how teachers

prepare to teach semipresential subjects, it is presented how the data collection of the research was developed and concludes with the description and analysis of the collected data, indicating that such preparation is done in the largest part of the time, with isolated actions, independent of the institution in which it works.

## EaD theoretical models

According to Chaves (1999), educational theory is a reflexive activity, which basic purpose is to understand this reality. Thus, an education theorist needs, basically, to look at the educational reality, to understand it, explain it, criticize it and propose its reformulation.

A theoretical research is central to the development of a practice field. The theoretical foundations are intended to provide the means to guide future developments. The power of ideas, represented in theories, directly influences practice, centering perspectives, revealing knowledge and suggesting new alternatives. A good theory is not limited to describing what it is, but should also help to predict what will or could be.

Thus, according to Garrison (2000), a theory of distance education must reflect both intentional and spontaneous nature. For this reason, theoretical constructs needs to be coherent and articulate, but also sufficiently flexible, so as not to restrict critical and creative thinking. The evolution of practical approaches in distance education should be reflected in its theory, since this practice is increasingly incorporating new and sophisticated communication technologies that allow the synchronous and asynchronous creation of collaborative research communities.

The pressing theoretical challenge of the EAD, therefore, is to adapt the current theories to this new reality.

Pretti (2002), in his text on "Epistemological Bases and Theories in Construction in Distance Education[4]", he emphasizes that the theories

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[4] Pretti text is classic when discussing the EaD theoretically and still used today by researchers of the area.

used to support proposals for distance learning courses are still under construction. According to D. Keegan (1986, p. 63):

The problem of distance education has become complicated because of the tacit assumption that we know what it is. Most of the efforts made in this field were of practical type, or about how mechanical utility has influenced the logistics of the company. So we have a lot of information about the students: their history, their motivations to study at a distance, their relative progress. There have been many discussions about the production of materials, the choice of medium, the distribution of materials, the meaning of student evaluation. But, the theoretical foundations of distance education are still fragile.

Thus, it can be understood that Distance Education needs a more fruitful discussion about its theoretical bases, as Pretti (2002) points out, emphasizing that a theory results from a process of dialogue between theory and practice, between doing and reflecting on the action, investigating, questioning and deconstructing truths or myths. According to this author, very few things have been done about this aspect.

This idea is reinforced by Godoi (2012), when he emphasizes that the insufficient scientific productions in the area have contributed little to the development of theories in this modality.

It is understood the concept of model, according to Behar (2009), as a trend to establish a relationship by analogy with reality, a figurative system that reproduces reality in a more abstract, schematic way and used as a reference.

The following are briefly presented some of the main theoretical models underlying the EaD, based on the theoretical approaches included in Keegan Taxonomy[5] . Within each of these models, we sought to highlight, besides their most important representatives, their basic characteristics and the role assigned to the teacher.

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[5] (i) "Instructional Model", by Otto Peters (1967); (ii) "Interaction and communication model", by Börger Holmberg (1983, 1995), John A. Baath (1979), David Sewart (1978), Jonh Daniel (1983), Kevin Smith (1984) and D.R. Garrison (1999, GARRISON et al. 2003), included by researchers more recently, and (iii) "Model of autonomy and independence", by Rudolf M. Delling (1966), Charles Wedemeyer (1973) and Michael G. Moore (1973, 1977).

**Table 1:** Main characteristics of EaD models

| | Main Representatives | Main Characteristics | Teacher's Role |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Instructional Model** | - Otto Peters | - transmission of information and content;<br>- does not use collaborative strategies in the learning process;<br>- passive student;<br>- banking education;<br>- Content-centric model. | - little participation of the teacher (or tutor);<br>- specialist in the production of "small tasks";<br>- no need to interact with the student. |
| **Interaction and Communication Model** | - Börger Holmberg, - John A. Baath,<br>- David Sewart,<br>- Jonh Daniel,<br>- Kevin Smith,<br>- D.R. Garrison. | - search for knowledge and understanding through dialogue;<br>- guided didactic communication and emphasis on the elaboration of didactic material. | - active participation from the conception and organization of the learning experience to the conception and implementation of the proposed activities. |
| **Model of Autonomy and Independence** | - Rudolf M. Delling,<br>- Charles Wedemeyer,<br>- Michael G. Moore. | - emphasis on student-centered teaching;<br>- Individualization, dialogue and structure of the teaching program;<br>- autonomy of the student;<br>- distant communication. | - facilitator of the knowledge acquisition process;<br>- encouraging the student in relation to self-study. |

The description of the models involving EaD in this work certainly does not exhaust the many theoretical contributions in the field of

distance education. However, it can be pointed out, with some degree of reliability, that the selected models reflect the progression of a theoretical development of the field. One question that Garrison (2000) highlights is whether distance education has a theoretical foundation that can guide it in the 21st century, and what challenges in this area will it have with the growing pace of communication technologies and new educational practices.

