How to Design a 'portable Virtual Learning Environment' on the Cheap to Develop Learner Competence and Autonomy

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Abstract

Having a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) may seem an impossible dream for teachers working in schools that cannot provide much financial and technical support in the field of ICT. Yet, making this dream come true is possible. Creating an effective VLE does not, in fact, really require loads of money and expertise and does not really need an on-line platform or a net. What is essentially required is the ability to devise an environment, ICT supported, where learners can find the right things they need in order to learn more, learn faster and learn better. So, a VLE can also be CD-Rom based, rather than web-based, be 'portable' and be inexpensive.

What you need to create this kind of inexpensive, portable VLE is the willingness to devote an adequate amount of time to the project, the ability to use the free resources offered by a word processor and by the web, a bit of creativity and, most of all, sound methodological principles.

The presentation will focus on how you can create a 'portable VLE', practically cost-free by exploiting free resources and on how you should scaffold it to make delivery, use and access to all materials, activities, tasks and links simple. Practical and methodological issues concerning electronic material design will be focused on.

Some final considerations will be given to the fact that creating an effective portable VLE, though time-consuming, is worth the effort. A teacher-designed, tailor-made portable VLE can be used in 'blended learning' to support and enhance 'traditional' classroom teaching. It is ideal to provide the best learning opportunities, develop learner competence, support the highest number of learner differences, boost motivation, foster learner autonomy and facilitate language leaning/acquisition. It can work wonders especially in the field of ESP teaching where commercial electronic materials are hard to come by.