



TEACHING ENGLISH REFLECTIVELY WITH TECHNOLOGY

A Project of IATEFL's Learning Technologies
Special Interest Group in collaboration with
TESOL's Computer-Assisted Language Learning
Interest Section

Edited by Philip Hubbard and Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou

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*To the British Council and Michael
Carrier, whose support and vision made
this collaboration between the IATEFL
Learning Technologies SIG and TESOL
CALL Interest Section possible.*

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PREFACE

In 2011 Michael Carrier, then Director of English Language Innovation for the British Council, managed to secure funding from them to bring the two largest English teaching associations in the world closer together. TESOL and IATEFL have led the EFL/ESL field for decades and have established themselves as leaders in the professional support and development of EFL/ESL teachers. The associations include smaller groups to help teachers with the same interests and concerns come together and create their own professional communities. This is how teachers interested in implementing technology in their classes formed the Learning Technologies Special Interest Group (LT SIG in IATEFL, originally Micro Users in ESL Institutions (MUESLI)) and the Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section (CALL-IS) in TESOL.

The LT SIG and the CALL-IS were the first two communities from IATEFL and TESOL to be brought together through British Council-funded exchange visits between the two associations. Bonds between the two communities grew, presentations from the two associations were exchanged, common concerns were discussed and there grew a need to do more together. The first joint project (see <http://ltsig.iatefl.org/archives/events/2013-2/201310-special-event/>) was a co-organised online conference in 2013 with presentations from members of both associations and open for all to attend.

The frequent, passionate, and long discussions between colleagues from both sides of the Atlantic often reached the same conclusion: the rapid development of the field promoted a short-term memory and a lack of reflection or analysis of all the research and understanding that has been accumulated through the years. Teachers, especially novice ones, presenting on both sites of the Atlantic all too often seemed to either be unaware of the mass of knowledge that had been accumulated in the field or often focused entirely on the technology with a lack of reflection on

pedagogical issues. In particular, when new technologies appeared teachers failed to make connections between them and previous ones with significantly overlapping functionality.

The idea was first conceived in 2012 in Philadelphia, USA and by 2014 it had developed into a full-blown project that would result in the present edited volume entitled *Teaching English Reflectively with Technology*. Though a joint venture of the two groups, it was agreed that the LT SIG would be responsible for the finances necessary for publication and distribution but that an electronic version would be made available to CALL-IS members. The many discussions that took place resulted in several important decisions for this volume, reflected on the book's website at <http://www.stanford.edu/~efs/LTSIG-Book/>. First, proposals for contributions and ultimately the contributions themselves needed to embody the following characteristics:

- 1) represent practical uses of recent and emerging technologies or innovative applications of more established ones;
- 2) include an explicit rationale for incorporating the technology tied to language learning goals and objectives, supported with references;
- 3) incorporate thoughtful reflections based on observation and/or collected data regarding what worked, what did not, and why, connected where possible to relevant literature.

We were particularly interested in point 3. We wanted to help bridge the gap between practitioners and researchers by leading our authors to defend their use of technology persuasively by acknowledging prior research and practice and by presenting challenges and limitations along with the positive aspects, backed up by more than just their memories and intuitions. Second, we recognized that a fair number of our authors may not have training or experience constructing such a reflective report and providing the needed support for their reflections. We therefore instituted a system where senior scholars in the field from both organizations would be available to mentor those who requested assistance. Mentors were tasked to assist with article structure and overall organization, linguistic accuracy and academic style, awareness

and reporting of relevant literature, and discussion of conclusions and implications of the study.

We accepted 30 proposals from which 22 chapters were ultimately completed. Contributors had to confirm their membership in one of the two organizations at the time of their submission. The result is a volume which relatively equally represents voices from both the LT SIG and CALL-IS. It is the product not just of their and our work but of the commitment of a number of volunteers from the IATEFL LT SIG and TESOL CALL-IS we would like to acknowledge. Special thanks go to Michael Carrier and the British Council, Paul Sweeney, Nicky Hockly, Dawn Bikowski, and Justin Shewell for getting the project started and to Shaun Wilden, Sophia Mavridi and Vicky Saumell of the LT SIG for bringing it to its conclusion. We would also like to express our gratitude to the following colleagues for agreeing to volunteer their time as mentors for the project: Claire Bradin Siskin, Deborah Healey, Volker Hegelheimer, Greg Kessler, Tom Robb, Graham Stanley, Vance Stevens, and Paige Ware. Authors who were mentored provide personal acknowledgments to their mentors at the end of their chapters.

Finally, we would like to thank the contributors of this volume for all their hard work and patience through multiple drafts and unforeseen delays. We hope you find their reflective reports as useful and inspiring as we have.

Phil Hubbard and Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou
November, 2016

AN INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING LANGUAGES REFLECTIVELY WITH TECHNOLOGY

Philip Hubbard, Stanford University, USA

Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou, Cyprus Ministry of Education and
Culture, Cyprus

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present volume is in demonstrating a variety of ways in which teachers using technology can do so more effectively by 1) identifying and incorporating findings from others' research and practice, and 2) reflecting both during and after employing technology to determine what worked as expected and what did not in order to improve outcomes in the future. In this introductory chapter, we expand on the notion of teaching English and other languages reflectively with technology and offer guidelines for incorporating this into teaching practice. In doing so, we hope to help bridge the current gap between formal research and practice in this field.

INTRODUCTION

The field of language learning and technology, commonly known by such acronyms as CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and TELL (technology-enhanced language learning), has a large and growing research base. There are dedicated journals like *Language Learning and Technology*, the *CALICO Journal*, *ReCALL*, and *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, and there are research-focused conferences and research strands within more general conferences. Some of that research is exploratory and descriptive, aimed at capturing the attitudes and activities language teachers and learners are currently engaged in with technology. However, many of these studies explore ways that using technology can make language learning "better".

Early work in CALL was aimed at showing it was more effective than face-to-face teaching, but that comparison has faded over time. The questions typically addressed by researchers now involve not *whether* to use technology but rather *what* technology to use and *how* and *when* and *with whom* to use it. Just as technology pervades our everyday lives, it is now an assumed part of the language teaching landscape. Correspondingly, the concept of "better" has expanded across dimensions other than effectiveness, and research also encompasses the following areas:

- learners pick up language knowledge or skills faster or with less effort (learning efficiency);
- learners can get materials or experience interactions that would otherwise be difficult or impossible (access);
- learners can learn with more or less equal effectiveness across a wider range of times/places (convenience);
- learners enjoy the language learning process more or are willing to engage in it more (motivation);
- learners require less space, less teacher time, or less expensive materials (institutional efficiency).

(see <http://web.stanford.edu/~efs/callcourse2/CALL6.htm>)

Despite this broad and growing collection of studies, the insights and generalizations from this research, even when they include clear practical suggestions, are often unknown to rank and file language teachers. There is an unfortunate, and at times seemingly enormous, gap between research and practice in this field. And it is not just the typical teacher that lacks awareness: from presentations at conferences and publications in practice-oriented venues, we see evidence of a large and growing use of technology by language teachers who seem oblivious to relevant research. Often, teachers simply appropriate existing applications and online resources intended for purposes other than language teaching and learning. Some of these teachers are in fact “serial adopters”, practitioners comfortable enough with technology to experiment with new options as they develop. They use the technology applications with their students, share their ideas with colleagues in their programs, and present their experiences at local, regional, or even international conferences, all without reference to available underlying literature.

This is one issue, the lack of appreciation and appropriation of the research of others. But there is another. We have long observed that this sharing, through conference presentations, workshops, newsletters, mailing lists, and other vectors, all too often occurs without any explicit report or evaluation of what *actually* went on. In fact, teachers presenting their work may focus solely on the technical and positive aspects of it uncritically, seeing their students’ interactions with and through technology through digital rose-colored glasses. Although what they offer may still have merit and their students as a group may be well-served by it, their report tells less of the story than it could. These presenters should report not just on the positive features but on the challenges they faced, how they worked to overcome them, and what similar challenges would exist for others attempting to incorporate the same technology and tasks. In a classroom of individuals, not everyone is equally engaged and empowered by a new application or task, but presenters often give the impression that this is the case.

Add this process of critical reflection to knowledge and understanding of some relevant research and practice literature

to support technology integration, and the presentation is further enriched. There is a literature of more than three decades on technology and language learning, and much of it is freely available. Teachers using technology owe it to themselves and their students to be aware of what others have done so that they do not repeat the same mistakes or, as is so often the case, reinvent the wheel. Spending even a short time doing some background reading before launching into a project (or even during it), is likely to yield a better result. Our point here is that critical reflection can—and should—be supported not just by experience, but by knowledge.

The title of this opening chapter differs from that of the book in one key word, replacing *English* with *languages*. In many of the chapters that follow, a similar exchange could be made. The technologies, tasks, and activities reported there—along with the evidence of reflective teaching and links to prior work—have value for the broader landscape of second language teaching and learning. In the remainder of this chapter, we will expand on these notions and offer some guidelines for how to be a more reflective language teacher with technology.

DIMENSIONS OF TEACHING REFLECTIVELY

The notion of teaching reflectively is widespread within the field of language education and has a long history. Richards & Lockhart (1994) devote a whole book to the topic. Teacher candidates are regularly oriented to the concept and in their practicum experiences are often required to demonstrate their ability to reflect and learn from that reflection. Our goal here is to focus on incorporating technology into this process without rigorously defining or limiting the range of interpretations and models of teacher reflectivity that can be drawn on. However, for those without a solid background in this area, we believe a brief discussion of the concept and a simple framework can serve as a starting point.

One way of understanding the notion of teaching reflectively is by looking at what it *isn't*. Brookfield (1995) famously contrasts

it with *teaching innocently*. Teaching innocently occurs when the teachers assume that they understand what they are doing and the effect it is having on their students. Teaching innocently, they do not challenge the assumptions underlying their teaching actions. Examples relevant to our situation would be to assume that our students are naturally autonomous language learners (a *paradigmatic* assumption according to Brookfield), that we should therefore basically provide them with an appropriate technology and motivating task and then stay out of their way (a *prescriptive* assumption in his framework), and that assigning them a collaborative task to do on a social media site will provide that natural experience, leading to successful language learning (what Brookfield would label a *causal* assumption). The failure to teach reflectively, then, is not necessarily based on laziness or time limitations or even arrogance. Rather, we would argue, it is a case of not knowing what we don't know and then letting the exploration stop there.

