USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES IN ELT

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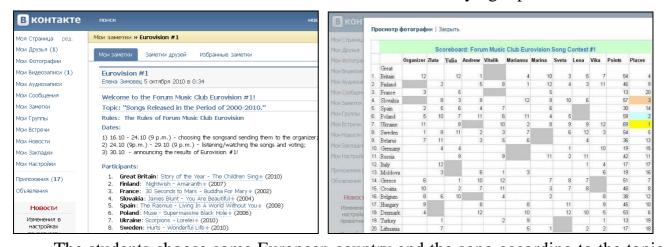
Nowadays a lot of people throughout the world use so-called social networking services. Social networking services (SNS) can be broadly defined as Internet- or mobile-device-based social spaces designed to facilitate communication, collaboration and content sharing across networks of contacts. SNS can be divided into two main groups: profile-based SNS and content-based SNS. Profile-based SNS are primarily organized around members' profile pages that mainly consist of information about an individual member, including the person's photos, details of interests, likes and dislikes (for example, "Facebook", "MySpace", "Bebo"). In content-based SNS the user's profile remains an important way of organizing connections, but plays a secondary role to the posting of content. Such sites are focused on sharing information and can be book-focused, audio-focused, video-focused, etc. (for example, "YouTube", "Flickr", "Shelfari")[1]. Among other popular SNS one can mention "Twitter", "Open Diary" (worldwide), "LinkedIn" (North America), "Faceparty" (UK), "Friendster", "Cyworld" "Vkontakte", "Odnoklassniki", "LiveJournal" (Russia, Ukraine and other (Asia), former Soviet republics) and many other communities that can be either of general use or have some restrictions in age, social status or interests [2].

If so many people including school and university students visit SNS, the question arises: can a teacher (and an EL teacher in particular) use the opportunities of these sites for educational purposes? Certainly. Teachers may be interested in:

- staff development and digital literacy, for example, to understand sites that are popular with learners, or to be able to deliver some information in electronic form;
- engaging with students and other members of the school, college or university who are using services, for example, by setting up a school profile;
- using SNS for e-learning, for example, working with learners or supporting their collaboration on a particular class, topic or project;
- ICT provision planning, for example, exploring services because they are considering hosting or running services for their communities, etc. [1].

The activities based on the usage of SNS in ELT are in many ways similar to the ones that can be suggested while using ELT web-sites, chats, forums, blogs, wikis, online reference tools, online courses, E-mail, etc., such as various communicative activities, analytical reading activities, vocabulary and grammar work, individual and collaborative writing projects, listening comprehension activities, playing educational online games, organizing competitions, etc. [3]. But the main advantage of SNS (especially profile-based SNS, which are usually multifunctional) is that they suggest wide opportunities for various activities including communication, searching and sharing information, entertainment and creative work. The majority of SNS support multimedia technologies and allow working with all types of information: text, audio, video, graphic, etc.; so they enable to gather students and teachers on one platform and organize their collaborative work without the necessity to register somewhere else.

Here is the example of the activity "Forum Music Club Eurovision Contest", based on the SNS "Vkontakte", which can be held while studying topic "Music".



The students choose some European country and the song according to the topic, find this song on "YouTube" and send the link to the organizer (teacher). Then they listen to all the compositions published in the current Eurovision contest and give them points from 12 to 1. The organizer counts the points and announces the results online. The students can leave their comments on the forum or discuss the results later in class.

References:

- 1. Digizen: http://www.digizen.org/socialnetworking/
- 2. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites
- 3. Gavin Dudeney, Nicky Hockly. How to Teach English with Technology. Pearson Education Limited, 2007. 192 p.