According to this same author, this will require theories that reflect a collaborative approach to EaD as opposed to independent learning. This fundamental change of focus reveals the challenge for distance education theorists, which should evolve to reflect the current and emerging innovative practices of its supply (Garrison, 2000).

The challenge for this century's EaD theorists is to consider the increasing variety of existing technologies and, above all, to change the values of the actors involved, resulting in behavior that no longer corresponds to an industrial character.

## About learning context

For Daniels (2003, p.108), "learning, both inside and outside school, progresses through social interaction in collaboration and the social construction of knowledge taking place". This advance of learning, in activity theory[6], occurs not only through the analysis of the context of the situation, but also of the student's individual culture and history.

Cohen & Siegel (1991) point out that the term context has become more than a word for substituting socio-economic variables or a research environment, although a precise definition is not yet available. These authors suggest that the study of context and development must necessarily include social characteristics, physical environments and people as active participants, all interacting and influencing each other.

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[6] In this work, the concept of activity will be taken in the field of historical-cultural psychology, according to what Leontiev proposed. According to him, activities are: (...) processes psychologically characterized by that to which the process as a whole is directed (its object), always coinciding with the objective that stimulates the subject to perform this activity, that is, the motive. (LEONTIEV, 2001, p. 68)

In this way, these authors expand the scope of context relevance, assuming that all fields of psychology, not just those related to sociological phenomena, need consideration of context for their proper formulation.

They reject visions that have agencies and contexts as independent entities, and propose instead a conception that includes the consideration of people (seen as active, constructive, processed information, containing a past history in a current set of agendas, goals, expectations, etc.), immersed in social relationships (close and distant) and within a physical environment (offering opportunities and limitations), all developing in time (COHEN & SIEGEL, 1991).

These authors highlight 5 points that characterize a context:

(1) Contexts are built by people. For Cohen & Siegel (1991), what makes contexts more than just the ambient settings or behavior are people. Contexts cannot be defined or understood independently from the people who create it next and will inhabit them;

(2) Contexts are essentially social. Although a place exists independently of people and memories, a context cannot be like that. Although the definition of behavior exists in the absence of active participants, a context does not exist in this way. Cohen & Siegel add an example that illustrates this idea:

> Our grandparents intuitively make this distinction when they say, "This place is not the same without your grandpa Sam". The definition of behavior is similar (Grandma Clara's dining room in the Thanksgiving meal), but the context is different! The presence of Grandpa Sam (via memories) or absence creates a totally different context. (Cohen & Siegel, 1991, p. 309);

(3) Contexts are personalized by people, reasons and memories (traditions, memories). A context has a time and place in which an actor, using a medium, accomplishes a goal. They clarify that, as in a good article, a context has a who, when, where, how and why. In this way, the same physical environment (for example, the same classroom, the same teacher, the same students) become different

contexts, depending on the objective defined by the participants (students and teachers);

(4) Context is its own unit of analysis. The authors point out that a researcher can investigate a particular environment and its impact on people or, still, people and their perceptions about an environment. However, to study context, research must be conceived and projected, and data interpreted, not in reference to people or environments considered individually or even together. It is necessary to advance to an analysis of the activity, of the human construction within these created configurations;

(5) Context and change: Contexts involve development (and vice versa). Siegel & Cohen criticize the definition of development as a progressive change in a system organized in a certain direction and hierarchical integration. Thus, they assert that the constructions of an individual in a particular context are dependent, for the most part, on their past experiences, and on the sequencing of those experiences. They also point out that similar events can affect people differently, and the same event, at different times, can have different impacts on the same people.

Lacasa (1994) uses these points highlighted by Cohen & Siegel (1991) to justify the idea that the school is a learning context.