In a recent chapter on reflective teaching, Murphy (2014) draws on the work of Schön (1983) for a conceptual framework based on the cognitive dimensions of *reflection-in-action*, *reflection-on-action*, and *reflection-for-action*. Reflection-in-action is “the online, real-time decisions teachers are continually making while teaching” (Murphy, 2014, p. 15). This kind of reflection, which allows teachers to make changes in lesson plans and interaction with students as the class is ongoing, is based on a combination of a teacher's background knowledge and experience, the context, and situational awareness. Reflection-on-action in contrast occurs after the lesson is over and allows the teacher time for deeper consideration of the events that occurred in the classroom—as Murphy notes, this additional time, free of distraction, offers the possibility of incorporating metacognitive as well as cognitive processes. The final category, reflection-for-action, is most clearly associated with the goals of this book. It represents a proactive mindset, reflecting on knowledge and experience of the technology, the learning objectives, and the teaching situation to craft a more efficient and effective language learning experience than presumably would have been possible without taking this step.

We would like to make one final point before concluding this section. Teaching reflectively is often presented in a relatively absolute fashion (as in Brookfield's contrast to "teaching innocently"), but the real world is not at all so binary. Reflective teaching can be more—or less—effective depending on the quality of the knowledge base, the depth of critical thinking, the simplicity or complexity of the teaching setting, the familiarity of the teacher/reflector with the full range of the setting, and no doubt many other factors. Ultimately, it is not *whether* a teacher reflects on his or her teaching in-action, on-action, and especially for-action, but how well the teacher does so that is likely to make a positive difference in the results. Indeed, through reading and internalizing the reflective experiences and insights from the authors of the following chapters, teachers can build a more substantial schema to guide them throughout both the planning and implementation phases of a project integrating technology into their own teaching.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING REFLECTIVELY WITH TECHNOLOGY

Calls for teachers to be reflective when using technology are not new. Meskill, Mossop, DiAngelo, and Pasquale (2002) report on an in-service project incorporating expert and novice teachers using technology, where the five novices were required to keep a daily reflective journal. Slaouti & Motteram (2006) argue for technology integration in to professional development as a reconstructive practice for language teachers. Kolaitis, Mahoney, Pomann & Hubbard (2006), show how collaborative reflection by teachers in the role of language learners using technology helped them better understand their students' challenges in using English language learning software.

An important initiative aimed at bridging this gap between research and practice is represented by the TESOL Technology Standards for teachers and learners (TESOL, 2008; Healey et al., 2011).

Goal 2, Standard 4 in the Standards for Teachers states: "Language teachers use relevant research findings to inform the planning

of language learning activities and tasks that involve technology” (TESOL, 2008, p. 35). This means that as fundamental standard, teachers have a responsibility to be aware of the research base for CALL so that they can search effectively for—and interpret—findings that are of value to their students’ learning goals. As an aside, this also entails that a 21st century language teacher preparation curriculum should include content and tasks to ensure teacher candidates’ familiarity with that base. Goal 4, Standard 2 directs language teachers to “regularly reflect on the intersection of professional practice and technological developments so that they can make informed decisions regarding the use of technology to support language learning and communication” (TESOL, 2008, p. 39). Though not directly mandating reflective teaching, this standard sets the target of a reflective mindset for language teachers using technology.

THE PRESENT VOLUME

When we sent out the call for proposals for this book, we knew we wanted more than just a report of what teachers did, but at the same time, we did not expect full-blown empirical research articles as we felt that many practitioners did not have the time or the training to embark on that. Specifically, we stated the following:

... please bear in mind that although decidedly practice-centred, the contributions are expected to go beyond simply describing an application of technology as is often done in conference presentations and informational publications such as newsletters. We seek examples of teaching with technology that provide a clear rationale for the claimed benefits of using the chosen technology by incorporating the following: 1) links to relevant literature in language teaching and learning, teaching with technology, and especially, language teaching with technology; 2) teacher reflection on the process and outcome, with discussion of not only the positive aspects but also the pitfalls, challenges, and lessons learned. The inclusion and analysis of some teacher and/or student data to support the claims is especially encouraged.

We asked contributors to be sure that their work incorporated the following features:

- 1) Represent practical uses of recent and emerging technologies or innovative applications of more established ones.
- 2) Include an explicit rationale for incorporating the technology tied to language learning goals and objectives, supported with references.
- 3) Incorporate thoughtful reflections based on observation and/or collected data regarding what worked, what did not, and why, connected where possible to relevant literature.

In the end, we received papers representing a range of approaches to reflectivity. In the next section, we combine concepts from the previously cited literature, including the TESOL Technology Standards, our own experiences, and insights from the authors of the chapters in this volume to produce seven guidelines as a starting point for those venturing into teaching reflectively with technology. We encourage others to refine this list further.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING REFLECTIVELY WITH TECHNOLOGY

- 1) Build a base in understanding the range of options for integrating technology into your language teaching. The TESOL Technology Standards vignettes (Healey et al., 2011) provide an excellent starting point. They offer situated examples of implementing the standards in a range of settings and levels of technology resources.
- 2) Before incorporating a technology-mediated activity or task, do some online research, looking for others who have reported on using similar technologies for similar tasks. For example, if you want to try using a Facebook group for your EFL class, try searching for 'efl Facebook group'—if you have difficulty getting useful sources, try searching on Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) to find published material. The chapters in the present volume provide a rich place to start your search as well as examples of how to make use of the literature you discover.

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- 3) Understand both the technology and the environment in which you and your students are likely to be using it. For example, if you are relying on mobile devices, be aware that an app may look and behave differently on an iPhone and an Android system, be available on one system but not the other, or be free on one and paid on the other. Additionally, you need to consider your and your students' context carefully. You may read about an "exciting" new app, see it demonstrated at a conference, or even hear about it from a colleague. Just because it works in their context, with their students, does not mean it will work as well in yours (if at all).
 - 4) Run a thought experiment, just as Einstein used to (an example of reflection-for-action at the onset of a project). First, describe what it is that you are trying to accomplish—your expected outcome. Then, visualize a set of actions by you and your students that are likely to achieve that outcome. Finally, reflect on challenges that you are likely to encounter and think about what you could do to avoid or overcome them. Taking these steps will help you avoid 'teaching innocently' (Brookfield, 1995).
 - 5) Consider learner training, both as an initial step and as an ongoing process. Even if you have students that you believe are technically proficient, do not assume that they will know how to connect their personal use strategies to learning (see the chapters by Cunningham and by Nurmukhamedov & Kerimova, this volume).
 - 6) If your project involves colleagues, connect with them early and often to work out the details of your plan and to 'co-reflect' (see Claro & Akai, this volume).
 - 7) Keep a record of your experiences and reflections at every stage; this is especially useful when those reflections are shared and discussed (see Coleman & Yamazaki, this volume). Journaling is an excellent way to accomplish this.

FINAL REMARKS

This project started as a way of combining voices from IATEFL's Learning Technologies special interest group and TESOL's Computer Assisted Language Learning interest section in a common chorus. Our hope was not only to connect the two organizations in a joint venture, but also to work toward bridging the gap between those attached more to the academic research side of language learning technologies and those who fall predominantly on the practitioner side. The authors of the chapters in this volume have done an exemplary job of meeting that goal. We hope readers will find it both valuable for its practical content and inspiring in its demonstration of the variety of ways in which knowledge of others' work and reflection on one's own can be usefully integrated into the digital frontier of language teaching.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Philip Hubbard is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and Director of English for Foreign Students in the Language Center at Stanford University. Over the past three decades, he has published across a wide range of topics in computer-assisted language learning (CALL), including most recently in teacher education, listening, and CALL theory. He is associate editor of *Computer Assisted Language Learning* and *Language Learning & Technology*. Email: phubbard@stanford.edu.

Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou is Chief Education Officer at the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, where along with her administrative responsibilities, she conducts research, trains teachers, and develops materials. She is also General Coordinator/Manager of the Cyprus CLIL Coordinating Centre and Chair of the Cyprus Teachers of English Association. Her work focuses on CLIL and language teacher education. Email: sophiecy@yahoo.com.

EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING CHATBOTS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Amany ALKhayat, Pace University, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of using chatbots in promoting English language proficiency. The study focused on 22 undergraduate students divided across three distinct groups in an Arab university in Saudi Arabia. The study investigates the students' ability to practice English by chatting with a virtual agent designed to teach ESL learners. The researcher used situated learning and constructivist learning theories as theoretical underpinnings. Survey results of students' perceptions and teachers' reflections on their teaching strategies show that students' levels and language skills are important factors in determining the effectiveness of chatbot use in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Although EFL teachers try their best to encourage their students to learn English effectively in the classroom, many EFL students in the Arab world do not have the chance to practice English outside the classroom. This is due to the fact that often in countries that do not have extensive presence of English, it is challenging for the English language learners to practice English outside the classroom. Hence, there is a pressing need for the integration of technology in and outside the classroom to enhance the

students' learning opportunities. Jia and Chen (2009) indicated that EFL students encounter several barriers that can hinder their use of the English language in class, such as anxiety or "limited opportunity for quality feedback" (p. 209). Consequently, most EFL students face numerous challenges when embarking on doing their homework assignments without their teacher's guidance. For example, they may need help in correcting grammar and spelling. They may also need to discuss the writing topic to gain some insights and to generate ideas.

Providing such guidance does not interfere with the development of learner autonomy, which many teachers advocate for enhancing the learning process. On the contrary, it could help the learner attain learner autonomy by obtaining feedback and correction that are considered necessary in learning a foreign language. There are innumerable CALL applications that teachers can make use of to interact with their students such as emails, chatting, MOOCs and social networking websites and the internet is abundant in research that suggest plentiful methods and strategies that focus on incorporating technology in foreign language learning. Nonetheless, very few research papers studied chatbots as one of the solutions (Coniam, 2008). Moreover, Bii (2013) discussed the usefulness of chatbots in developing countries but referred to the fact that until now "not much research has been conducted in developing countries to uncover specific ways of chatbot technology use in the classroom" (p. 219). There have been even fewer studies in the literature that explored the use of chatbots for practicing English (Coniam, 2008; Abu Shawar & Atwell, 2007; Jia & Chen, 2009) with students who do not otherwise get the opportunity to practice English or feel shy about obtaining feedback from the instructor due to lack of confidence, motivation or any other obstacles that might hinder language learning (Fryer & Carpenter, 2006).

