E-LEARNING TOOLS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING, - II part –

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Abstract: In this second part of the paper is description of some *Asynchronous tools* of Virtual Learning Environment Tools used in education, knowing that in the previous part was presented some *Synchronous tools.*Since the tools provided by VLEs are very diverse, teachers must get to know them well in order to be able to use them efficiently in the process of teaching, learning and evaluation. When a teacher chooses to use e-learning tools, s/he should have in mind both the type of the course in which they can be applied and the students' needs and abilities.

Keywords – Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLEs), Asynchronous

The term "VLE tools" includes all kinds of virtual/internet-tools that can serve for educational purposes.Virtual Learning Environment tools (VLEs) are claimed and used by the students, guided by teachers, to facilitate the solving of various learning situations.

As we said in the first part of this paper, theVLEs instruments can beclassified in:

A. *Synchronous tools – in a real time, instantaneous*

B. *Asynchronous tools - transmission of data without the use of an external clock signal, where data can be transmitted intermittently rather than in a steady stream.*

Now it's time to present some of*Asynchronous tools!*

1.Blog

A blog (a blend of the term web log) is a type of website or part of a website. Blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. Blogging refers to maintaining or adding content to a blog.Most blogs are interactive, allowing visitors to leave comments and even message each other. Interactivity distinguishes blogs from other websites.Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability of readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (art blog), photographs (photoblog), videos (video blogging or vblogging), music (MP3 blog), and audio (podcast). Microblogging is another type of blogging, featuring very short posts.

In education blogs can also be used for posting news and assignments to students. Teacher may also use a blog for sharing links to educational websites that will enhance students' knowledge and understanding of concepts and topics discussed in class. Students' comments or postings may be invited on issues in order to give them a writing voice. Students may even be asked to write a reflective learning diary/journal that they may share either with other students or only with their teacher.

Some application that can used for developing a blog are:
- Blogger (www.blogger.com, by Google),
- Wordpress (http://wordpress.com/),
- iWeb (http://www.apple.com/de/ilife/iweb/, by Apple),
- Posterous (https://posterous.com/)

2. Podcast

Academics at the Community, Journalism & Communication Research group at the University of Texas at Austin in the USA are proposing a four-part definition of a podcast: A podcast is a digital audio or video file that is episodic; downloadable; program-driven, mainly with a host and/or theme; and convenient, usually via an automated feed with computer software.

A podcast (or non-streamed webcast) is a series of digital media files (mainly audio) that are released episodically and often downloaded through web syndication. The word replaced webcast in common use with the success of the iPod and its role in the rising popularity and innovation of web feeds. The mode of delivery differentiates podcasting from other means of accessing media files over the Internet, such as direct download, or streamed webcasting.

Commonly used audio file formats are OggVorbis and MP3. In many respects, this is closer to traditional publishing models associated with books and magazines (as opposed to radio, which uses a live stream).

From the other perspectives we can subsume all kinds of online and downloadable audio-files under the term podcast.

Services to create save and share podcasts are:
- Voisse- allows you to upload and/or record audio-files and to share them online. A plus is the possibility to link these audio-files to pictures and presentations. (http://www.voisse.com/)
- Vocaroo- is a very simple and free online tool to record from your computers microphone. After recording the website offers to share the file via Link, E-Mail or embedding it into a website and/or to download it.(http://vocaroo.com/)

3. Resource-sharing

Resource-sharing covers a lot of activities, where you share resources (files or bookmarks) via internet, with a wide public or within a group (e.g. fellow-learners, participants of a study-program).

The main goal of resource-sharing is to create a common resource-pool for all or groups of learners, which can include text (scripts, presentations, articles, video-lectures etc.)

The characteristics of resource-sharing tool are:

- *public* (accessible to everyone) *vs. private* (shared only by a specific group or person, e.g. with password-protection)
- *grouping and organizing:* possibility to organize and structure the resources shared
- *description and tagging*: possibility to add descriptions and tags (buzzwords) to the resources shared for easier searching and organizing

Resource-sharing can be differentiated into three types:

- *File-sharing:* sharing files via internet (programs, multi-media, documents, e-books, etc.)
- *Social-bookmarking:* organize, store and manage bookmarks (references, links to special homepages, files in internet)
- *Presentation-sharing* is a very simple way to get ready-made presentations.

File-sharing is the practice of distributing or providing access to digitally stored information, such as computer programs, multimedia (audio, images, and video), documents, or electronic books. Types of file sharing:

- *Peer-to-peer* file sharing: Users can use software that connects in to a peer-to-peer network to search for shared files on the computers of other users (i.e. peers) connected to the network. Files of interest can then be downloaded directly from other users on the network.
- *File hosting* services: These sites host files so that others can download them. Sometimes these services are used together with Internet collaboration tools such as forum, blog, or any other medium in which links to direct downloads from file hosting services can be embedded.

