e-learning in the classroom?[1]

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Abstract

As teachers, we are challenged everyday to solve pedagogical problems and we have to fight for our students' attention in a media rich world. I will talk about how we use ICT in Initial Teacher Training and give you some insight on what we are doing.

The most important benefit of using ICT in education is that it makes us reflect on our practice. There is no doubt that our classrooms need to be updated, but we need to be critical about every peace of hardware, software or service that we bring into them. It is not only because our budgets are short, but also because e-learning is primarily about learning, not technology. Therefore, we need to have the knowledge and skills required to act in different situations, and choose the best tool for the job.

Not all subjects are suitable for e-learning, nor do all students have the skills to organize themselves their own study times. Also not all teachers want to spend time programming or learning about instructional design and metadata. The promised land of easy use of authoring tools (e.g. eXe and Reload) that will lead to all teachers become Learning Objects authors and share these LO in Repositories, all this failed, like previously HyperCard, Toolbook and others.

We need to know a little bit of many different technologies so we can mobilize this knowledge when a situation requires it: integrate e-learning technologies in the classroom, not a flipped classroom, just simple tools. Lecture capture, mobile phones and smartphones, pocket size camcorders, VoIP, VLE, live video broadcast, screen sharing, free services for collaborative work, save, share and sync your files.

Do not feel stressed to use everything, every time. Just because we have a whiteboard does not mean we have to make it the centre of the classroom. Start from where you are, with your preferred subject and the tools you master. Them go slowly and try some new tool in a non-formal situation and with just one or two students. And you don't need to be alone: subscribe a mailing list and share your thoughts with other teachers in a dedicated forum, even better if both are part of a community of practice, and share resources. We did that for music teachers and it was a success, in two years arriving at 1.000 members. Just do it.

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[1] Comunicação apresentada na 7ª Conferência Internacional ecoMEDIA-europe "eEducação — Desafios Sociais e Tecnológicos", realizada em Sintra, entre 27 e 30 de maio de 2012.

Introduction

Two years ago I was teaching the same Music course to six different classes, on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. In December, the 1st and the 8th are bank holidays so the classes scheduled for these days would loose two sessions. In a small course two sessions is a lot of time and there was no way to add extra ones. How did I solve this problem? I used an old idea from distance learning, I video recorded the sessions from other classes and send it to the ones that were missing. An old idea, but with new technologies: a very small and simple digital video camera (Fig. 1) on a tripod, no cameraman, no special setup, by the end of each session the video was immediately transferred by USB to the computer, then uploaded to a free video sharing service in the web (Fig. 2), where it is possible to assign a unique password, and share the link and password by e-mail with the students.
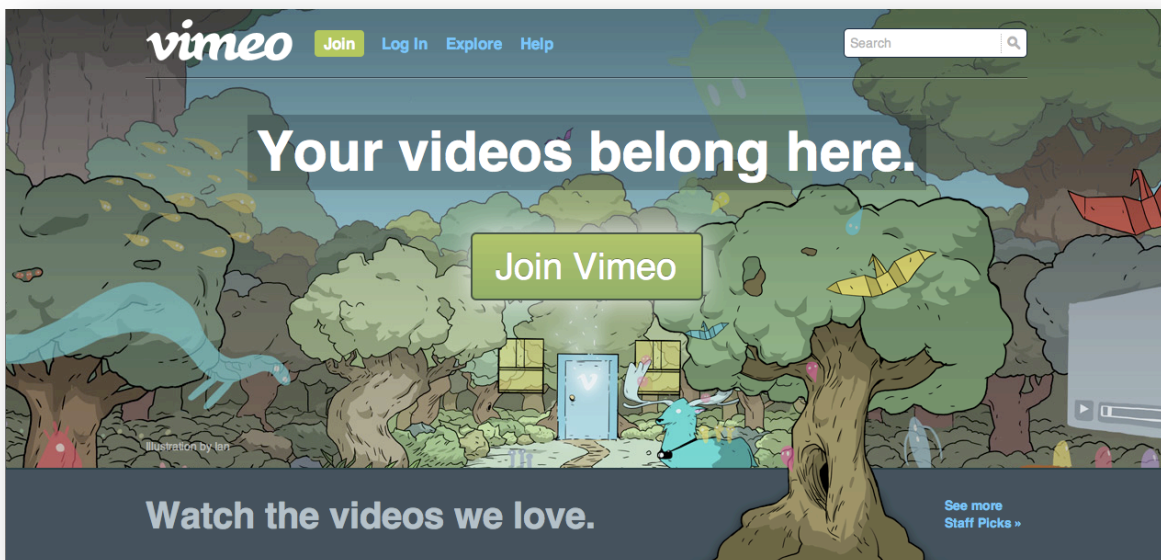

Fig. 1 – Flip video camera http://support.theflip.com/en-us/home

Fig. 2 – Vimeo http://vimeo.com/

As teachers, we are challenged everyday to solve pedagogical problems and we have to fight for our students' attention in a media rich world. I will talk about how we at Higher School of Education of Lisbon use ICT in Initial Teacher Training and give you some insight on what we are doing:

1. Integration

2. One size does not fit all

3. The right tool for the job

Topic 1 – Integration

I believe this story encapsulates some of the main ideas that I am presenting to you today. First, what drives us is pedagogy, not technology. Second, despite that, we need to be knowledgeable and skilful about many different technologies so we can choose the best tool for the job. Third, we also need to be critical about every peace of hardware, software or service that we bring into the classroom.