To address this gap, this paper reflects on three classroom-centered experiments that were conducted to explore the effectiveness of using chatbots in the EFL classroom and whether the students would efficiently interact with the chatbot and improve their language skills. The study also examined the reflections of the teachers and the researcher, who integrated

chatbots in the classroom. The study also reflects on the useful teaching strategies that can be implemented to enhance students' learning using chatbots.

BACKGROUND

The idea of chatbots or conversational agents emanated from Alan Turing's proposal that a machine "can think" like human beings and can show signs of intelligent behavior (Jia & Chen, 2009). Thus ideally, a chatbot should pass a test called the "Turing test", which requires users to be unable to distinguish whether they are speaking to a human or a computer—this is the well-established criterion for machine intelligence. Abu Shawar and Atwell (2007) surveyed a number of conversational agents that are used in several domains including education. They think that "the aim of chatbot designers should be: to build tools that help people, facilitate their work, and their interaction with computers using natural language; but not to replace the human role totally, or imitate human conversation perfectly" (Abu Shawar & Atwell, 2007, p. 45).

Chatbots or virtual agents are software programs that are designed to simulate human conversation using natural language (Shawar & Atwell, 2007). In order for a chatbot to construct a supposedly intelligent answer, the user's input, which is in the form of a written text or sound signals, is analyzed morphologically, syntactically, semantically, pragmatically and contextually in order to generate an answer that abides by the same linguistic rules and relates to the same discourse.

In addition to the fact that there are insufficient studies that examine the use of chatbots in education (Coniam, 2008), such studies experimented with chatbots that were not designed for educational purposes. Hence, they were not necessarily reliable for use with students (Abu Shawar & Atwell, 2007; Jia & Chen, 2009). Therefore, this paper will focus on Tutor Mike: a "Robot English Tutor" as described by its creator, Dr. Ron C. Lee. Tutor Mike is a well-informed and knowledgeable teacher that can correct the user's spelling and grammar mistakes, give some advice about

learning English, and provide definitions about parts of speech. The chatbot can also help students know more about cultures, history, geography, and other information related to general knowledge, information which could also be useful in generating ideas for essay writing tasks and speaking activities (see http://www.eslfast.com/robot/english_tutor.htm).

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the use of Tutor Mike in the EFL classroom. This study attempts to find answers that would help EFL students improve their English and make learning easier and motivating by answering the following questions:

- 1) What are some suitable lesson topics in which such a conversational agent can be used to help students better their English?
- 2) Would using such a tutor work with a range proficiency levels?
- 3) Would it apply to certain language skills more than others?

Thus, the researcher's goal is to attain deeper knowledge and clearer perception of using dedicated chatbots like Tutor Mike in the language classroom by considering the topic from different angles.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

In contrast to the traditional classroom, learning according to Situated Learning theory is contextualized, unintentional, authentic, and interactive. The theory enhances learning and communication by embedding it in an appropriate situation (Jia & Chen, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Such components are reflected in the learning objectives and outcomes (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Constructivist learning theory also emphasizes the fact that learning is contextual, involves language and requires motivation (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996).

This paper makes use of a constructivist learning design that focuses on involving students in classroom activities that build their own knowledge through active participation. In addition, this constructivist learning design highlights six important elements

that “provoke teacher planning and reflection on the process of student’s learning” (Gagnon & Collay, 1997). These elements were the guidelines that all the three teachers involved in the study, including the researcher, applied in their courses during the study:

- 1) Situation: refers to teachers preparing certain situations that involve problems, questions, metaphors, decisions to be made or conclusions to be drawn by the students. In this study the teachers prepared the students to use Tutor Mike by introducing it in class and talking about what it can do and then asked the students to use Mike to help them correct their mistakes or ask for help.
- 2) Groupings. Groupings are divided into two categories:
 - A. Grouping of students: group work, pair work or individual. In this case, the task was individualized and done inside and outside the classroom. Group work could not be implemented due to the lack of such feature in the software. However, this was convenient for the students since they can learn at their own pace, individualize their experience and reflect according to their own problems. It was also beneficial for the teachers when they examine the students’ snapshots of their conversations with the chatbot so that they can have some insights on their students’ problems.
 - B. Grouping of materials. This is used to explain the use of Tutor Mike in and outside the classroom. The materials referred to here are whether the software is accessible or not, whether the students have internet access at home, whether they can use it in open access labs instead in addition to the materials used to gather information about the students (surveys, assignments, classroom discussions, etc.).
- 3) Bridge. This refers to bridging the gap between what the students already know (prior knowledge) and what they are going to learn from the chatbot. Since the situation involves utilizing the chatbot as an ESL Tutor, the students can use their prior knowledge to make learning more meaningful. When they chat with Tutor Mike, they will use certain words they know, and they will make mistakes, which ideally will be corrected by the chatbot.

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- 4) Questions. Questions can range from eliciting information from the students at the beginning of the lesson as a warm up activity by asking questions to solve a problem related to a certain task, to engage students in a collaborative learning experience, to create a link between prior knowledge and an activity being explained or learned, and to describe and reflect on the activity.
 - 5) Exhibit. This refers to the way students can demonstrate others' thinking regarding the situation by recording other students' experiences. When the students chat with the chatbot Mike, they might encounter some problems. At this point, peer feedback takes place and augments the learning experience.
 - 6) Reflections. Reflections are the students' analysis of their thoughts while explaining the situation and observing the exhibit from others and the teachers' reflections on the learning process and ways for improving the use of the chatbot.

IMPLEMENTATIONS

This study was conducted in spring and summer semesters of 2014 at Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia, and included three groups.

Group 1: IEP students (spring semester, 2014). The Intensive English Program consisted of only eight students enrolled in the spring semester 2014. The IEP is for students with low proficiency levels. Their courses include grammar, reading, writing, speaking and listening up to a level of approximately 3.0 IELTS and 30 Internet Based TOEFL. All eight students participated in the study for two weeks.

Group 2: Freshman Students (Summer Semester, 2014). Nine female students taking ENG 103, a freshman writing course for students not majoring in English, were assigned to use the chatbot for five weeks. The proficiency level of the students was Upper-intermediate. The course objectives focus on the following:

- 1) Summary writing
- 2) Paraphrase
- 3) Argumentative Essay

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- 4) Problem Solution Essay
 - 5) Investigative report

Group 3: Senior Students (Summer Semester, 2014)

Five female students enrolled in ENG 415, a senior writing course for students majoring in Applied Linguistics or Translation programs, were assigned to use the chatbot for five weeks to help them do their assignments and improve their writing skills. The course objectives focused on research writing and business letters. The purpose of using the ESL chatbot with these students was to explore the effectiveness of using it in such an advanced course since the students also were struggling with spelling and grammar. The students were asked to chat with the Tutor Mike on topics related to their course and reflect on the usefulness of the information given to them.

Procedure

Two instructors participated in the study in addition to the researcher as a teacher. The researcher, who taught Group 3 (see below), trained the teachers to use the software and discussed possible ways of incorporating it in their lessons. The teachers' first impression was positive, and they prepared activities that consolidated the chatbot.

Methodology

Group 1

The first group's syllabus was based on thematic topics, where the teacher discussed certain topics every session with the students. The purpose of using the thematic instruction with low proficiency students was to activate their prior knowledge of a topic or idea.

Among the topics discussed in class was "friendship". The teacher brainstormed the topic with the students. Then they started to read a short story about friendship. One of the classroom activities was using Tutor Mike, who asked them questions like "Do you prefer to have many friends or just a few that you are close to?", "Do you think sites like Facebook are good

for developing friendship?" The students were supposed to answer in short sentences and continue the conversation with Mike.

However, due to the students' low proficiency levels, they discontinued chatting with the robot. It asked them questions that they could not answer and others that were irrelevant such as *"What do you think are the best ways to make new friends?"*, *"What are some examples of bad manners that you hate?"*, *"Do you think the use of cars will increase or decrease in the future?"* and *"Where will you be and what will you be doing in 10 years?"*

The students were asked to give snapshots of their conversations to their instructor. The snapshots showed very short conversations which demonstrated that they were not really curious about using the chatbot.

Groups 2 & 3

The second and third groups used Tutor Mike as a tool to help them improve their writing skills. The students were supposed to use the chatbot in two ways. First, they were instructed to use the chatbot to help them with the grammar and spelling mistakes. In other words, if the students made mistakes when chatting with Tutor Mike, it would ask them to correct their spelling or grammar mistakes. It could be argued that the students could use any spelling checker software instead. However, the chatbot is designed as a teacher to prompt the users to correct their mistakes and might give them some feedback as well. Such feedback may motivate learners to use online dictionaries and other resources to improve their English. A spelling checker program in comparison to the chatbot might fall short as it gives suggestions without definitions or feedback; the students might also select the first suggestion without verifying its correctness (Beatty, 2010). Secondly, the students were asked to discuss their designated topics with the chatbot prior to classroom discussion and note down the brainstormed ideas. All the students used the chatbot for five weeks, and they were asked to keep snapshots of their conversations with the chatbot as evidence to be submitted with their essays.

The Sampling Method

The purpose of using such a heterogeneous sampling was to examine the students' perceptions and experiences from different angles. The researcher was looking for differences in perspectives based on proficiency levels, course objectives, learning preferences, teaching strategies and learning outcomes. These elements that came from such diversity would demonstrate a variety in students' attitudes, experiences, situations, and so forth. The same applies to the teachers' perspectives and reflections on integrating chatbots in an EFL classroom.

Data Collection

As for the first group, the data collection was based on the students' snapshots of their conversations with the chatbot and oral feedback in Arabic. Regarding the second and third groups, a survey was used to collect information from the students about their perceptions regarding the use of the chatbot. The students took the survey after chatting with Tutor Mike.

The questionnaire included the following questions.

- 1) Which category below includes your age?
 - a. 17 or younger
 - b. 18–20
 - c. 21–29
 - d. 30–39
 - e. 40–49

- 2) How do you practice English outside school?
 - a. I practice English with my family at home.
 - b. I have a tutor with whom I practice English.
 - c. I don't practice English outside school.
 - d. I practice English with my friends.

- 3) If you have used Tutor Mike, can you describe how useful it was for you?

