



"WEB 2.0" TOOLBOX

Ana Monte Río

Centro de Profesorado y Recursos de Gijón
Spain

E-mail: anamonte@educastur.princast.es

Abstract

The new information and communication technologies have been growing enormously in the last few years providing many different tools that the learning professionals should be aware of as our new role as teachers is already being defined by the existence of these tools. It would be handy to know which tools are the best to be used in our foreign language classrooms, in order to create, modify or complete our toolboxes, at least whereas all these tools are there at hand for free.

Our presentation will start with the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 in order to understand the great change and challenge the social web represents and the possibilities to be used in a foreign language classroom. We will classify these new tools in four categories according to their content: Tools to create resources (mainly weblogs and wikis) tools to share those resources (podcasting, videocasting, online presentations, webmailing, instant messenger and voice call, photo albums and geoapplications) tools to organize and recover content (tags, social bookmarking, RSS readers) and the social network (facebook, linkedin...). We will try to define their main features and uses, their main advantages and implications in order to prove how useful they can be for the learning and teaching of a foreign language.

We will try to convey the idea that, once overcome the anxiety provoked by the amount of tools at our disposal, the time has come for us to chose some of those tools, so that we can help our students to become competent in reading, writing, speaking and listening in a foreign language.

1. Web 2.0: Main features and implications.

The term "Web 2.0" was coined to define an emerging pattern of new uses of the Web and approaches to the Web development, rather than a formal upgrade of Web Technologies as the 2.0 version number may appear to signify. The Key Web 2.0 concepts include:

It's an attitude, not a technology: An acknowledgement that Web 2.0 is not primarily about a set of standards or applications, but a new mindset to how the Web can be used.

A network effect: This describes applications which are more effective as the numbers of users increase.

Openness: The development of more liberal licenses (such copyright licenses as Creative Commons; open sources licenses for software) can allow integration of data and reuse of software without encountering legal barriers.

Trust your users: Rather than having to develop complex access regimes, a more liberal approach can be taken who can make it easier for users to make use of services.



Network as a platform: The Web can now be used to provide access to Web applications, and not just informational resources. This allows users to make use of applications without having to install software on their local PC.

So, what's the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0?

From the user's viewpoint, Web 1.0 is only a reading Web, whereas Web 2.0 is a reading and writing web which allows users to create their own contents.

From the creator of contents viewpoint, Web 1.0 means the need to master technical programming skills as well as implying hosting difficulties. On the contrary, Web 2.0 requires just a few technical skills while it provides great hosting opportunities.

Therefore, with Web 2.0, knowledge is web-based and the users want to look for it, create it, organise it, improve it and share it anytime, anywhere.

This may all sound very nice as the new possibilities are more interactive and dynamic, the access is easier but can any drawbacks be found yet? What about safety, copyright protection, portability among the different applications? How many different "users" and "passwords" need to be remembered? What about teachers? Are they willing to assume that their role needs to change along with times and the new possibilities offered by Technology? Nonetheless, the fact is that Web 2.0 is already at school with the following implications:

- Web 2.0 provides a rich, social space oriented to work in an autonomous, collaborative, critical and creative way, encouraging personal expression, researching and sharing resources, knowledge creation, learning...
- It fosters autonomous learning, greater participation in group activities, motivation and interest.
- It enables the creation of content to be shared and commented on by readers.
- It offers on-line space for the publication of content.
- It facilitates new learning contexts and new evaluation activities.
- It improves digital skills in students.
- It enables the creation and organization of networks of schools and teachers.

2. Tools to create content.

2.1. A blog is a web site commonly used to provide diaries, articles or texts called **posts** shown in chronological order. These posts may be written by one or more authors who always keep the right to publish what they choose. Readers are given the possibility to write comments to express their reactions, viewpoints, agreement, disagreement... The author(s) can answer these comments so that a dialogue is established. Blogs can be used for a variety of purposes. When they're used for educational purposes they're called **edublogs**.

A blog is a simple tool which allows students to see their texts published immediately, with a click of the mouse. The articles written can be constantly revised.