As for virtual Learning file-hosting services are the better solution as it is far easier to use. If the files shared are videos in our context we speak of video-sharing.

Features:

- *possibility to add descriptions*, tags
- *public* (files are accessible to everyone) *vs. private* (e.g. password-protection)
- *automatic synchronizing* with local computer: Some file-sharing providers offer clients which enable you to create a virtual drive on your local computer, which is automatically synchronized with your virtual space. If the client is installed on various computers (e.g. of a learning group), the files are automatically updated on all computers, once they go online.
- *mobile clients*: some services also offer programs for mobile-devices like smart-phones

File-sharing services are:

- dropbox(https://www.dropbox.com/)
- sugarsync(https://www.sugarsync.com/) - favourite at the moment
- zumodrive(http://www.zumodrive.com/)

Social-bookmarking is a method for Internet users to organize, store, manage and search for bookmarks of resources online. Unlike file-sharing, the resources themselves aren't shared, merely bookmarks that reference them. Descriptions may be added to

these bookmarks in the form of metadata, so users may understand the content of the resource without first needing to download it for themselves. Such descriptions may be free text comments, votes in favour of or against its quality, or tags that collectively or collaboratively become a folksonomy. Folksonomy is also called social tagging, "the process by which many users add metadata in the form of keywords to shared content". In a social bookmarking system, users *save links to web pages that they want to remember and/or share*. These bookmarks are usually *public,* and can be *saved privately, shared only with specified people or groups,* shared only inside certain networks, or another combination of public and private domains. The allowed people can usually view these bookmarks chronologically, by category or tags, or via a search engine. Most social bookmark services encourage users to organize their bookmarks with informal tags instead of the traditional browser-based system of folders, although some services feature categories/folders or a combination of folders and tags. They also enable viewing bookmarks associated with a chosen tag, and include information about the number of users who have bookmarked them. Some social bookmarking services also draw inferences from the relationship of tags to create clusters of tags or bookmarks. Many social bookmarking services provide web feeds for their lists of bookmarks, including lists organized by tags. This allows subscribers to become aware of new bookmarks as they are saved, shared, and tagged by other users. As these services have matured and grown more popular, they have added *extra features* such as *ratings* and *comments* on bookmarks, the ability to *import and export*bookmarks from browsers, emailing of bookmarks, web annotation, and groups or other social network features.

Typicalsocial-bookmarking services are:

- Diigo (http://www.diigo.com)
- Delicious (http://delicious.com)

Presentation-sharing is a very simple way to get ready-made presentations online. Presentations are uploaded to the hosting's companies server and can then be displayed online. The big advantage to using presentation-sharing tools is that the user can look at the presentation right online and doesn't have to download the slides first to his computer.

Usual features for the presentation-sharing tools are:

- *private* (only invited users, password etc.) *and public* (everyone) sharing
- *possibility to download slides*
- *commenting on slides*
- *embedding to websites*, blog, etc.
- *sharing*
- *sync audio with slides*
- *embed videos to slides* (e.g. YouTube)

Examples for presentation-sharing applications are:

- SlideShare (http://www.slideshare.net/)
- SlideSix (http://slidesix.com/)
- Scribd (http://www.scribd.com/)
- Prezi (http://prezi.com/)

4. PowerPoint presentations

In the world of E-Learning, PowerPoint is a tool that you cannot afford to ignore. Sure, there are plenty of discussions about the good and evil of this program, but the reality is that it is the most commonly used E-Learning format across the board. So if you want to save time then you need to make a point to learn this program inside and out. Become the guru and learn all the little tips and tricks that will you save hours, if not days, in the future with New PowerPoint 2010 which: Create, manage, and collaborate with other people; Manage your files in the new Backstage view; Co-author a presentation with your colleagues; Automatically save versions of your presentations;

Organize your slides into sections; Merge and compare presentations; Work with separate PowerPoint presentation files in different windows; Work from anywhere: PowerPoint Web Apps; PowerPoint Mobile 2010 for Windows Phone 7: Edit and view from your phone; Enrich your presentations with video, picture, and animations; Embed, edit, and play a video in your presentation; Trim an audio or video clip; Use bookmarks in your audio and video clips; Link to a video from a web site; Apply artistic textures and effects to your pictures; Remove the background and other unwanted portions of a picture; Crop your pictures with more precision; New SmartArt graphic picture layouts… etc.

You have utilities that convert PowerPoint into Weblearning LMS (http://weblearning.atrixware.com/addons.php), as well as to slidepoint.net platform (http://www.slidepoint.net/), and there are numerous utilities that will you convert them to Flash as well - all mean you can easily get your PowerPoint online.

So know your tools. You'll be glad that you do!

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