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- 4) How helpful was Tutor Mike for you?
 - a. It was very helpful; I learned new words.
 - b. I did not learn much
 - c. It is useless
 - 5) Tutor Mike is good at teaching.....
 - a. Reading
 - b. Writing
 - c. Grammar
 - d. General knowledge
 - 6) What are the weaknesses of Tutor Mike?
 - 7) What did you learn from Tutor Mike?

Results

Despite the low proficiency level of the first group and their teacher's presumptions that the students will likely find the software program useful, the students could not continue using the software program and they became uninterested in using it due to their limited vocabulary and low literacy.

The first group instructor's reflections were significant. When she was asked to reflect on using the chatbot in the classroom, she stated that the software program was helpful when asked about topics that were meant to be discussed in class. However, it was somewhat hard, for the learners, to continue the conversation due to their low proficiency levels.

As for the second group, all nine students were asked in the fifth week to answer an online survey about their views regarding using the chatbot. When responding to the survey questions, only one student stated that she does not practice English outside the classroom, whereas the rest stated that they practice English with both family and friends. When asked whether the software program was useful or not, all of the students described it as "useful", "provides vocabulary", "corrects spelling mistakes and it remembers some information" from the conversation, "helps in fluency", "'s nice and easy to talk to" and "useful [...] and funny and seems real". For the students, teaching reading, writing and general knowledge were the features that Tutor Mike is good at.

When asked about the chatbot weaknesses, the students criticized it for some of its unintelligible answers and incoherent responses (Chantarotwong, 2005). For example, some students said "Sometimes it doesn't give a specific answer", "he can't understand me very well.", "Its like talking to machine no feelings", "Repeat the words", "It has the same respond to specific words". Other students expressed their inexplicable confusion: "I don't know" and "he dosent correct spellinkest", "It has the same respond to specific words", "Sometimes its hard to deliver to him my point, thus it cannot give me the correct answer. But overall it interesting." Only one student expressed her need for an oral chat: "It had no sound". All students' answers were typed as shown above without correcting their spelling or grammar mistakes.

Regarding the third group of the five senior students, their answers were positive in relation to evaluating their learning experience using Tutor Mike. Some students stated that they learned new vocabulary, made use of the spelling and grammar features, knew how to ask questions "the right way", learned some turn-taking skills, learned how to initiate a conversation, became somewhat skilled at typing quickly and gained some knowledge into the topics they were assigned to write essays, knew how to "create topics to talk about". One student described her experience in chatting with Tutor Mike as "Good conversation".

Moreover, when asked about the usefulness of the chatbot, their responses were as follows (the students' responses are given below without any corrections):

Student 1 – "it was useful by explaining some grammar to me and giving examples on each when I asked for some"

Student 2 – "it gives me a correction to my grammar mistakes"

Student 3 – "it was very useful because he answered all of my questions"

Student 4 – "useful and answers very quickly"

Student 5 – "It is useful with new words and creating sentences/miniconversations."

Despite the fact that all of the students stated in the survey that they practice English outside the classroom with family and friends, they found the software useful. Most of them suggested grammar and general knowledge as the best teaching features provided by the chatbot.

REFLECTIONS

As one of the teachers involved in the study, I strongly believe that chatbots can be effectively used in the EFL classroom. Tutor Mike, as reported by the teachers, myself and the students, gives accurate grammatical responses (Coniam, 2014); however, it does not remember previous discussions, which complicates the flow of the conversation (Coniam, 2008, 2014; Jia & Chen, 2009). The use of a chatbot with EFL students requires ample time and preparations of the techniques and strategies that can be used in class. This is due to the fact that the software is interactive and such interactivity depends on the students' questions and responses, motivation, and proficiency levels.

All the teachers' reflections, including my own as the teacher of the senior students, endorse the use of chatbots in the classroom. However, we also agree that teachers need to bear in mind the limitations and challenges that the students might encounter when using it (Coniam, 2014).

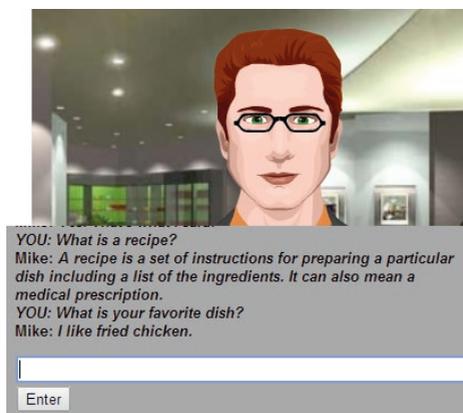


Figure 1 Using related words in a conversation: recipe and dish

When the ENG 103 instructor provided her reflections, she agreed that because of the spelling and grammar correction features, Tutor Mike can be a positive tool since the spelling mistakes are among the problems that students encounter even after finishing their foundation year program and joining college. The students were asked to chat with Mike and try to brainstorm ideas for writing a process analysis essay on food. Having noticed that the chatbot does not keep track of the conversation and may sometimes give incoherent answers, the instructor suggested that it can still be used as a means to brainstorm ideas and ask direct questions where the same keyword is repeated in the question (See Figure 1).

Such use could help the students overcome some of their language problems. To explain, Tutor Mike can be used as a Robot teacher where students can chat with to explore and discover some information and learn how to express themselves fluently without shyness. Students can also use the chatbot when they start drafting essay outlines, writing free essays, making group discussions, synthesizing information, providing reasons and examples to support brainstorming, a topic sentence, and so on.

When reflecting on my ENG 415 students' interactions with Mike, I think they became more confident through chatting with Mike. It encouraged them to explore certain ideas for brainstorming activities, learn more vocabulary, and become aware of their grammatical and spelling mistakes.

Based on this study, two specific strategies can be proposed for integrating chatbots in the classroom:

- 1) Students struggling with tenses can ask the chatbot grammar-related questions if they do not know the correct tense.
- 2) Chatting encourages students to express themselves and attain fluency and accuracy to some extent. Therefore, teachers can ask students to attach a copy of their conversation with the chatbot to their essays or assignments to examine the students' interaction with the chatbot and how that was reflected in the assignment.

However, the results of this study point to certain aspects and limitations that need to be considered in future work.

- Tutor Mike uses grammar appropriately in responses; however, it can't produce more "coherent utterances on text level" (Coniam, 2014, p. 566). Accordingly, this dissuades students with low proficiency levels from maintaining a meaningful chat with the chatbot.
- Many students prefer to use Siri (the search avatar for Apple's devices), for example, when searching for information online, or interacting with virtual characters when playing games. Therefore, there is a need for more research papers that investigate the use of chatbots in the EFL classroom.
- There is an urgent need for collaborative work involving second language acquisition experts, applied linguistics specialists, and computational linguists to bridge the gap in this research area. A concerted effort will result in understanding students' needs and creating chatbots that could recall previous discourse and become a useful tool in class.
- The teachers involved in the study and myself were experimenting with the use of the chatbot for the first time in class. There was no clear vision of how to use it. Hence, more research is needed to examine the strategies that can be used and the pedagogy involved.

This study was an attempt to answer questions related to the students' proficiency levels and the appropriate situations and language skills in which a teaching robot can be used. I expected the students to be entirely content with Tutor Mike. However, the first group was not motivated due to their low proficiency levels, while the majority of the second and third groups found it useful in terms of answering questions regarding grammar, vocabulary, spelling and helping with topics.

Finally, teachers interested in implementing technology in and outside the classroom can consider activities such as the following that can be utilized to motivate the students and engage them in the classroom.

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- 1) Warm-up activities. Teachers can display Tutor Mike on a projector screen. They can ask the chatbot a few questions to display answers that could be used to start a classroom discussion.
 - 2) Grammar and spelling correction. When teachers assign homework to their students, they can ask them to brainstorm topics using the robot before submitting their assignments.
 - 3) Brainstorming in a classroom. How about including Tutor Mike as a member of the group? When asking students to create groups, they can use the chatbot to ask him a number of questions related to the topic of discussion.

CONCLUSION

Chatbots are online tools that can be utilized in class to help students improve their English. The freshman and the senior students in this study enjoyed using the chatbot because they used their prior knowledge and experiences to interact with it in a meaningful context. They learned from the feedback they obtained from the chatbot, especially the feedback regarding spelling and grammar.

The results in this paper agree with the literature that chatbots use correct grammar and spelling and that they could be a useful teaching tool. In addition, the results concur with previous research which have shown that there are still limitations on the use of the chatbots and challenges in relation to keeping track of the conversation which might affect the learning process (Coniam, 2014, Fryer & Carpenter, 2006; Coniam, 2008 & 2014; Bii, 2013).

In conclusion, chatbots are useful internet applications. They become more useful when applied in the classroom to enhance the learning experience. There are still some drawbacks that hinder effective interaction with the chatbot (considering the fact that it is not human). Consequently, more studies need to be conducted to explore other applications and methodologies for using chatbots that could be useful to the students.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amany AlKhayat is currently a part-time ESL Instructor at Pace University. Between 2010 and 2014, she was the Applied Linguistics Program Coordinator and English Language Lecturer at Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia. She received her MA degree in TEFL from the American University in Cairo. Her current research focuses on CALL, Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. Email: aalkhayat@pace.edu

THE HYBRID LEARNING DESIGN POWER OF WHATSAPP IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Carla Arena, Casa Thomas Jefferson, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The present text explores the enriching experience of an EFL teacher in Brazil using the app *WhatsApp* with her advanced-level teens, showing how the proposed tasks to the group moved from simple substitution activities to more engaging ones. It also provides practical examples of how the app could become an integral part of an educational hybrid model that encompasses in-class and anytime type of learning, blending formal and informal instances of teaching and learning through the use of mobile devices.

INTRODUCTION

A driving force in educational technology, through the massive use of mobile devices around the globe, has been the adoption of social media platforms for language teaching and learning. The hybridization of the EFL classroom made possible by these emergent digital technologies has already made its debut in language schools and has been shown to be a powerful addition to the pedagogical arsenal language teachers have, leading to a more meaningful, contextualized and personalized learning environment.

WhatsApp is one of those popular apps, available for Android and iOS mobile devices, broadly used by Brazilians of all ages and social classes to communicate with friends and family. Due to its free messaging system, its functional simplicity in which even the most limited user can understand how it works, as well its widespread use among students at the Binational Center I work for, in the first semester of 2013, I decided to try it out with a group of teens taking an advanced level class. Based on that initial positive experience, I have been using it ever since with other groups, mainly adults.