## Distance education as a learning context

Based on the characteristics on context, based on Cohen & Siegel (1991), and the parallel made by Lacasa (1994), presenting the school as a learning context, important points are highlighted that can be thought of the EaD as a context of learning. They are:

- Distance education, despite the physical separation between teacher and student and between the students themselves, is built by people. It is understood, then, that what is essential are the actors (teachers, students, support team) who work in it and their goals;

- EaD is a social context, because it is necessary to be aware of the social dimension existing in the relationships developed in it. A

course, or even a discipline taught at distance, is never the same when students, teachers or the teams that compose it are changed;

- Contexts include memories. The EaD is immersed in collective memory processes. It is assumed that over time a certain course or discipline of a given EaD institution acquires a tradition, shaped by the students who have passed through it, by the teachers who form it, and so on;

- EaD as a context, is a unit of analysis and can be characterized as a group of students and the teacher, with their goals, interacting in a particular learning environment. To study the context of a distance course, for example, research should not only take into account the student, the teacher, the material, or only the interactions between them, but should also consider the activity of human construction within these configurations created. I.e., it is necessary to analyze the inseparability between the students, the teacher, the tools used, the course material, the technical support team, the offering teaching institution and the environment they create in this course;

- EaD, as a learning context, must be understood in relation to the processes of change that take place in it, because every institutional process must be considered as a process of change.

To think of a distance course as a context in which teaching and learning takes place first requires specifying what is meant by context. In general, it can be considered as a structure in which the elements have meaning only in relation to their totality. Thus, theoretical models that attempt to explain these elements have to accept that they only acquire meaning in relation to the whole.

## The university professor facing the challenges of a distance learning course understood as a learning context

Currently, it is possible to observe several situations that contribute to the development of conflicts in institutions of higher education

that inevitably are reflected in the relations between teachers and students, resulting in actions taken by institutions that directly affect the daily life in the classroom.

Krasilchik (2008) points out three important points of tension in higher education: the large increase in the student population claiming access to higher education; the dichotomy between teaching and researching and the process of remapping knowledge. In this sense, the training of the university professor could be included in these points, understood as crucial in higher education.

Therefore, essential issues related to these tensions will be discussed below.

With regard to the great increase of the student population, the direct consequence is the reduction of financial and human resources, overloading teachers, who find students coming from different realities in large classes. In this way, teachers feel directly such changes, finding difficulties in overcoming them.

The dichotomy between teaching and researching is presented as tension, since research is now more valued than teaching before the development agencies and the internal organs of the institutions. But, according to Krasilchik (2008), this tension is shaped by an international problem, resulting in the fact that the measurement of 'productivity' by the number and quality of publications provokes a preference for research rather than teaching, especially undergraduate studies.  According to the author, there is a need to carefully evaluate teaching and its importance within the university as an element of career progression, since only this would prevent the imbalance of weights between teaching and researching, "encouraging teachers equally dedicated to the two activities".

The tension related to the process of knowledge remapping stems from the need to build paths between the various areas and cultures, forcing teachers to review curricula and programs, e.g., creating new disciplines or reformulating old disciplines. Such attitudes "challenge teachers and provoke disruptions of long-established traditions"

(Krasilchik, 2008, p. 14), requiring new studies, research on new bibliographies, creation of new disciplines and restructuring of old ones, generating changes in physical and hierarchical departments.

Also as a consequence of this remapping of knowledge, Krasilchik points out the existence of an increase in information, which may restrict the capacity to store and transmit it, creating the need to provide students with the ability to study and learn individually or in groups, regardless of the teacher's continued attention. She points out that this situation also changes the position of the teacher and creates new functions and obligations, another element that interferes as a source of tension: the need to bring together the printed culture, which prevails in all academic activities, with digital culture, each time more meaningful, necessary and present. According to Krasilchik,

> regardless of this reaction, the idea that both for regular courses and for the so-called EaD there is no way to circumscribe school ecology to traditional spaces and to confine all students in classrooms, laboratories and even in fieldwork supervised and directed by a specialized teacher is increasingly spreading. The situation demands creativity and boldness from the universities to inform, plan and implement new solutions, using both the elements of the printed culture and the digital culture (KRASILCHIK, 2008, p. 22).

What is seen in the scenario, in general, of higher education institutions is an environment surrounded by tensions that have been established for some time, and by new ones that are created as a consequence of them, as is the case of EaD.

In this environment, it is necessary to prepare teachers even more in relation to the process of teaching and learning in Higher Education, but, according to Pimenta and Anastasiou (2010), in most of the institutions, what still prevails is the unpreparedness, the scientific ignorance of the teaching and learning process, and, complementing, even a disregard for these issues. A study by Benedito (1995) portrays how the formation of the university teacher usually takes place:

> (...) The university teacher learns it through a process of socialization in part intuitive, self-taught (...) or following the routine of 'others'. This is undoubtedly due to the lack of specific training as a university teacher. In this process, their own experience as a student, the model of teaching that predominates in the university system, and their students' reactions play a more or less important role, although the self-taught capacity of the teaching staff should not be ruled out. But, it is insufficient (BENEDITO, 1995, p. 131).