Their main features are:

- They admit all type of multimedia contents: text, images, audio, video, flash animations... They also allow links to other documents, sites, blogs. Thus, students can develop their ability not only to express themselves writing texts but using other multimedia elements, thus producing **hypertext**.
- They're very easy to use: the technical support is provided by online management platforms allowing users to concentrate on the contents they wish to communicate.
- Information is organised both chronologically and thematically so that it can be accessed either by dates or by the tags or key words given by the users. Besides, each post (article published) generates a *permalink* that can be directly referenced from other blogs or web sites. These features may help students develop their skills organising content as they can create their own categories.
- There's a communication exchange defined by the participation of users as they can write comments for the different articles, fostering debate and a responsible



use of the *cyberspace*. This interactive dimension is, undoubtedly, the most attractive feature from the educational point of view.

- The rules to be observed in the blogosphere are quite simple. There are certain attitudes which are punished like copying and pasting without mentioning the references, not respecting the licenses, not "listening to the conversation", not replying to the comments, wiping off articles. On the contrary, transparency, "elaborated copies", rectifying, expressing your personal voice, explaining things, humility, sharing, adding, collaborating, are good values for our students to learn and not only in this context. Mistakes and imperfection are not considered a problem so that they can feel more relaxed about making mistakes, thus encouraging their written expression.

2.2. A wiki is a web site that allows the easy creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages within the web browser. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites, therefore inviting all users to edit any page or to create new pages using only a web browser. Thus they promote meaningful topic associations between different pages by making page link creation almost intuitively easy. A wiki enables documents to be written collaboratively. A single page in a wiki website is referred to as a "wiki page" while the entire collection of pages, which are usually well interconnected by *hyperlinks*, is "the wiki". They're like a living growing memory being constantly built and anyone (including you) is entitled to add information in the different parts of the wiki.

Its use can be totally open as in *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia, or completely restricted to some users as in some firms, associations, institutions or groups of people with common interests.

A wiki may have very powerful implications in an educational context. There are many critical voices about an open resource like *Wikipedia* where knowledge is built by a wide community of users. These voices claim that academic rigor and accuracy may not be present in its contents. Therefore, students need to learn how to contrast or evaluate information. In order to do this they can look for the information provided by *Wikipedia* about a topic they need to study about Science, History, Music or any other subject. In small groups they can handle relevant paragraphs about the topic, select the facts given and research them using other sources. Of course, they'll have to keep track of the new references consulted thus building an excellent resource bank. After presenting their findings in the classroom, the teacher can create an account in *Wikipedia* so that they can complete or modify the contents. By means of this process students will begin to understand that the big sources of information may not be reliable at first sight. Finally, all the work done can be used to build a wiki page using the free tools provided in the Internet:

Wikispaces <http://www.wikispaces.com>

Wikia <http://es.wikia.com>

WetPaint <http://www.wetpaint.com>

PBWiki <http://pbwiki.com>

2.3. Other interesting applications to create documents include GoogleDocs <http://docs.google.com>. It offers web-based word processing, presentation, and spreadsheet services to foster a more efficient collaboration as different users can edit, write, modify, update or simply read the documents from their web browsers. It becomes a very interesting tool for groups of students who are working in the same project.



3. Tools to share content.

3.1. Audio/Podcasting.

Podcasts, or MP3 audio files, have become a very familiar format. *Audacity* is the favourite tool for creating audio files and podcasts. It is a free, open source, downloadable tool that makes recording and editing audio very simple. With the extra encoder you can convert your audio files into MP3 podcasts.

Podcasting (a contraction of the words "*iPod*" and "*broadcasting*") is online audio content that is delivered via an RSS feed so that listeners can determine the time and the place they want to receive podcasts and when and where they want to listen to them. Podcasting is the syndication of audio files using RSS. Podcasts can also be displayed on websites with clickable links to audio files:

<http://storynory.com/>

Podcasts are a great resource for improving listening skills, especially in an autonomous context. Moreover, they provide teachers with almost endless opportunities of exposing their students to different types of oral situations: news, opinions, poems, tales, songs, reports...