The main area I want to explore here is the potential such a simple app has to build community, motivate, inform, and enhance language practice, acting as a transitional connector between the brick and mortar classroom and way beyond it.

TOWARDS MORE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Language learning has a special flavor when it becomes a social act in which the students feel as belonging to the group, enjoying themselves as a group. My challenge began with my low-tech setting, teaching those advanced-level teens at one of our partner schools premises. There, I did not have all the technological solutions I was used to in one of the school branches I generally taught. Teaching at that partner school meant I had no projector, just a small TV screen on the very high ceiling, and no sets of iPads which I had become fond of during the mobile device piloting stage I helped implement. What I had in abundance was a lively, rambunctious group of teens who came to English classes, forced by their parents who believed learning another language was an integral part of their education. Those teens wanted to socialize, talk, interact, but not really learn English. They mentioned they liked to speak the language, but not learn it. Another main challenge in my context was the fact I was tied to a demanding curriculum, using a textbook that was not appropriate for very young advanced-level teens. They had the language, but lacked the motivation to be in class. Added to this class environment, I was faced with a group that ranged from highly extroverted teens to ones that I could barely hear when they spoke in class.

As we progressed in our lessons, I realized that, for a better and more engaging learning environment, I had to reconsider the design of the language experience. This new lesson architecture had to address the different challenges I had within the group: use the technological tools students had at their disposal, coordinate options for task completion, empower students through active learning in which they were in charge of producing content in English, accommodate the diverse student voices, and tap into my teens' world to give them choices and make learning relevant to them. It was certainly a demanding mission which required more prep time, but not an impossible one to achieve.

To start my redesign project, considering the many educational layers I had acknowledged as important to the learning process and the connection within the group, I decided to select a tool that could help the group connect and make those goals I had set for the semester achievable. *WhatsApp* seemed to be the perfect fit due to its ubiquity and generalized use by the teen population. When I suggested its use to my class, my students were all excited and immediately helped me create the *WhatsApp* group and add all the students to it. *WhatsApp* was then the first attempt to begin a closer contact with the teens in a more informal setting that was already part of their daily lives. My pedagogical design was based on a socially-constructed approach to learning in what Jahnke et al. (2014) mention as co-located settings—physical teaching spaces enhanced by mobile technologies. According to the authors, mobile technology becomes part of classrooms, both merged into new teaching and learning spaces, making it possible for educators to design learning that promotes active learning, where students are dynamic producers, co-constructing knowledge.

Thus, by trying new teaching approaches that took into account the fluid boundaries between formal and informal learning, I planned to engage my teen learners and make the classroom environment a more enjoyable, vibrant place for them. It also seemed to be the perfect opportunity to harness the potential of the mobile devices my students had to make them aware of the learning capabilities of the digital tool they were, at all times, holding in their hands.

THE SAMR FRAMEWORK, TASK CHOICES, AND COLLECTIVES

Many teachers still resist using technology with students, for they feel that if they are just substituting one way of doing things for a more contemporary version of an old task, then the effort is not worth it. However, I've always believed that even if you are just substituting one tool for another, the little increments you provide to your daily practices might add up and result in transformative outcomes. This is reflected in Puentedura's SAMR framework (2014), a four-level approach to selecting, using, and evaluating technology integration in educational contexts: substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition. By considering the SAMR approach when designing our lessons, we can clearly visualize which tasks are mere substitutes for what we had been doing before without any digital aide, working as enhancement activities, and which ones imprint a transformative approach to the task setting where the students cannot perform it without the use of technology. Therefore, in the substitution and augmentation levels, tech tools are enhancers of class activities, but they still act as a direct tool substitute. However, the main transformation in the learning process happens when the technology integration allows for a significant task redesign (modification stage) or the creation of new tasks previously inconceivable (redemption stage).

The *WhatsApp* integration to my teaching practice worked both at the enhancement level and in the transformational sphere. It all depended on the pedagogical purpose of its use, time constraints imposed by my schedule, and the complexity of students' work I wanted to promote. Sometimes it was just a quick note or review, but on certain occasions we were working on more elaborate projects that enhanced students' higher order thinking and their digital literacy skills.

Besides the more formal activities that were an integral part of the lesson, the use of *WhatsApp* gave room for more group interaction and student-driven conversations that were not possible during class time due to the demanding syllabus we had to follow and the limit of contact hours in class, three hours per week. In fact, from an initial class communication tool, the social

media app platform became the enabler of the emergence of a collective. As stated by Seely Brown and Thomas (2011), we live in a time where we have the ability to produce, consume and distribute knowledge in an unlimited, unfiltered, and immediate way, adding our own knowledge to the general mix. In this co-construction, students can take an active role in helping create and mold the flux of information and knowledge. So, a collective, as the authors reveal it, comprises more than just a group of people, skills and talents that are greater than the sum of its parts. A collective is defined by the fluidity of relationships in which its participants actively engage in the process of learning, and the technological infrastructure empowers participation, providing innumerable possibilities for learning through intentional and incidental learning. They go as far as differentiating communities from collectives, "In communities, people learn in order to belong. In a collective, people belong in order to learn. Communities derive their strength from creating a sense of belonging, while collectives derive theirs from participation." (Seely Brown & Thomas, 2011, Location 616).

Therefore, the experience with *WhatsApp* went from a perspective of my being closer to students and proposing certain tasks to a more hybrid and liquid space of contextual and situated interactions that resulted in a participatory environment. In fact, the whole mobile experience provided during that semester provided an opportunity for student agency and identity. It was about students doing and belonging. Talking and learning not only about class matters, but about things that really interested learners, helped me bridge the gap between the pedagogical pressures of a classroom and students' vibrant lives outside school. It made me connect to them on another level. I had a better understanding of the different perspectives, tastes, interests, passions of my students, which generally we just don't have the time to explore in all its many dimensions and more personally during class time. Of course, it was not a smooth process, for we were just giving the tool and its possibilities a try, but I could really perceive how dynamic and fluid the interactions between teacher-students and students-students were.

WHATSAPP ACTIVITIES

As I check back the log for the group since I created it, I realize that my first attempts with the tool were exactly the most traditional uses of such communication platforms. I was certainly in Puentedura's first level of substitution and using a more teacher-centric approach to technology integration. In this sense, *WhatsApp* was used to post class summaries of important points we had explored and reminders to students, such as asking them not to forget to buy their student books or not to forget to do their homework for the following class. In fact, this was a classroom management strategy that I never abandoned, for I saw the positive outcomes – my students rarely forgot to do their homework or bring them to class, even when they were absent in our previous encounter. Reflecting about the whole experience made me realize that we need to strike a balance between teacher initiated interactions and student-driven conversations. Even with these new technologies, we can very easily fall into the trap of teacher-centeredness and miss great chances to let our students produce and practice more language.

After the first week of *WhatsApp* use with my group, it dawned on me that mobile devices had the potential to entice my students to produce more, to search, and to share with their peers. Thus, I started encouraging them to share songs they listened to where they could find some specific grammar points. When we were studying the present perfect, for example, they shared a list of songs, going on a web treasure hunt, and there was even a certain kind of healthy competition, for they couldn't share a song that a friend had already posted in the *WhatsApp* group. From the students' answers, I could prepare a class that was tuned to their interests and own choices.

Random notes to learners on the days we didn't have classes were also part of my strategy to connect with them. At that time, I was really delving into the study of neuroscience in education, and it was clear to me that if my students were emotionally connected to English in a playful, pleasurable and informal way, I could be creating a propitious environment to nudge them toward learning. Indeed, the neuroscientist Zull (2002) mentions that our feelings

of fear, calmness, excitement, attraction, and happiness are all sensed, so being that emotions are part of our sensory experience, they imprint a map in our brains of what might help or hinder the learning process. Varying the approach to these notes was also a way to connect and to grab my students' attention to English even outside the classroom. Sometimes it was just a message of how much I missed them and couldn't wait to be in class with them; at other times I had a question about their personal lives, indirectly reviewing any vocabulary or grammar point we were studying.

As the group became closer, learners started to talk to each other in English within our group digital platform without the need for my prompts. They started asking questions and getting immediate answers from peers related to what they missed in class when they were absent, or what the homework assignment was. Even when they were going to be absent, they sent the group a note, giving the reason for their absence, which was something totally new for me, teenagers letting me know when they would be absent.

Posting photos was also part of our routine. Sometimes it was a photo taken in class, which they always had fun commenting on, or photos of the board with the content we had explored so that they could retrieve it and review it later on. At first, I used *WhatsApp* to reinforce the language being explored in class through repetition and iteration of the content. They were mainly extracurricular activities and informal class interactions. However, when I felt ready to dare more and realized that I needed to move up in the SAMR stages to a more transformative use of mobile devices in the classroom, I started using *WhatsApp* not only beyond classroom walls, but also as part of classroom activities. I started encouraging students to share their notes through the app when they were working in groups so everyone could see each other's answers. For vocabulary review, they'd write the definition and sentences with the words in context, sending them to the group. On one occasion, one of the students even created autonomously a beautiful poster with all students' definitions and sentences for a test review. I encouraged her to share the app she used for such a lovely creation.

As my take on designing the classroom experience turned into a more hybrid approach, in which the textbook activities were adapted to accommodate my students' interests and needs, I decided to create a simulation activity with the students for a unit about social action. I knew that unit wouldn't be especially exciting for my learners the way it was presented in the book, so tailoring the use of our group platform with a more intentional and purposeful educational context in mind seemed a natural step. I divided the learners into groups and designed a situation in which they were all part of an HR enterprise that provided qualified professionals and trainees to the market. They developed the mission and logo of their company, and, for each class day, I had missions that the group had to accomplish, all of them adapted from the textbook activities. My teen students seemed to be more engaged and worked cooperatively and collaboratively in their groups. Some of the tasks even required them to do some simple app smashing.

According to Greg Kulowiec (2013), app smashing is "the process of using multiple apps in conjunction with one another to complete a final task or project" (para. 2). In one of the tasks, the students' fictional companies were required to send their best trainee candidate to fill a position in a big environmental enterprise. They had to decide on one candidate in their group who would apply for the position. Next, they took a photo of the candidate with their cellphone camera and created a poster with the app Piccollage (<http://bit.ly/itunespiccollage/> for IOS devices and <http://bit.ly/googleplaypiccollage/> for Android) for the candidate's profile. It was a very simple example of app smashing (cameral roll photo + Piccollage), but entirely appropriate for the pedagogical purpose of the activity, the review of vocabulary related to types of personality. Our *WhatsApp* group worked as the database of the candidates, where each group posted their profile pages. I invited the candidates for the interview during class time, and the students had the chance to analyze which candidate was better prepared for the position and why. I listened to their arguments; we discussed everyone's performance, the positive points for each interview and what could be improved. As the task was part of the simulation activity, I mentioned that I, as the head of the hiring

enterprise, would take the final decision after listening to everyone, and I would send the result by email. I used our digital platform after class to announce which trainee had been chosen for the position. They got a formal notification in *WhatsApp*.

