LEARNING THROUGH SHARING :
OPEN RESOURCES, OPEN PRACTICES, OPEN COMMUNICATION

Opening pedagogical possibilities through an open source tool: integrating formal and informal language learning using *Mahara*.

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Abstract

Language education has been radically transformed by the use of the web and thus the possibility to access open educational resources (OER), either in the form of content (open repositories of materials, content generated by social-networking sites) or the availability of tools (open source software), has facilitated an array of new pedagogical affordances. The use of open source software (OSS) has contributed to new ways of approaching computer assisted language learning allowing among other possibilities the integration of formal and informal learning.

Reflective practice and the use of portfolios have been a key principle in language education and language teacher education at the Faculty of Teacher Training at University of Barcelona since 2005. During the last two academic courses language teachers have been experimenting with the use of *Mahara* to improve students' metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness as an effective way to develop their language skills and digital communicative competence.

Mahara, as an OSS, helps teachers to introduce learners new communicative strategies in a way that was unimaginable before. Teachers can exploit tasks that target new language learning objectives, which students can achieve in an easier and more effective way in this digital open environment.

Throughout the course, learners publish three views in their digital portfolio. In these views, learners have the possibility of reflecting on their language learning process using a range of formats such as text, image, audio and video. Thus, *Mahara* also serves teachers as a useful tool to foster the students' digital communicative competence, which is necessary in the present CMC exchanges.

This paper explores the affordances that *Mahara* has in the teaching/learning process for our educational context in which the digital portfolio is an essential component in:

- helping learners to understand language learning as a whole learning experience
- facilitating the integration of learner-generated products in informal settings with formal teacher-prompted assignments
- developing a culture of sharing amongst learners through peer review of portfolios
- developing learners' digital communicative competence while producing multimodal texts.

An analysis of these four themes will be detailed to discuss the pedagogical potential of this open source tool for language learning.