3.2. Videocasting

Videocasting allows users to share video files by means of "streaming", which means that videos can be watched without being completely received. Video is a very powerful medium for presenting information or instructions of all kinds. In the following web-based applications you can easily find videos and also upload your own. Nowadays videos can easily be created using webcams, camcorders and even mobile phones. What about creating a video presenting the school to your partner school, or to upload it in the school blog?

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/>

Vimeo: <http://www.vimeo.com/>

Blip Tv: <http://www.blip.tv/>

TeachersTV: <http://www.teachers.tv/>

3.3. Online presentations

If you create presentations with *PowerPoint* or other desktop software, the most popular tool for hosting them online and sharing them with others is *Slideshare*:
<http://www.slideshare.net/>

You can even synchronise your presentation with an audio file to create a narrated presentation.

3.4. Photo albums

As a Foreign Language teacher I've always missed having a good resource bank of pictures, especially for all that vocabulary to be learnt about everyday issues. Nowadays we can ask our students in small groups to take or find pictures about different topics (school objects, clothes, body parts, furniture...) and download them or organize them with *Picassa* or *Flickr*. They'll be learning three things at the same time:



the vocabulary itself, the technical aspects to use these applications and how knowledge is built, named and categorised.

Picasa: <http://picasaweb.google.com/home>

Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/>

3.5. Geoapplications

Ask for and give directions in a street map, show where your school is or how to get there from the bus station, airport...show the main sightseeing points in your town or city, prepare a gastronomic, environmental or literary route for your partner school...you name it and *Google Maps* provides a very easy tool to make it possible and, of course, all the maps you design can be loaded into your blog, wiki...

Googlemaps: <http://maps.google.es/>

3.6. Mind mapping and timelines.

Some tools allow teachers and students to build their own mind maps or timelines, save them and share them with other schools. These tools are considered to be especially useful in a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) context.

Mind42.com: <http://mind42.com/>

Xtimeline: <http://www.xtimeline.com/>

3.7. Videoconference and VideoQuiz.

Dimdim allows free videoconferencing with a webcam. It could be very useful, for instance, to present the results of any research done by our students or to share different cultural aspects in classes from two different countries.

<http://www.dimdim.com/>

Some pages enable teachers and/or students to create quizzes based on videos previously loaded onto other applications, like *Youtube*. The most popular is *ESLvideo*:

<http://eslvideo.com/>

4. Tools to organise and recover content

4.1. Social bookmarking

Store your favourite resources online, tag (i.e. categorise) them and share them with others. *Delicious* is the leading social bookmarking tool:

<http://delicious.com/>

Any Foreign Language teacher can have its favourite resource pages (for revising grammar, vocabulary, for reading online...) all together in a *Delicious* account so that their students can access these resources from any computer, thus fostering their learning autonomy and providing them with endless opportunities to practice a foreign language.

4.2. RSS/Feed reader

Have the news or blog updates sent to you! Although modern day browsers let you read RSS feeds easily, a feed reader will let you manage all your subscriptions in one place. *Google Reader* is the most popular online feed reader and also lets you share postings with others. This is an interesting tool for our students to use as they can organise the sources they use to be updated. Moreover, they can easily access the latest news

about a given topic for a week or a month to prepare a report to be presented to the rest of the class. If the teacher has a blog, they can be aware of his/her new posts and, alternatively, if students use blogs like digital portfolios, teachers can easily have the latest updates of their activities.

5. The social network

Social/Professional networking

You may already belong to a public social network like *Facebook* or *LinkedIn*, where you can also set up a dedicated group for network members to join easily. If you prefer to create a private social network then *Ning* is a popular online platform.

Teachers' networks are very useful for collaborating in projects, for finding academic and emotional support...With adult students the creation of virtual learning communities may be promoted with the help of these tools:

<http://www.linkedin.com/>

<http://www.ning.com/>

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