I realized that by adding the simulation element to my practice, I was supplementing my pedagogical mix with what João Mattar (2010) reminds us as tangential learning: you learn because you are exposed to things and because you are involved in a context that promotes your natural interest to perform the task. In fact, that simple class simulation enhanced students' engagement and helped them become aware of and develop life skills that still didn't comprise their repertoire as future professionals, learning how to do a job interview. They also had the opportunity to use their digital skills to work on their design abilities to display the profiles of their candidates in a visually appealing way, which might be an important skill for them in the near future once they enter university and look for real internship positions. English was certainly tangential, but an essential means of communication for the students to successfully accomplish the task. For this specific simulation task, the *WhatsApp* platform worked as the aggregator of the group's content throughout its stages, from the profile posters' sharing to the final "email" with the result of the selected candidate.

During that semester I started using *WhatsApp* with my teen students, a colleague from an online mobile learning course I had taken contacted me to collaborate with her on a school project. I invited another teacher in Rio de Janeiro to join us, and we started an international collaborative project that was more in the transformative part of technology integration in Puentedura's SAMR framework. We created a collaborative board on Padlet (<https://padlet.com>), and my colleague's students in Dusseldorf, Germany, asked questions about the Brazilian culture to my students and the students in Rio. As I didn't have wi-fi connection in the classroom, *WhatsApp* was a life saver. I would post links for students to research about the culture, geography and lifestyle in Dusseldorf so that they could understand a bit more about our collaborative partners' contexts, using their own cellphones and 3G data plans. Also, they recorded videos using their mobile

devices to answer the German students' questions. A quick answer can be seen at <http://bit.ly/brazilianschools>. My students got so interested in knowing more about those students who wanted to learn about our Brazilian culture that they also wanted to ask them questions (for examples of those questions, see <http://bit.ly/questionstodusserldorf>).

Therefore, the collaborative project evolved because of students' curiosity and exchanges and it could only become operational through the use of *WhatsApp*. When there was new material posted to our collaborative wall in Padlet, I would send a screenshot of the wall to my students via *WhatsApp* so that they could check what our partners had replied. Recipes were shared, important dates mentioned, videos created, and mainly, stereotypes were demystified through this project. If not for our digital communication hub and its easy access to the information and content we developed and received, it would have been really arduous to carry out our collaboration. I had schedule constraints because of an extensive syllabus to follow and technological challenges with no wi-fi infrastructure in the school and a single TV screen in the classroom placed high on the wall, making it very hard for students to read or see anything on it. So, *WhatsApp* emerged as our decentralized classroom screen, where every student not only had control over it, but also used it to produce content to share with their peers.

One final use of *WhatsApp* worth mentioning was as a more one-to-one tool for assessment purposes. Getting to the end of the term, I wanted to give them more personalized feedback on their oral performance, focusing on the specific speaking skill of retelling a story with their own words. In a textbook unit about mysteries and murders, we worked on some guidelines for them to create a mystery story, and I asked them to write and record their stories – without just reading them aloud, but really retelling their stories (although there was no way for me to check that for sure). They sent their stories via *WhatsApp*, and I sent back my feedback to each one of them, using a rubric I had created for the activity (available at <http://carlaarena.com/mlearning-assessment-for-a-recording-activity/>). Some students got as far as editing their audio files to create sound effects in their stories. All in all, I felt the

speaking assessment was the perfect end-of-term activity to wrap up the learning experience we had during our time together in an individual, personalized way.

FINAL REMARKS

Throughout the *WhatsApp* experience and its unfolding parallel activities, such as the simulation activity, I remember my feeling of anxiety every time our formal tests were to come. I was always apprehensive, for I was still not sure if my learners would succeed in the assessments required by the school. The students had to take formal tests based on the book content we had to cover. By sometimes taking an unconventional approach to the design of lesson plans, choosing a more hybrid, fluid path that floated around formal and informal learning where technology was the means for group connection, interaction, feedback, information and co-construction of knowledge, I had chosen to take a risk in how I explored the class content with my students. Traditionally, we would go by the book with some “extra activities” here and there. However, I took a conscious approach of blending and remixing the book content with more meaningful activities, as in the case of the simulation and projects (the international collaborative project with Dusseldorf and Rio) to make language learning and practice more authentic and motivating for my teen students. The whole process proved to be worth it in terms of group engagement and motivation to learn. My students succeeded in the school assessments, keeping their averages within the expected range for advanced level students in our school. Besides, they had the incremental layer of using English to authentically communicate and create stronger bonds with peers through our class interactions in *WhatsApp*, as well as during class time.

The *WhatsApp* experience with my teen group showed me that some of our pedagogical choices to overcome challenges can really become great learning opportunities with some incremental innovations in our practice. Because of the technological infrastructure in the partner school I was teaching, with no Internet

connection and a small TV screen, many activities had to be adapted. In the case of the collaborative project with Dusseldorf students, for example, it was challenging even to show students the photos, images and videos with the questions from our international partners. However, my teen students had WhatsApp and 3G connection, and we could make the necessary adaptations to make it work in a low-tech school environment.

I also became more daring in the use of the tool, trying out different strategies for better connection and ways of learning to reach my students. In my educational context, most, if not all students, are *WhatsApp* users. Thus, since that first experience using the app with my teen students, I have been using it with my other groups, mainly adults, with very positive results in which a hybrid approach to my lessons has freed my class time for much more student production, discovery and interaction that is extended way beyond classroom time and has made my students more aware of their responsibility and autonomy in the learning process. Learning is not just an educator's business. It encompasses learners and teachers working together. In this case, *WhatsApp* makes this process visible, feasible and transparent for all.

If there is one tool that is common to most of the students at the institution I work for, it is *WhatsApp*. However, most of the activities, if not all of them, could be developed in other digital platforms. If WhatsApp is not an option in a teacher's educational context, one that would be worth exploring is Edmodo (see Legge and Odell, this volume), a cross-platform tool, which is web-based and has its own app. Many educators use it because of its safe environment for learners, including a way for parent access through a password-protected system, and its social media interface feel that is user-friendly for learners.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carla Arena is the Head of the Innovation and Technologies department of a Binational Center in Brasilia, Brazil. She's been interested in the intersection of technology and pedagogy for many years to design of learning experiences that are joyful and memorable for students. Carla is also a teacher trainer and online moderator who truly believes in the transformational power of educators developing their digital literacies. She blogs at <http://carlaarena.com>. Email: contato@carlaarena.com

REFLECTIONS ON HOW ADULT STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION WITH TECHNOLOGY

Marcelino Arrosagaray, UNED, Spain

Ruth Breeze, Universidad de Navarra, Spain

Ángel Sobrino, Universidad de Navarra, Spain

ABSTRACT

Despite the importance teachers and learners attach to having an acceptable pronunciation for successful communication, its teaching and learning may still present a complex challenge. In practice, this might result in its neglect by the teacher in the classroom. For the student, this means a missed opportunity and, perhaps, a sense of frustration. This article reflects on the possible contributions ICT (information and communication technologies) can make to improve pronunciation when students return to language learning as adults. The results of our research show that students improve their pronunciation and strengthen their own commitment to continue learning.

INTRODUCTION

As the proverb says, it is never too late to learn. European education authorities are currently committed to promoting lifelong learning as a means to boost not only employability and competitiveness, but also social inclusion, active citizenship and

individual welfare. They call for the adaptation of curricula to new learning scenarios, where learning takes place in a flexible way so that students can benefit from authentic learning opportunities along their lives.

As language teachers, one of our concerns is to find more productive ways of helping our students improve their pronunciation. However, the way this has been factored into the curriculum under the predominant communicative approach in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has been subject to great variation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Godwin, 2010). Teaching pronunciation still generates a complex challenge for the teacher, because many different factors influence its learning in a given context (Levis and LeVelle, 2010).

Among these factors, we should mention (i) student-related factors, like age, individual differences, or students' attitude to language; (ii) linguistic factors, like the choice of the pronunciation model to teach, given the use of English as a lingua franca; and (iii) methodological factors and the type of instruction that is adopted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the teaching and learning of pronunciation has grown significantly, but there still seems to be a long way to go until pronunciation training that builds on these research results is included as a regular teaching component.

In general, one of the main interests of teachers and students in using ICT for improving pronunciation lies in giving corrective feedback or providing personalized supervision of students' pronunciation. The following studies are representative of some current trends. Engwall (2012) concludes that students improve the pronunciation of certain phonemes with the help of graphic animation, though they also need some training in its interpretation. Pearson, Pickering, and Da Silva (2011) observe that students improve the pronunciation of consonant clusters after practice focusing on syllabic onsets and codas, and Ramírez-Verdugo (2006) defends the effective development of self-monitoring strategies to improve intonation. All of these studies

also point to the need to sustain intensive pronunciation practice and test the results over longer periods of time.

From the evidence found in the studies mentioned, it seems that exposing students to the analysis of aspects of pronunciation contributes to the students becoming active participants in the learning process, by raising their awareness of issues previously unknown to them, and stimulating interest in perfecting their own pronunciation in order to facilitate communication. The latter result is also supported by Brown (2012) and Luchini (2007). Therefore, it seems advisable to create conditions in the classroom for students to acquire these analytical skills and guide their efforts into communicative situations. Most previous research focuses on the use of ICT inside the classroom, but nowadays its use can also be extended beyond the classroom with the help of current Web 2.0 technology, thus maximizing students' interaction with the target language.

In the remainder of this paper we discuss a study where we incorporated some Web 2.0 tools in order to provide students with tailor-made pronunciation practice adapted to their learning environment.

OUR EXPERIMENTAL CYCLE

The Setting

Our teaching context is The Open University in Spain (UNED), with students following a C1-level course between October and May. These adults, mostly university students, middle-aged professionals and occasionally pensioners, are generally renewing their contact with the language after some years of interruption.