On the other hand, it is known that the university needs to follow the accelerated changes that occur in society, understanding the current dynamics and favoring the formation of agents of these transformations.

According to Keegan (1986), EaD teaches that not only the teacher, but the institution, i.e., every institution undergoes a change in its role, since all have a direct contribution in the process of teaching and learning of the student.

In addition, the role of the teacher is given as multifaceted, transforming it into a collective being. It should be remembered that, with the insertion of new technologies, this characteristic also extends to presential teaching.

In this new role, the university teacher will always need constant updating, both in relation to the content taught in their discipline, as well as new teaching methodologies and new technologies.

Belloni (2009) reunites the functions of the teacher, in the EaD, in three groups: 1st Responsible for the design and realization of the course and materials; 2nd Responsible for the planning and organization of the distribution of materials and academic administration; 3rd Responsible for accompanying the student during the learning process. In this way, one can have the same teacher in front of all these functions, but also the organization of a team of teachers, working in an integrated way, becomes interesting.

It is known that Higher Education institutions, both public and private, in general, should have as their mission the responsibility of fomenting, building and disseminating knowledge, contributing to the formation of the citizen and sustainable human development, dissociating teaching, research and extension and, thus, giving the student freedom in the construction and autonomy in the dissemination of knowledge. All of these points nowadays are about the insertion of technologies and EaD in the university environment, since they are a reality and are present in a highly connected society, such as the Brazilian one.

Some questions can be raised: are HEI teachers prepared to deal with the specificities of EaD? Are they digitally included to use NTICs (New Technologies of Information and Communication), in order to train qualified and autonomous professionals? Is digital inclusion enough for the teacher to act critically in EaD and in the use of NICTs? Are teachers prepared to work in this new society? What new features does the teacher need for work in the EaD? These questions are essential to analyze the preparation of these teachers to act in this new form of education.

The importance of the discussion about the role of the teacher in face of this challenge and the new characteristics that this professional is demanded is proved. The purpose of this paper is not to answer all these questions, but rather to use the reflections and research carried out to question how, in an environment surrounded by transformations, the teacher faces the challenge of teaching a discipline, for example in a distance learning course, or in a semipresential way.

Understanding EaD as a learning context admits as its main characteristic to develop a structure in which the elements have meaning only in relation to their totality. Thus, it is not enough, for example, for a course to have a good material without worrying about the technological resources that will be used, or worrying about the technological resources and the material without thinking about the target audience (the students) that will use it. As Nicolau and Krasilchik point out, the success of a distance learning course is due to the team's ability "to maintain the connection, rigor and quality

of a large, complex and multifaceted operation" (NICOLAU and KRASILCHIK 2011, p. 30).

In relation to the teacher, it is understood that having a significant experience in its specific area is a necessary characteristic, but not sufficient for the development of a discipline developed at a distance, based on EaD as a learning context, as it becomes necessary also be clear about the teaching and learning process; about the use of digital information and communication technologies and about who the students are, how and why they are in that course and also about their total involvement with the work team.

## About hybrid undergraduate courses and semipresential disciplines

Currently, there are numerous indications[7] that Brazilian higher education has entered the age of teaching virtualization. With this, the university will have to reinvent itself, changing the concept of classroom and its pedagogical approach. One point that is much discussed today is the exploration of the concept of active learning[8]. Also linked to the concept of active learning, the idea of hybrid courses is more and more widespread, in which there is a mixture of moments of presential and virtual learning.

According to Moran (2002), today we have presential, semipresential (part presential/part distance) and distance education. The presential is that of regular courses, where teachers and students meet in the same physical location. The semipresential is one that can occur partly in the classroom and partly at a distance, through technologies. Distance education occurs essentially with teachers and students separated physically in space and/or time, but may be together through communication technologies.

But Tori (2009), points out that the trend to combine presential learning activities (or face-to-face) with activities developed at a distance has

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[7] For example, in December 2005, with the creation of UAB (Brazilian Open University).

[8] Examples of Active Learning Methodologies: Project Based Learning (PBL) Game Based Learning (GBL) Teaching Case Team-based Learning (TBL). Peer Instruction (PI)..

been referred to by means of several denominations, of which, according to the author, the 'hybrid courses' and blended learning stand out. Tori also adds that the term blended learning stands out[9] because it refers to a concept of 'harmonious blend' and is singled out[10] as one of the top ten trends in the 'knowledge industry'.

