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INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLIGIES FOR THE RESPECT OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

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Abstract: Despite some disadvantages connected with application of ICT in teaching, computer-based activities are considered very useful. First of all, they bring novelty into the classroom through almost inexhaustible amount of interactive games, exercises, grammar tasks, audio and video files, songs, reading materials on various topics. Their interactivity naturally supports individual learning styles and requires involvement of almost all senses.

Key words: reading, language skills, chat, practical, teaching, computer-based activities.

Chat is an ICT tool allowing people to communicate all over the world in real time. It gives an opportunity either to write messages or speak directly to the other person synchronously, which is the main difference between chats and emails or discussion forums described in the section above.

Based on Dudeney, this technology is worth trying in the classroom because learners are often familiar with its use. “What makes chat essentially different from other forms of synchronous communication . . . is presence. Chat users are able to see the status/availability of other chat users, such as whether the user is online, away, busy, and so on”. However, it is important to bear in mind that using chat needs to have a clear purpose for learners. It is generally recommended, e.g. by the author, to use standard written English conventions in text chat and email. Learners are also more likely to start interaction with other non-native participant. Chat should be used as another way of improving and practising the second language. Basically, several types of chat programs are

distinguished to be used online which can take place either one-to-one or between groups of users:

- **Text chat.** Communication via typed text. Messages are typed into the chat program, sent, and they instantly appear on the screens of the users.
- **Audio or voice chat.** Communication via audio, similar to a phone conversation, but conducted on the Internet (becoming more common). To use audio chat, a microphone and speakers and/or headphones are required.
- **Public chat.** There exist a huge number of public chat rooms, on different topics and categories to join on the Internet. Users usually don´t know each other, and they can use an alias instead of their real names.
- **Private chat.** The installation of a client program connecting individual users is required. Users can be linked over an intranet (i.e. within a company) as well. It is also known as 'instant messaging'.

Possible classification of educational chats:

- **Free topic chats.** No topic or agenda set, no specific moderator role; i.e. a pair or small group meeting via an instant messaging program to practise English.
- **Collaborative, task oriented chats.** Out of class chat meetings to complete a real task, prepare some 'product' together as part of project work which will be presented to peers in the classroom.
- **Informative or academic chats.** Set to disseminate information. A specific topic is presented, followed by a question to be explored in the chat itself in the context of a blended learning solution (learners meet both online and face-to-face).
- **Practice chats.** Set to practise a specific function or form of language, or a specific skill or strategy, probably out of class time.

In teaching and learning languages chat programs are considered another way of practising the target language in real-time environment. The element of using webcam (web camera) enriches the quality of interaction and extends the use of multisensory involvement. On the contrary, there is not enough space in lessons

within the school year to use these VLE tools frequently. Therefore, learners are seldom likely to experience the types of communication described above. Possible solution could be to get learners familiar with the rules of usage and set tasks out of classroom time. Then they should be able to present the outcomes in lessons. Chat is considered synchronous, as mentioned by Dudeney at the beginning of this section, in comparison to email, or discussion forums which are described in section 2.4.4.1, or to e-learning courses defined below.

Generally, 'e-learning' is represented by learning that uses computer-based tools, e.g. the Internet, CD-ROMs, DVDs, or some portable devices like MP3 players or mobile phones, as mentioned by Dudeney. The author describes several terms associated with e-learning which understanding can be rather confusing:

1. **Distance learning** describes learning via ICT tools such as the Internet, CD-ROMs and mobile technologies. E-learning is the newer term. Distance, or e-learning are, strictly speaking, superior names for terms listed below.
2. **Open learning** represents one aspect of distance learning, referring to how much independence the learner has concerning covering course content, how and when to do so.
3. **Online learning** takes place via the Internet. Therefore, it is an aspect of e-learning. Online learning involves a major part of course delivery and course work taking place virtually over the Internet.
4. **Blended learning** is understood as a mixture of online and face-to-face course providing. Sometimes the digital element is done offline with a CD-ROM.

In the light of these facts this chapter will deal more with the use of e-learning or online learning courses rather than with a simple incorporation of digital media, such as CDS, CD-ROMs, or DVDs into the regular classroom (which is described in relevant sections).

According to the information above it is obvious that there exists a certain scale concerning the proportion of virtual and face-to-face course delivery. Dudeney describes it as follows:

> "At the end of the scale we have a 100 percent online course, where learners never meet face-to-face, and all course content and coursework takes place online, and at the other end of the scale, a blended option where most coursework takes place face-to-face, but there is a regular and carefully integrated online component to the course" (137).

The content of e-learning courses, occurring within both ends of the scale, is provided through a convenient VLE on the Internet. It depends on the teacher´s decision of what exactly should be involved and practised. The content includes relevant information covering the aims of the course, for instance, reading materials, audio and video files for practising listening, mock tests, accompanying pictures, or interactive exercises. There can be references to a wide range of educational web sites offering worksheets, interactive games, or quizzes. An indispensable part is represented by discussion forums on various topics set by the teacher. There is also a space for setting and delivering homework, teacher´s comments on students´ work and participation, communication within the community, or participants´ grades. It can be also called 'computer-supported collaborative learning' which "is one of the most promising innovations to improve teaching and learning with the help of modern information and communication technology". ("E-learning")

This option of language learning support through VLEs can be positively accepted not only among university students, but also at secondary school level where learners´ computer literacy has constantly been moving to a higher level. It also meets the demands of multisensory approach because of the incorporation of activities requiring involvement of almost all senses (as described in the previous sections). It is also suited to flexible and independent learning out of classroom time.

Of course, there exists a wider variety of different forms of VLEs than are described in this thesis. Some of those more commonly used were chosen as examples of the alternative use of ICT tools available within a computer-based collaborative learning environment.

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