These students, who have not benefited from recent educational schemes in Spain (early language learning or CLIL), show an interest in learning and improving their mastery of English, sometimes many years after completing their training. They also have diverse proficiency levels and learning motivations, ranging from professional to recreational ones. In addition, there is little classroom teaching time available, student attendance is rather

irregular along the year (with dropouts at certain times) and students are often strangers to each other before the course starts, thus making social relations and interaction more challenging. They opt for this type of flexible learning, which is also available for undergraduates and postgraduates, and attend two one-hour lectures a week.

All this makes for a classroom setting which requires something more than good teaching intuition. In fact, adult education constitutes a specific learning context given the students' cognitive maturity, language skills, learning experiences, limited time availability, and their possible reluctance to speak in the language, if they feel they do not speak properly (Lightbown and Spada, 2006).

As a consequence, we teachers need to adapt our teaching to a hypothetical average adult student who does not necessarily match the idiosyncrasies of any one of the diverse social backgrounds and motivations for learning. Moreover, this language learning experience should help to empower adult students to continue learning the language in the future and make the most of their own autonomous learning skills.

The Teaching Diagnosis

In order to anchor the research, we carried out an initial diagnostic study on the pronunciation of 95 adult students at the B2 level examination, designed to assess student performance on several pronunciation parameters (articulation of sounds, word stress, weak forms and sentence stress and intonation), and thus select the aspects to be reinforced through our intervention.

We observed that the students performed better in word stress and in the articulation of sounds than in weak forms and in sentence stress and intonation. Among their recurrent weaknesses these should be highlighted: the mispronunciation of regular verb past tenses (-ed), pronouncing /e/ instead of /ɪ/ (as in *experience*, for example), misplacing the stress in multi-syllable words (as in *comfortable*) or in two-syllable ones (like *exam* or *event*), not relaxing vowel phonemes into /ə/ in some word endings (as in *bottle*), and making their speech monotonous by lacking proper intonation patterns.

Against this background, we planned a didactic intervention with an “action-research” frame following some basic stages making up a cycle as described by Whitehead (1989): “I experience problems when my educational values are negated in my practice. I imagine ways of overcoming my problems. I act on a chosen solution. I evaluate the outcomes of my actions. I modify my problems, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations” (p. 45).

Our main objective was to provide a pronunciation learning environment aiming to increase students’ familiarization with phonemes and prosodic features and their commitment to self-assessment and improvement by guiding them through communicative activities into spontaneous interactions with other students. To cut it short, our overall aim was to analyze if they improve their pronunciation and the extent to which they can become committed to doing so. We tried to combine and complement classroom activities with students’ individual or group work out of class in a blended manner.

Subjects, Tools, and Measures

Twenty-six university students, 8 male and 18 female, with an average age of 33, participated in our study over a period of 14 weeks (February-May 2012), equivalent to one academic term. They belonged to two C1 groups and volunteered for the intervention. We established a control group (13 students from group A) and an experimental one (13 from group B who guaranteed to have access to a computer at home).

At the start of the intervention, students were asked to complete a series of questionnaires: (i) A “Personal Information Survey” to analyze some background information on their previous English learning experience, (ii) “A Pronunciation Reception and Production Test”, (iii) “A Pronunciation Attitude Inventory”, in order to detect the relevance, they attribute to pronunciation and get to know their expectations for improvement, and (iv) a “Survey on Student Autonomy”. At the end of the intervention, all the surveys except the first were administered again to spot variations, if any, together with a survey on student satisfaction measuring teacher, activity and instrument (ICT)-related aspects.

Along the intervention, we relied on online tests, observation files and the teacher journal in order to obtain as complete a picture as possible of the process.

The Teaching Program

The program of activities followed by students comprised three different stages: individual student practice, guided communicative activities with the teacher, and spontaneous interaction with other students. All the activities were gathered in a virtual learning environment designed specifically for this activity in Moodle (see <http://www.moodle.org>), which was permanently available for students to exercise at will.

Stage 1 (Weeks 1–7)

In this familiarization stage, the activities included the following formats:

- a. Links to short subtitled videos describing all the English phonemes on an unspecialized basis and extracted from the BBC website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/>.
- b. Short self-evaluation comprehension tests developed with the authoring tool Hot Potatoes (<https://hotpot.uvic.ca/>) by the teacher. These exercises consist of phonological oppositions based on minimal pairs or sets of words or sentences, always following the phonological RP model. The exercise aims, as the name suggests (“Ear training 1 and 2”), to familiarize students with the minimal differences between the vowel sounds and consonants in question. Each record consists of ten statements, to guarantee that the sample is sufficient and can be performed in 5–7 minutes.

During this stage, students could check their progress and were invited to repeat the tests until they obtained an acceptable score (around 75% right answers), which was also stored in the platform and could be consulted by the teacher.

Stage 2 (Weeks 8–11)

The teacher provided an online activity to be performed using free software (VoiceThread: <http://www.voicethread.com>) embedded

within Moodle that allowed students to record short interventions easily. The recordings of the students were uploaded as audio sequences. Two weeks were devoted to each activity: in the first one (weeks 8 and 10) students performed the activity outside the classroom, while in the second one (weeks 9 and 11 respectively) some follow-up reflective activities were conducted in the classroom. Task 1, “Listen and repeat” required the production and recording of two specific statements that students had to produce and record with the help of a sample audio if necessary. Task 2, “Tea or coffee?”, raised three simple questions that the student was expected to answer and justify very briefly (i.e.: A bird in the hand or two in the bush?, Beer or coke?, Staycations or couch surfing?).

Once the recording period was over, the teacher led the students’ reflection through the completion of a self-observation file (for task one) and another student-observation file (for task two), where special attention was paid to mispronunciations. Students were expected to spot any mispronounced words, check the phonetic transcription in the dictionary and include it in the file. Once they had finished, the students handed their work to the teacher, who asked them to pronounce the words once more. Thus, the teacher could detect some possible mistakes and discuss them personally with the students, if any of them persisted.

Stage 3 (Weeks 13–14)

Students were grouped in trios, assigned a topic (Public services, holidays and travel, education, or health and wellbeing) and invited to interact through Skype (<http://www.skype.com>) following the format of the oral test of the Official School of Languages in Navarre (Spain), with which they were already familiar, consisting of three quotes on their given topic that they needed to comment on. The activity had a twofold objective: (i) to provide each student with two words mispronounced by them in previous activities and check whether they were able to integrate them within the course of the interaction, and (ii) to rate the overall pronunciation of each student, for which the interaction was recorded with the students’ permission with the tool CallBurner (<http://www.callburner.com>).

Phonological Competence: Any Improvement?

By comparing the pretest with posttest results we noticed that on the whole students were able to better discriminate vowel and consonant phonemes in the reception post-tests and especially in the production post-tests. Moreover, to a fairly satisfactory degree, students improved their pronunciation by consciously incorporating what they had learned in previous activities within online communication with peers through Skype as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pronunciation of target words on posttest.

Group/Topic	Student	WORD 1	WORD 2
PUBLIC SERVICES	B13	comparison	<i>stupid</i>
	B3	period	imagine
	B5	<u>interested</u>	young
HOLIDAYS & TRAVEL	B9	says	model
	B1	strange	<u>taste</u>
	B12	yesterday	young
EDUCATION	B4	<u>interested</u>	exercise
	B11	<i>receive</i>	<u>young</u>
	B7	reputation	<i>damage</i>
HEALTH & WELLBEING	B6	culture	enjoy
	B10	just	necessary
	B2	develop	caused

As it can be seen, the 17 words in bold (70.8%) were integrated and pronounced correctly, the four underlined were still mispronounced and finally, three of them were left out from the interaction (*stupid, receive and damage*). Students also showed an improvement in the recognition and production of some of the prosodic features practised, such as word nuclear stress and sentence accent distribution or tonicity.

By comparing the answers in the questionnaires of our experimental group with those of a control one, we curiously noticed that students' individual practice on the computer (followed by the experimental group) produces a similar learning

perception to the one observed following the collective exercise of the contents in the classroom (method used with the control group). However, if we analyze whether or not the student is able to recognize the phonetic notation and read a text in phonetic transcription, there are important qualitative differences in favor of the students who familiarized themselves with the contents individually at their own pace with the computer. All of the students felt confident enough to read the whole text written in phonetic notation in the posttest, and made fewer mistakes despite reading the whole text, whereas in the control group only 61.5% of the students could do this.

We could infer that the type of learning or the type of knowledge acquired is different. Individual exercise generates a practical realization of this knowledge: a better recognition ability of phonetic notation and therefore a greater ability to predict the pronunciation of English words. We believe that this capability could contribute very substantially to improve consultation processes in a dictionary when students come across new terms. With the advent of virtual dictionaries that include sound files, this is no longer strictly necessary for the student, but it helps to strengthen their level of perception (or noticing), and to consolidate their knowledge as a result.

LESSONS LEARNED

We ponder here on the challenges faced along the implementation process and the results obtained from the intervention. Our aim as teachers is to carry out some critical reflection on the evidence found in order to keep the practice alive in the future.

Reflections on the Program Applied

The bulk of the creative work for the teacher entailed planning the stages or defining and sequencing the type of activity to be carried out by the students. This involved selecting the pronunciation contents, designing the activities and defining the evaluation procedure. The work was demanding, especially because it was done within the framework of a research project. Without the

time constraints of research we also believe that the stages could be combined flexibly. That is, the linear sequence implemented here should perhaps be cyclical, with a quicker flow from comprehension to production, and with shorter familiarization, however practical it turns out to be, since students proved impatient to transfer knowledge into practice. The succession of small cycles would generate a greater need to acquaint students with different activity formats and tools initially, although its recurrence in subsequent cycles could contribute to further consolidation in the future.

We planned the coverage of a sufficient and systematized set of contents integrated within the syllabus of the subject to facilitate its management and implementation. Thus we prioritized work on individual sound articulation and word stress along the three stages.

Activities were either extracted from well-reputed sources (stage 1) or designed by the teacher (stages 2 and 3) and reshaped into computerized format in order to ensure student access and work from home, and allow continuous and quick student self-evaluation and progress self-check. At the end of the experience, students significantly valued the interest of the activities ($p=0.041$) and the time required to complete them ($p=0.037$), as observed in the satisfaction questionnaires.