There is an ever-growing trend where e-learning teaching strategies and technologies are moving into the classroom. A last year report[2] showed forty diverse examples of blended learning. From Online Driver, with just one face to face session in the beginning, to Face-to-face Driver, where almost all curricula was taught in the classroom with the online part only as a supplement or support for students who asked for help. For instance, five years ago I used eXe to develop some Learning Objects (Fig. 3) that were available online to my Music and Technology students who accessed them in the computer lab and getting face to face support from me. e-Learning in the classroom.

Fig. 3 – A Learning Object developed with eXe http://exelearning.org/wiki

2 eSchool News 2011. "Report cites 40 diverse examples of blended learning". May, the 4th
http://www.eclassroomnews.com/2011/05/04/report-cites-40-diverse-examples-of-blended-learning/
(accessed 2011.05.16)

Topic 2 – One size does not fit all

Not all subjects are suitable for e-learning, nor do all students have the skills to organize their own study times. Also not all teachers want to spend time programming or learning about instructional design, Dublin Core metadata, SCORM and IMS formats. The promised land of easy use of authoring tools like eXe and Reload (Fig. 4) that will lead to all teachers become Learning Objects authors and share these LO in Repositories, all this failed, like previously HyperCard, Toolbook, and Authorware. I do not think these tools are "for the rest of us". Let us make a quick survey:

— How many of you have ever used one of these old tools (HyperCard, Toolbook, and Authorware)?

— How many of you have ever used one tool like eXe or Reload to build and play Learning Objects?

Fig. 4 – Reload SCORM Player http://www.reload.ac.uk/scormplayer.html

Topic 3 – The right tool for the job: some examples

The story that I told you in the beginning of my presentation used something that is now called "lecture capture". You can find dedicated hardware and software for this purpose, but I used a simple Moodle plug-in called Auto-view (Fig. 5) and the webcam from my laptop. It let us synchronise a PowerPoint presentation with a video file. I use it in my classes to introduce some topics and leave it available online for students to review it later on. I am not promoting here the flipped classroom concept, where students watch lecture capture at home and the face-to-face classroom is used as tutorial time. No, I am just suggesting that this e-learning technology can be very useful as a tool for reviewing content taught in the classroom.
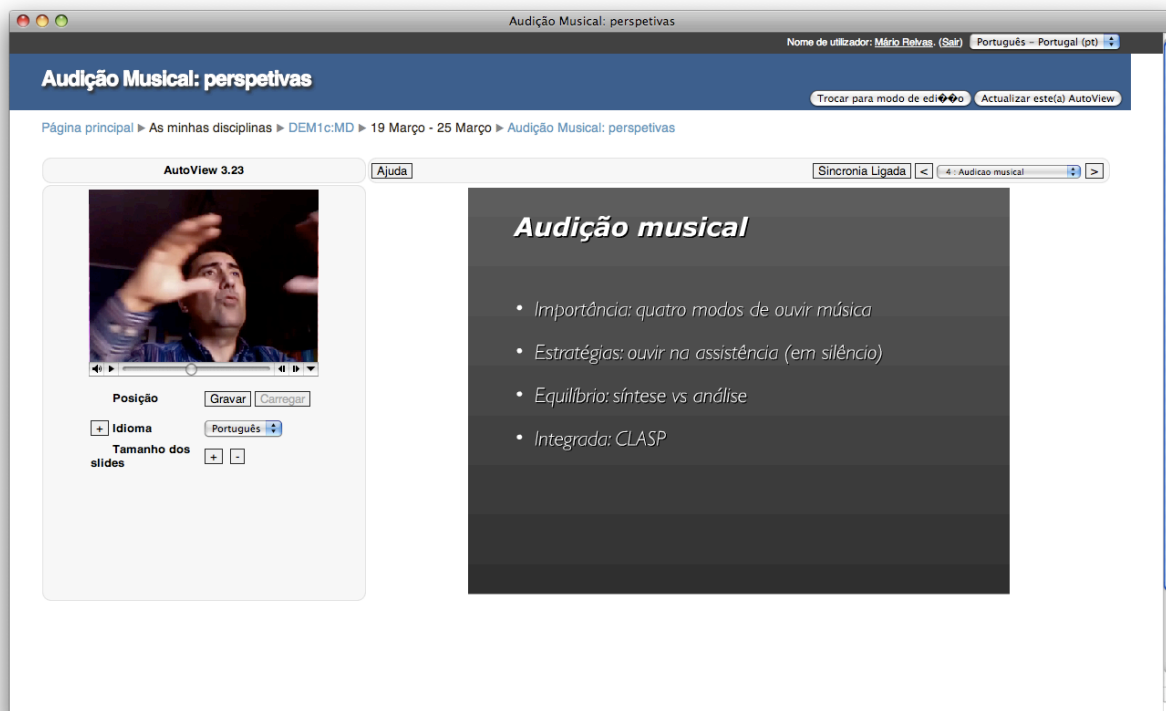
Fig. 5 – Auto-view http://autoview.autotrain.org/

