

TeleAula: new ways of Schooling for Hospitalized Students

Maria Eulália Ribeiro Cordeiro

Rui Fernandes

CANTIC - Information and Communication Technologies Centre
Escola Secundária de Secavém, Quinta do Património, 2685-011 Secavém, Portugal
direccao@cantic.rcts.pt

Summary

This project covers a three-year period and looks at the application of a videoconferencing system for students suffering from severe chronic diseases who, as a result of their clinical condition, are unable to attend school and receive regular schooling and to benefit from teaching.

Given this situation, we wish to study the possibilities offered by applying videoconferencing technology to real time teaching, as a means to enable schooling of these students by their presence in the classroom, even though they are following classes at home or in hospital. We also wish to assess the impact of this experiment on the school's community, primarily in terms of changing attitudes of teachers and students directly involved.

In addition, the study also seeks to find pedagogical methods that would allow us to answer several kinds of clinical situations.

Introduction

The inclusion of students with special educational needs in regular schools means that the educational system, school and especially the teacher, must use a range of diverse and innovative strategies in the search for suitable responses to the particular needs of each student. In such cases, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) emerge as a resource which can help the organisation of educational responses, with a special emphasis on dealing with students with neuromotor problems, communication problems or suffering from severe chronic disease.

Students with illnesses or serious traumas are particularly vulnerable and are frequently incapable of travelling to school. Dealing with who they are, with the changes that come with the treatment or illness, has a profound impact on their inner development. It is especially in the adolescent that the role of the group and friends is important in identifying with and accepting themselves.

The school has tried to minimise this problem, providing an individual support that, although important, is not sufficient, since it lacks interaction, sharing, co-operation and acceptance from the peers.

TeleClass Project intentions

For the past four years, CANTIC has been developing a pilot project for remote learning aimed at finding an educational solution that best fits these students specific conditions – **The TeleClass Project**

TeleClass is being used to minimise some aspects that come with the disease or handicaps and to allow the children and young people to be part of school and have access to the personal development that they are entitled to, by having the feeling of being accepted, wanted, having people to talk to or taking responsibility for the work within a group of students. These can all be key factors for the sick students to overcome the feeling of exclusion.

Method and Resources

This study has been conducted in two stages:

1st stage – In this study we involved 4 hospitals connected with schools that are part of the same educational community. These schools have different curriculum levels.

2nd stage – In this study we involved 10 students that attend school at home connecting with their original schools.

In both cases, TeleClass implies two levels of requirements:

1. Pedagogical requirements
2. Technological requirements

For **the former** we focused in a pedagogical team to create a planning that suits the needs of schools and the hospital or the home students, so that there is a common ground in both parts.

At the same time we were answering the special education needs of the students in the hospital, we have also the intention to contribute to the improvement of learning skills in the classroom in all schools involved in this project. A school that promotes values such as sharing affection, that enables students to experience situations of interaction, of feeling useful, is certainly a school that understands the importance of these same values in the integral development of its students.

The way in which the teacher integrates ICT into curriculum and classroom activities, the way in which he reorganises strategies and the supporting resources he uses, all become aspects which affect the success of inclusion of this type of students into the school and society itself.

For **the technological requirements**, we provided each place with 1 *TeleAula Technological kit*:

- 1 Multimedia Personal Computer
- 1 Printer
- 1 ISDN line
- 1 videoconference board
- Monetary support for communications (based on the schedule the students are able to attend)

Results

Positive issues

The development of this project shows us that this kind of technological resource is able to promote the inclusion of the students in regular schools as long as it is supported by correct pedagogical strategies.

We can also conclude that it contributes to the empowerment of the students and teachers directly involved in what concerns technologies.

Problems

The technological systems used in our projects have some bugs so we need some alternative strategies to use when the technology fails. The Internet (e-mail address and chat) is one of the ways we have to continue the communication between the participants.

Acknowledgements

Our grateful thanks to all students and families involved, staff of the Hospital Dona Estefânia; Instituto Português de Oncologia; Centro de Medicina de Reabilitação de Alcoitão; Hospital Garcia de Orta e Direcção Regional de Educação de Lisboa and also to Instituto Português de Comunicações, Portugal Telecom, and Programa Nónio Séc.XXI, whose financial support made this study possible.