

### Video 2.1.2: Communication and Collaboration Tools - Transcript

In this section we will discuss about communication and collaboration tools which can contribute to reduce the impact of some of the shortcomings of virtual learning, such as the lack of direct interaction with peers and teachers and the impossibility to perform cooperative tasks.

Through the communication and collaboration tools, instead, it is actually possible to:

- improve student's engagement by creating a more interactive learning environment;
- to develop their team-working skills by fostering cooperative tasks, despite the physical distance;
- To make the workflow and the cooperation itself more efficient.

We will analyse **five main kinds of tools**:

- synchronous and asynchronous communication tools;
- virtual worlds
- networking tools
- team collaboration tools
- Wiki and Blogs

Communication can happen both in real time or with the answer from the other interlocutor which comes after a certain delay. Tools used for the real-time, synchronous, communication are often different than those that are used for the delayed, asynchronous one. Both kinds of communication have certain advantages over the other:

- **Synchronous communication tools** allow for an immediate reception of feedback from the interlocutors, which can be particularly important in a learning environment; they also allow for a better social presence and the use of the tone of voice and the body language as communication means, which leads to a greater engagement and motivation.

Some of the most widely used synchronous communication tools are: WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, Google Meets and BigBlueButton. The last one is an open-source videoconferencing tool which is particularly well-suited to be used in an e-learning context.

- **Asynchronous communication tools**, instead, allow for communications which are not restricted to a specific time and place, for a more in-depth analysis of the topic at hand before answering and for an easier management of crowded conversations, especially with, potentially noisy, classrooms. Asynchronous communication tools are Emails, social media such as Facebook and YouTube, and platforms as Quora, Reddit and Google Drive.

**Virtual Worlds** are computer-simulated 3D environments which users can explore and interact with through their personal "avatars". Often, they can also interact with other peoples' avatars. Through virtual worlds, learning can become a much more engaging and interesting experience with the further advantage of including "learn-by-doing" and practical activities which surely improve learning outcomes. Given their focus on interaction they can also impact positively on students' collaboration and socialisation skills.

Some Virtual Worlds that can be effectively used for learning are:

- Second Life: which includes many ad hoc features for learning and allows also to visit digital reproductions of Universities, museums and exhibits.
- OpenSimulator: an open-source tool that give users also the possibility to create their own customized Virtual World, although it requires some coding skills.
- Minecraft: which through its Education Edition offers an immersive methodology of learning, especially for STEM subjects.

- Assassin's Creed Discovery Tour: through which users can explore several cities of Ancient Egypt and Greece, meeting with historical figures and discovering customs and tradition.

**Social Learning**, besides often improving learning outcomes as a consequence of a greater engagement, can also enhance students' interpersonal soft skills. This can be achieved also in a distance learning framework by using the right networking tools for social learning. To this category belong useful resources such as:

- Facebook's social learning groups, which feature specific learning functionalities such as the organisation by topic of the posts of the group and the possibility to create warnings related to specific assignments.
- Edmodo, a powerful platform through which educators can co-operate between them, manage lessons and create quizzes, tests and group conversations to require and obtain students' active participation to lessons.
- Elgg which is, instead, the right resource for those teachers which have some coding skill and are in need of some highly customized social learning platform. In fact, it provides all the tools needed to design and concretise a platform exactly as you imagined.

**Collaboration** with others can surely make learning funnier and even improve some very important soft skills. To collaborate with other students in a digital environment, however, the right tools must be used. There are available many resources than can help reaching this goal such as Slack, Asana, Trello or Google Drive but we would like to focus our attention here on three tools which have features that make them ideal for learning-related collaboration. They are Chanty which allows for the assignment and management of projects and tasks, Toggl Plan through which is possible to optimize workflows and effectively manage deadlines and Office Online. The last one is the online version of the world-famous Microsoft Office suite through which the members of a team can edit in real time a document, provided that they have an internet connection.

If you want to give a certain amount of responsibility to students, we suggest you to take into consideration having them develop a **Blog or a Wiki**. In this way, since they will be the authors of something that will be publicly available on the internet they will have to really master the topics they will treat in the blog or wiki itself. Among the tools that might be used to create a blog or a wiki there are Nuclino, best suited for internal-private wikis, DocuWiki, which is an open source software particularly easy to use for beginners, EduBlog with its many functionalities thought specifically for blogging used as an education instrument and Blogger, another free to use and simple solution powered by Google.