Integrating Skills Using Open Source Softwares (http://maps.google.com) and the Educational Platform http://campus.dokeos.com

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Abstract

Using web 2.0 based technologies in language teaching gives a great opportunity to language teachers to integrate both productive and receptive skills.

Google Maps is a free mapping service accessed at http://maps.google.com. As well as zooming in on any corner of the world it allows users to create directions between any two locations.

I first present how to use Google Maps with different functions, normal and street view and getting directions. This well known and widely used software in everyday life offers student a real life situation and if they work in groups -if they handle the same map but with a different view- it can lead to a fruitful discussion by contrasting and sharing information. They have to interpret the information, analyse it and apply it.

Using real maps provides a realistic task for learners. By using Google Maps learners can choose any maps from around the world and this choice provides extra motivation for students.

In our lesson the use of Google Maps has been combined with collaborative online writing by using the wiki of the educational platform of campus.dokeos.com. The task was to find a flat to rent and once they found it they had to describe the area where the flat is situated (Google Maps gives plenty of information about restaurants, museums and other places of interest in a certain area). The final task of the group was to write a letter to a friend describing the new flat using the wiki function of http://campus.dokeos.com. Each student had to add some details to the description. Since with a wiki it is very easy to publish content students find it encouraging and motivating while especially the talented students may like the idea of getting an immediate feedback for their work from the teacher.

This task also gives extra information to the teacher about the productive skills of the students because the wiki makes possible to track all the changes and see the contribution of each student.