

Travelling the Digital Highways: Collaboration, ICT and Blended Learning in the MFL Classroom. Creating a Students' Wiki for the Year Abroad in Germany

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Abstract

In recent years a trend has emerged towards the increasing use of Web 2.0 technologies in third-level institutions and the MFL classroom. Unlike traditional Web 1.0 technologies, these so-called web applications, e.g. social networks, podcasts, blogs and wikis offer more extensive, outcome-oriented possibilities for communicative language learning. Due to their participatory and interactive potential, they not only foster the students' receptive language skills, but also their productive language skills as well as offering new opportunities for intercultural learning. For the current generation of students the use of Web 2.0 is already part of their social and academic life, and the integration of these tools into the MFL classroom is a chance to combine ICT tools with collaborative and blended-learning approaches.

This presentation will showcase a German language project 'Das Auslandsjahr in Deutschland' (The Erasmus year in Germany) by final year Commerce/German students in NUIG (National University of Ireland, Galway) as part of a 12 week module on 'Creative and collaborative language learning with Web 2.0'. The rationale behind this project was/is to create a wiki platform for second year students in NUIG who prepare for their Erasmus year in Germany. The wiki should act as a medium to inform and prepare students on many aspects of living and studying in Germany, give some insights into the cultural and social aspects of the German-speaking world and pass on personal stories and experiences as well as useful tips and advice by students who have just returned from the year abroad in Germany.

The aim of the project is to enhance the students' language learning experience, nurture the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and promote the use of Web 2.0 technologies for autonomous and collaborative learning. This project should also facilitate students' engagement with the subject and other learners of German (in this case second and final year students of German) as it encourages collaboration and interaction between both groups of students through setting up focus groups and meeting virtually in social networks like 'Facebook' or 'Ning'. In addition, final year students compose and publish their own texts in German, upload pictures and web applications and conduct interviews which they edit and publish as podcasts.

The Year Abroad Wiki www.galwayerasmus.pbworks.com is an ongoing collaborative project in its fourth year, managed and maintained presently by a new cohort of final year students.