METHODOLOGICAL RESOURCES ASSISTANT (MRA):
HOW TO APPLY INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN
TO OUR WEB-BASED-MATERIALS

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Abstract: Our experience in distance learning has shown us how important it is to have well structured materials which are designed from a pedagogical point of view, and keeping in mind what, how and when we want to teach or encourage learning. That is why we have created an authoring tool, which will meet the needs of our institution.

Introduction

The Methodological Resources Assistant (MRA) is a project being developed by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), which is a distance learning university based on the concept of the ‘Virtual Campus’ and the use of multimedia teaching materials.

We must place this project in the context of the task developed by the UOC and other institutions and companies created from the Foundation for the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. In only few years the growth of services offered by our university and its associated institutions has created the need to contact a high number of collaborators, subject specialists, professors from other universities as well as professionals from the world of business, who could act as authors of our material or develop specific training tasks.

We have become aware of the need to train these authors (usually specialists in a field of science or other areas of study) in how to elaborate teaching material for distance learning. This implies a training task, centred not only in the understanding of the distance teaching-learning process, but also in the knowledge of resources and tools to make the elaboration of material easier. The MRA was created to answer the above-mentioned needs.

The Methodological Resources Assistant

Figure 1: ARM main interface
**MRA main features**

1. **What is the MRA?**

It is a system for the design and elaboration of methodological resources adapted to different objectives and training needs, in a virtual learning environment. Its aim is to provide a wide range of distance learning methodological resources as well as tools to facilitate material creation, for professors and authors.

2. **What can be found there?**

The MRA enables:
- Looking for resources
- Accessing to a concrete resource report by selecting its name.
- Acquiring / Offering ideas
- Consulting methodological aspects
- Creating activities: programs and templates
- Giving guidelines or advice of use

Every resource report provides information about the typology or category that the resource belongs to, the goals that can be reached with it or the activity given; the resource description – structure, stages, functioning, etc.; the application – guidelines or directions to improve the possibilities the resource offers; the work dynamics to follow; the view of concrete examples; the elaboration guidelines for the resource; the bibliography reference; and templates and programs to create resources easier.

3. **Which is its structure?**

The MRA is structured as a system composed of different elements:
- A communication space: a forum, a mailbox, FAQ’s…
- Help or Guidance about methodological aspects
- The searching form (the tool that helps the professor or the author to know the best resource features for their material elaboration)
- The result of the searches’ list
- The resource reports
- The examples
- The templates
- The database that supports the system

**Conclusions**

- This space allows educators to gain access to up-to-date information concerning educational activities and the student body.
- The tools used in the evaluation process are also incorporated which allow educators to introduce and consult information concerning the progress and qualifications of students.
- The exchange of ideas and collaboration are encouraged between all of those people who participate in the teaching process by means of the environments that are reserved for telematic intercommunication.
- Another function of this integrated space is to grant direct access to the university’s administration services and to help in solving educators’ problems and doubts.
- Furthermore, educators are involved in an on-going process that is intended to improve the educational model through surveys and in this way detect strong and weak aspects.

**References**