In this way, for Tori, the hybrid courses are the combination of

> two learning environments that have historically developed separately: the traditional presential classroom and the modern virtual learning environment (VLE), which are finding each other mutually complementary (...) seeking to take advantage of what is advantageous in each modality, considering context, cost, pedagogical adequacy, educational objectives and student profiles (TORI 2009, p. 122).

Currently, in undergraduate courses, hybrid courses, in general, are composed of semipresential disciplines. These disciplines were authorized by the Ministry of Education, by Ordinance 4.059, dated December 10, 2004.

The university professor, who already faces great tensions in higher education, as pointed out, in a distance or semipresential course, faces a further challenge: to acquire the necessary theoretical knowledge that involves this form of education and methodological and instrumental mastery of TDIC (Digital Information and Communication Technologies).

Pretti (2005) points out that "the discussion about teacher education is not recent, but it gains new contours (conjunctural, political, ideological and pedagogical) to be associated to the distance modality". Thus, the challenge of universities (whether public or private) is to prepare for this new educational perspective.

According to Oliveira and Fumes (2008), many university professors do not have the appropriate training to insert the TDICs into the

[9] blended learning

[10] By ASTD (American Society for Training e Development)..

pedagogical context of their classroom and, when thinking about distance education, the situation is even more serious. But, distance learning courses are taking place at this time, already trained teachers are working in this area. In this way, it becomes important to question how these teachers are prepared to teach courses of this nature and what are their conceptions about EaD.

## About data collection and discussion points

So far, central points have been highlighted related to this research: characterization and main theoretical models on EaD; the concept of learning context as a possible theoretical support for EaD and the current growth of semipresential disciplines and distance as a trend in universities - such growth stands out as a point of tension in higher education.

The research assumes that working with distance education is not something simple or mechanical, as we could observe in the theoretical discussions held. It is believed, from the idea of learning context, that there is a structure in which the elements have meaning only in relation to their totality, i.e., elements such as the material used; technological resources; the tools of the virtual environment and students and teachers developing a relationship of harmony and balance. EaD is a strong trend in Higher Education, a segment already so surrounded by tensions and challenges for the teaching staff. In this way, this data collection had as main objective to identify the main actions of the university teacher in their preparation to minister semipresential or distance disciplines.

Data were obtained from the following instruments:

- A questionnaire suggested to teachers of semipresential disciplines

Initially, a research was carried out on institutions that underwent a process of implementation of semipresential subjects in their undergraduate courses. It was carried out using the internet as a data source, in search sites, through keywords, such as semipresential institutions and disciplines, implementation of semipresential disciplines, among others, and later analysis, the material found. The initial objective was

to get an idea of the scope of such disciplines in the country's higher education institutions.

More than 150 institutions were found that presented this form of teaching in their presential courses, all private. Eleven institutions from different states of the country participated in the final analysis : four from Rio Grande do Sul, one from Santa Catarina, four from São Paulo and two from Rio de Janeiro.

From this path, the questionnaire was used in only two institutions that were willing to cooperate with the research, which will be identified here as institutions A and B. Institution A is located in the interior of the State of São Paulo, and B, in the city of São Paulo.

The questionnaire was written on a web page, where each institution received the website's electronic address, a username and a password to access the questions page, which should be passed on to their teachers who taught semipresential subjects.

Teachers who were willing to answer the questionnaire generally teach classes in several courses of these institutions: Engineering, Administration, Mathematics, Pedagogy, among others. They work with classes ranging from 45 to 60 students.

There were many difficulties in obtaining questionnaire replies. It is believed that this is due to points such as the time of the year when the responses were requested, because, due to the adequacy of the methodology used and as a way to meet the planning proposed by the research, the data collection was restricted to the months of November and December; the teachers did not want to talk about it; there was little incentive from the managers who sent the requests to the teachers, among others. Thus, only 10 teachers returned in total, 4 from institution A and 6 from B.

- Semi-structured interviews

After a first analysis of the data of the questionnaire applied to teachers, there were some points that asked for more clarification and the need to interview some of these teachers. The interviews were carried

out with two of the teachers who participated in the previous stage and who agreed to participate also in this phase of the work.

One of the teachers works in institution A and the other in institution B. The interview was carried out in a semi-structured manner, ensuring the discussion of important issues that arose in the analysis of the answers to the questionnaire and not neglecting interesting points that could arise for the development of the research.

