Chapter 12
Open Source LMS and Web 2.0 in Mobile Teaching

Elisa Spadavecchia
Provincial School Authority, Italy

ABSTRACT

Can students learn a foreign language at school meeting their real communicative needs? Is it possible to exploit the potentialities of the 2.0 Web tools and the advantages of the Open Source software to guide students towards effective linguistic competence and autonomy? The chapter describes an experience of using simple Web 2.0 and teaching support online tools for learning English in an Italian secondary school, pointing out the achievements and the drawbacks of the integration of e-learning 2.0 with classroom teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of attending the information technology laboratory regularly during the English as a foreign language class sprang, in a certain sense, from the students themselves. The school where the activities have been carried on, an Italian secondary high school (Liceo Scientifico Quadri in Vicenza, a town near Venice), with a large population of students between 14 and 19 made up of a great number of commuters, many face-to-face activities have been developed to help students in their learning process. This project is situated in a complementary position among the other opportunities offered in the Liceo. Indeed, it is a sort of integration, not an alternative to ordinary teaching practice.

The school is well equipped with such facilities as ICT laboratories, and almost all the students have a computer and an Internet connection available at home. At the beginning of the school year, during some warming up classes carried out in the ICT laboratory, the students asked to attend it regularly during the whole school year. They found
it much more interesting and involving than the traditional lesson in the ordinary classroom. So, it was decided to exploit the Open Source Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle (https://gibi.liceoquadri.it/moodle) that had been implemented and successfully used for a supplementary course in summer 2008 together with a popular helpdesk carried out on a blog (http://www.sportelloinglese.it) plus a podcast for English as a foreign language (http://www.quadripodcast.it) to integrate, sustain and enrich the learning opportunities offered in the traditional English course. The challenge was to show that the use of ICT was not just a diversion from traditional classroom teaching; on the contrary, an effective use of LMS and Web 2.0 tools could facilitate communication, knowledge sharing, cooperation, and language learning.

After the preparation of the specific courses for different grades, the students started to interact in the ICT lab and could decide freely whether to use the course or not during their studying activities at home. At the beginning, some resistance came from the weakest or the most de-motivated students, but after the first shocking impact of the novelty, dragged by the overwhelming majority, almost everybody enrolled in the course. At the end, only 3 pupils out of the 127 students from the five classes involved in the project have never enrolled, even though they have participated in the online activities with the rest of the class in the ICT lab and have contributed actively to it also through their assessment of the project.

**ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS**

The language activities were developed with a pragmatic approach, starting from the students’ needs and suggestions. The technology and resources already available at school were used together with tools and materials freely available on the Internet and some personal materials to enrich on the basis of the learners’ needs.

The initial idea was to give the students enough motivation to use the web as an alternative to the textbook to attain specific learning and linguistic objectives. That was a real challenge because students are generally difficult to involve in school learning activities. Normally, after the first curiosity produced by the novelty, a passive attitude prevails, particularly in the classroom. The only interest that really drives them, even though it has much to do with an extrinsic motivation rather than an intrinsic one, is their eagerness to know the marks they get at school. This was exactly what the teacher played on at the beginning of the experience to encourage them to enroll and involve them in the online activities, relying on their curiosity to attain other educational kinds of objectives. If the students wanted to check the web activities their teacher had prepared for them, or to know the marks they got during their learning activities in real time, with the total respect of their own privacy, first of all they had to learn to use the platform and do the activities well. The teacher’s hope was that they would do them not only at school because they had to but above all at home. In that way, they could start to consider the positive impact of the use of technologies in their learning, while sitting in front of their home computers downloading music, chatting with friends, playing videogames, and texting messages at the same time.

Another important consideration stemmed from the awareness of how, after the success of the so called Web 2.0 that is characterized by a more and more active role of its users in the production of contents, some authors have started to criticize the distance learning approach based on the exclusive use of Learning Management Systems and foster new types of approach (Cross, 2006). The objective to attain for an effective e-learning is the integration of different kinds of knowledge acquisition, from formal to informal, as it happens in traditional learning. So, it was chosen to integrate the formal experience provided by the online knowledge management