

An e-Learning Pilot Training Course for Teachers of Portuguese as a Foreign Language at the University of Porto

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Abstract

The Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto offers since 2006 a intensive summer course (30h) which aims to recycle teachers of Portuguese as a foreign language (CAPPLE – Curso de Atualização de Professores de Português Língua Estrangeira). As indicated by the title, the course covers a diversity of subjects - from culture, didactics, history, language, linguistics, and literature, to a solid theoretical basis, necessary for foreign language teachers. Indeed, from this point of view, foreign language teaching is humanistic and educational in nature, not basing its model from the native speaker but on formal and academic registers (see Kramsch 2002).

This course is designed for different target groups: teachers of Portuguese as a foreign language who wish to update their professional activity; native Portuguese speakers who want training in the teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language / second language; graduates who wish to direct their work to the teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language.

Due to external demands, even from Portuguese teachers around the country, and following the e-learning policies of the University of Porto, the organizers of the course proposed a ICT edition of the above-mentioned course. It fits in the context of the mission of the University of Porto to "stimulate the cohesion and the institutional spirit of the University of Porto, through the dynamics of the cooperation between their agents and contribute for their projection to international and national level, promoting the excellence of their activities".

The 1st virtual edition of CAPPLE took place in 2010 (from 4th January to 5th March), as a pilot training course involving 11 teachers and 15 students, most already having some teaching experience in Portuguese as a foreign language. Of these 15 students, 9 successfully completed the course (3 ECTS), 5 received a certificate of attendance and one withdrew.

During the course the students were guided by the teachers / tutors through the tools available on the platform (forum, messages and activities). All the content modules had at least one activity that had to be performed by the trainee, since this course ran under continuous assessment and integrated several elements that were rated on a qualitative scale.

In this paper, we intend to provide a brief description of what is currently one of the main objectives of University of Porto: the pedagogical and technical support, provided by the Unit for New Technologies in Education, to teachers who want to deliver lifelong learning courses using e-learning/b-learning strategies. An example of an innovative e-learning course, with a diversity of contents, strategies and monitoring of trainees, will be presented. We will explore the results and what needs to be improved in future editions based on the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of this course.