There were strategic points in the interviews:

- the reaction of the teachers, as they learned about the institution's EaD implementation plans;

- the preparation of teachers in their institution;

- the participation of teachers in this preparation;

- preparation courses in terms of quality;

- the knowledge that is important for the teacher, when teaching distance or semipresential disciplines.

The problems that involve, e.g. the preparation courses in Higher Education institutions are highlighted, both in the answers given by the teachers to the questionnaire and in the interviews. It is evident from the observed data that these courses are not sufficient for the teacher to develop a quality work in the EaD. Another important point is the teacher's effort in the search of their own training to teach distance or semipresential disciplines.

The main actions carried out by the teachers to overcome their deficiencies in the work with the EaD that stood out were:

- searches for distance learning courses on their own;

- reading of bibliographies found, especially on the internet;

- learning by trial and error in their own teaching practice;

- seeking the support of linked persons with experience in EaD;

- exchange of information among co-workers;

- discipline made in the Master course;

- reflection of their teaching practice.

It cannot be denied that teachers who are willing to seek their own preparation already have many of the characteristics they have pointed out for themselves as necessary to carry out their work in EaD: dynamism, willingness to leave the sameness, interest in learning, innovative entrepreneurial posture.

This almost solitary search, through their own preparation, often leads them to understand misunderstandings of EaD, presented in their answers to the questionnaires: teaching modality, methodology, tool, among others; and which reflect directly in classroom practice.

It is verified, according to the data, that the idea of EaD as a learning context does not appear clearly in any of the presented answers, both in the questionnaires and in the interviews; however, important points emerge about it, which teachers understand to be essential for the EaD. They are:

- is based on non-presence activities;

- must have a virtual environment that develops student autonomy of study;

- the student must help in the construction of their own knowledge;

- represents the modernization of Education;

- The interaction between teacher and students is fundamental.

Teachers are aware that something is missing in their preparation. Even those looking for readings and isolated courses feel the need for a deeper dialogue with qualified professionals with whom they can discuss the problems faced in their institutions, in their disciplines, and not only in training courses focusing only on mechanical virtual platforms, for example.

## Conclusion

The main objective of this work was to identify how higher education teachers are prepared to teach distance disciplines, due to the complexity of this form of education.

Distance Education is characterized as a form of education in which students and teachers do not need to share the same physical space or interact at the same time, where teacher/student communication is carried out through a communication technology, making the existence of a quality interaction between all the actors involved essential.

Here we worked with teachers who teach classes in semipresential disciplines, characterized by occurring partly in the classroom and partly distance, through technologies.

In order to have EaD as a learning context, the role of the teacher changes. It will be a multifaceted professional to understand from the conception of a course, its objectives, the elaboration of the materials, the choice of the tools of the virtual environment that will be used, the analysis of the characteristics of the students that will attend it, even about its technical structure.

This does not mean that all this work will be done only by a teacher. It can and should be carried out by a team, working together, in an integrated way. Used to working alone in the elaboration of their discipline, it will be up to the teacher to relearn as much to work in group as to even manage the work developed. This will be another important trait for the teacher in the EaD.

With the insertion of the TDIC (Digital Information and Communication Technologies) in higher education, organizational structures, curriculum and development strategies of the teaching, learning and evaluation process are modified. And this fact directly reflects the teacher's daily life, which needs to be re-worked, to redefine their practices, to seek theoretical and methodological foundation that will help them to understand this lived historical moment.

The responsibility of higher education institutions is to provide theoretical and methodological support for the teacher to face this challenge more safely, preserving, even if not totally, the teacher of many frustrations.

According to the data presented, the institutions are not sufficiently fulfilling the supporting role in the preparation of the teacher for EaD, being such preparation almost exclusively to them.

The answers given by the teachers in the questionnaires and in the interviews carried out show their efforts in the search of their own training to work with both EaDs and semipresential disciplines. It is important to highlight the overload of responsibility, which makes it urgent to seek a preparation that meets these new needs.

From the data presented, it cannot be denied that teachers who are willing to seek their own preparation already have many of the characteristics they have pointed out for themselves as necessary to carry out their work in EaD: dynamism, willingness to leave the sameness, interest in learning, innovative entrepreneurial posture. These characteristics demonstrate a professional commitment to the quality of the work they develop.

In order to create a learning context, the teacher cannot develop the work in EaD alone or independently of the institution where it operates.

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