In initial teacher training we have blocks of school experience, and sometimes I need to show something to the students but there are no video projectors or is just too much work for the purpose. Because all of my students have laptops and the schools have wireless networks, I can share my screen as if we were all apart, using a free and no installation required tool called join.me (Fig. 6).
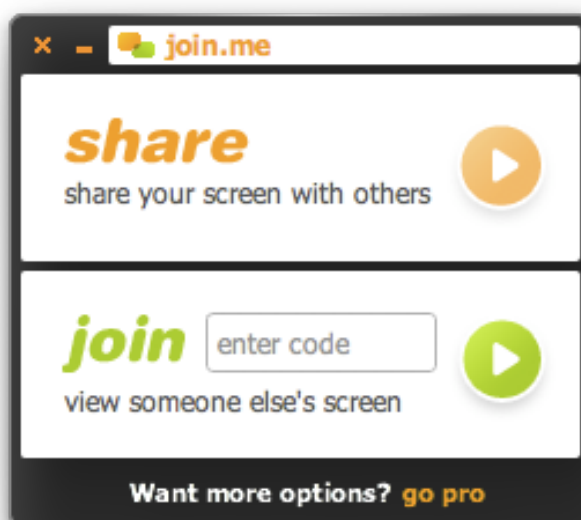

Fig. 6 – Join.me https://join.me/

In music, like in other performing arts, we improve by assessing our own performance. Some students need help with this task of self-assessment, so I usually suggest them to video record their performance with their own mobile phones. Other times, I use the Flip video camera or the camera from my mobile phone and then share the videos with them trough a Dropbox link (Fig. 7) sent by email during the class. No more copying files to student's pens.
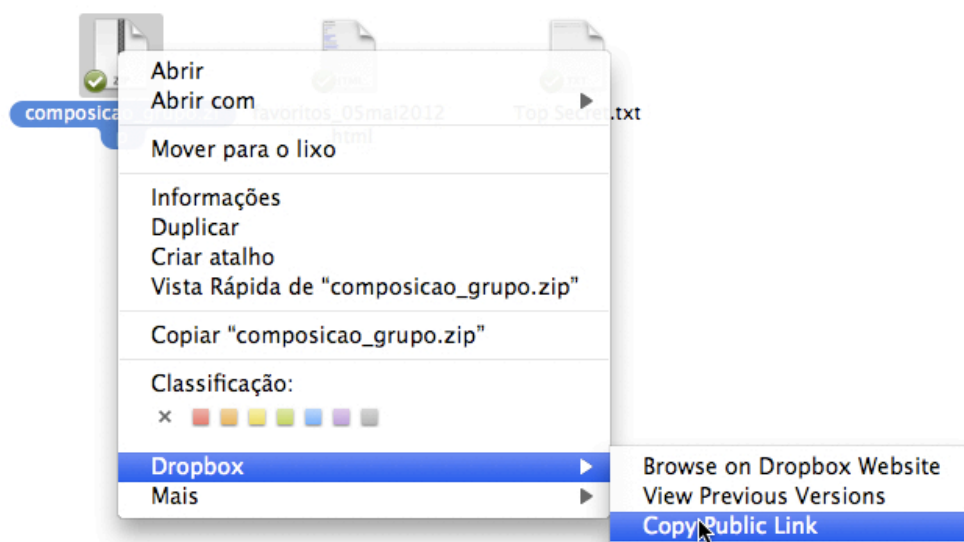

Fig. 7 – Dropbox https://www.dropbox.com/home

Summary

Nowadays, on the master level all of my students have netbooks or notebooks. At home they have LCD or LED TVs, game consoles, and so on. We need to update our classrooms, and e-learning technologies will help us solve many pedagogical problems, as long as we reflect on our teaching practice and know how to choose and use the right tool for the job.

I will now take some questions, and after I will have one last word to say.

— Q&A

Do not feel stressed to use everything, every time. Just because we have a whiteboard does not mean we have to make it the centre of the classroom. Start from where you are, with your preferred subject and the tools you master. Then go slowly and try some new tool in a non-formal situation and with just one or two students. And you don't need to be alone: subscribe a mailing list and share your thoughts with other teachers in a dedicated forum, even better if both are part of a community of practice, and share resources. We did that for music teachers and it was a success, in two years arriving at 1.000 members. Just do it.