Reflections on the ICT Tools Used

The tools used (Moodle, Hot Potatoes, VoiceThread, Skype and CallBurner) are user-friendly software which require little previous training or knowledge by the teacher, though some are not entirely free. The teacher needs to know enough to obtain maximum benefit from the tool. In this sense, the teacher also becomes a learner, and this fact may help them sympathize with students' initial queries and fears.

We have experienced some typical problems, such as managing the appearance of the Moodle platform, establishing proper links with audio files, or facing some occasional network crashes. All were duly solved with the help of getting-started manuals and more expert colleagues and friends. Needless to say, previous

experience with the tools used, especially with Moodle, was of great help too. In the future, we intend to use them all again in the way described.

Reflections on Student Involvement

We explained the whole intervention to students in advance. They welcomed the program with initial enthusiasm and volunteered openly to undergo it, despite all the test load it implied, some of which had to be done out of class, which required some extra time from them (around 20 minutes of individual recording for both pronunciation production pretests and posttests). This speaks volumes about their attitude and may also be related to their motivation to improve pronunciation, since they rated their pronunciation as the weakest of their linguistic competences in one of the initial questionnaires.

A big challenge was to maintain their initial willingness. To this end, we consider the activities of each phase must be available to students online well in advance and that they should remain accessible throughout the whole practice.

Some of the data we collected show that class attendance among the students involved in the study was clearly greater compared to those students who were not involved. The average score in online tests in stage 1 was 86%, which served to pinpoint the areas that posed greater difficulty to students. Among these, the /ə/ and /h/ phonemes have to be mentioned.

Given the students' reaction and positive overall evaluation of the experience, it would be interesting to promote this initiative further in the future. The program could be adapted to the individual needs and pace of the students and let them choose the content to practise.

After the intervention, students reinforced their belief that pronunciation should be emphasized more in the classroom. At the same time they modified their perceptions of their own pronunciation and expectations for improvement. Though they ended considering it to be a greater challenge than they thought initially, they did not give up and their degree of concern and involvement has increased for the future. We can therefore

state that the practice contributed to raising their “pedagogical commitment” to their own learning. What is more, when rating their degree of autonomy to face challenges after the intervention, they considered themselves to be more independent and able to manage their own learning, while they also had modified their initial beliefs and appreciated the supportive role of peer students. We include here some of the answers given by students showing their level of agreement with the statement “As a student, I consider myself independent and able to manage my own learning”. They answered: “Individual progress depends on the effort you are willing to make”, “The virtual platform helps drive this point”, “I believe that the teacher can guide our learning but we are the ones who have to take responsibility”.

FINAL REMARKS

Our experience has convinced us that it is necessary to adapt technology to specific educational purposes and contexts that allow teachers to acquire knowledge about its potential. The classroom should be the natural environment where the teacher acquires the appropriate knowledge and experience.

Our results show that tools such as those we incorporated in our intervention can enable the individualization of content and learning rates, reduce the pressure on students, and make it possible to expose them to different accents and native language models. We believe that educational programs should be customized, making it possible to detect areas of pronunciation that students need strengthened, and should promote exercise and reflection in these areas so that students can set personal improvement goals and evaluate their own learning experience. The potential of ICT tools is the possibility they offer teachers to adapt their teaching to the learning process that students experience.

As teachers, we value these findings since they reinforce our conviction that the teacher can also be creative in the classroom. And without doubt, this helps us renew our devotion to the work we do. If our adult students believe it is never too late to learn, we teachers cannot give up either.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marcelino Arrosagaray, BA in English Philology and PhD in Pedagogy, is a teacher at the Distance School of Languages of Navarra (EOIDNA), UNED in Pamplona and Adjunct Professor at the University of Navarra, with several publications in the field of English language teaching.

Email: marrosagaray@pamplona.uned.es

Ruth Breeze, MA in Modern and Medieval Languages and PhD in Education, is Professor at the Institute of Modern Languages at the University of Navarra and researcher in the *Instituto Cultural y Sociedad*. She has published widely on language pedagogy.

Email: rbreeze@unav.es

Ángel Sobrino, BA in Educational Psychology and PhD in Pedagogy is Associate Dean of Research at the School of Education of the University of Navarra, with several publications on ICT teacher training. Email: asobrino@unav.es

USING PRESENTATION SOFTWARE, PEER INSTRUCTION, AND LEARNER REFLECTIONS TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Thomas E. Bieri, Nanzan University, Japan

ABSTRACT

Small groups of students in English oral communication courses in a Japanese university were asked to research and learn to use presentation software programs. They then had to create a presentation using the software their group was assigned, present individually to other groups of students about the software, and reflect on the project. This unit of work led to research, discussion and negotiation in English, self-managed and peer-supported learning, exposure to and understanding of previously unfamiliar software, and critical reflection. It was well received by the students. I describe the process and share my reflections on the project as it may be useful in other EFL and ESL learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses a project done in an English oral communication course at a private university in Japan where I was teaching full-time. I describe the setting and address the objectives of the unit, which were to encourage self-managed learning,

cooperation and peer instruction, increased use of digital tools for creating visual aids, and critical reflection by the learners on not only the content of the unit but also the learning process.

I provide a detailed description of the procedures used, which culminated with learners presenting an evaluation and demonstration of a visual aid tool. I also address critical reflection during and after the project. I summarize the written reflections produced by the students and include examples of their comments. Finally, I present my own reflections, and I note some areas for improving the implementation of this project in the future.

SETTING

This software presentation project was done in two successive academic years with the English I/II Oral Communication A (OCA) course, which is a required two-semester course for all first-year students enrolled in the Department of British and American Studies at Nanzan University, Japan. The class meets for three 90-minute periods a week for 15 weeks each semester. The common OCA course objectives are focused on the development of both speaking and listening skills such that learners are able to engage in general conversation, issue-based discussion, and presentations in English. Classes are streamed by ability based on a placement exam or teacher recommendation, and I teach the top-level section. Most students in this level can already manage basic conversations in English when they enter the department, so there is greater focus at this level on developing and practicing academic listening, discussion, and presentation skills than in other sections. The students listen to, take notes on, and discuss mini-lectures and authentic materials on a variety of topics. They also have regular oral performance assignments, the majority of which are three- to five-minute presentations. Other assignments include formal debates, negotiation practice, and role-play activities. In lieu of a written exam, students perform a final presentation in the last weeks of the course, which is expected to be eight minutes in the first semester and fifteen in the second, and submit an accompanying written report.

There were a total of 39 participants, 36 female and three male. The first year I taught this unit, the section included 19 first-year students plus one fourth-year student who had returned from time studying abroad and still needed to complete the OCA course. The section in the second year consisted of 19 first-year students. Most students in this section have experience living overseas, some for several years, and many have graduated from an English-focused high school within Japan. Therefore, most students in the class can score 700 and above on the TOEIC and 200 and above on the TOEFL CBT.

Student reflection, while not required in the curriculum, is built into my course. Learners take notes on the content and performance of their peers' presentations and exchange constructive feedback. I video-record most presentations and students view the videos of some of their own presentations. I provide grading rubrics in advance as they are an effective way to clarify expectations, grade fairly, connect grades to specific skill development and task achievement, and promote focused reflection by learners (Edutopia, 2008; Howrey, 2013, 2014). I return post-performance grades with notes on completed rubric forms. I ask students to use the peer reviews, videos, and returned rubrics as tools for reflection on what was done well, what could be improved, and the respective reasons for each. I also ask them to apply their conclusions to improving future preparation and performance. Additionally, the focus of their final written report each semester is reflection: on their final performance, on their improvement since the beginning of the course, and on future goals and steps for continued improvement.

OBJECTIVES

I had several objectives for this software presentation project. I wanted to encourage:

- discussion and negotiation within small groups
- engagement in self-managed learning and peer instruction

-
- knowledge of digital tools useful for making presentations more visually appealing and engaging
 - practice using the tools and other presentation skills
 - critical reflection on the process and content of the project.

I also expected that the nature of the project would encourage media use involving all four areas of Levin and Bruce's (2003) taxonomy of learning technology use: inquiry, communication, construction, and expression. I aimed to have authentic tasks, particularly tasks requiring natural interaction and genuine communication between the students, using their existing L2 and content knowledge, and focusing on goals and on transferable skill development, all as described by Mishan and Struntz (2003, as cited in Levy & Stockwell, 2006, p. 16).

My focus on the learners being engaged in self-managed learning and working with peers derives from constructivist-oriented beliefs and a conviction that collaboration leads to positive learning outcomes. Beatty (2010) summarizes constructivism as the belief that learners come to any situation with preexisting knowledge and that expanding on and perfecting knowledge comes through learners struggling with problems and new ideas to construct their own reality. He notes that the teacher's role "is as a facilitator of learning, rather than as an expert" and that learners draw on a variety of resources, including other individuals (p. 106). Dalgarno (2001) states that constructivism holds "that learning involves building on prior experiences" and that "the process of learning is an active one" (p. 184). He also explains that constructivism includes a perspective that learning takes place best in collaborative environments, and that the dialectical interpretation holds that realistic experience scaffolded by experts and collaboration promotes learning. Beatty (2010) defines collaboration as "a process in which two or more learners need to work together to achieve a common goal" (p. 109). Beatty also says it "is among the most useful ways in which learners acquire language at the computer" (p. 108) and goes on to describe how it involves negotiation of meaning and develops a variety of transferable skills.

PROCEDURES

Project procedures (2013)

I began the project midway through the second semester with instruction on creating and effectively using visual aids to support presentations, utilizing the textbook *Dynamic Presentations: Skills and Strategies for Public Speaking* (Hood, 2007). Two units of the textbook introduced ideas such as clarity and concision, avoiding overuse of visual aids and of text within aids, and different kinds of aids, such as charts, graphs, and even props, along with suitable uses for each kind. I asked learners to create and use visual aids, and reflect on and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various visual aids. Most of this information was covered over three class periods.

The next step was eliciting and listing of computer applications that could provide visual support for presentations. Prior to doing this in class, I researched online, using terms like “presentation software” and “PowerPoint alternatives,” to help increase my own understanding of available programs. I found and explored sites for several applications, including HaikuDeck, PowToon, Prezi, SlideRocket, SlideSnack, and Zoho Show, and articles comparing software (Frankart, n.d.; Hung, 2013) and tried accessing the applications on a computer in a classroom. In class I elicited names of programs that students knew, and then filled in the list with ones they didn’t mention. Most students had experience with PowerPoint, but the alternatives were mostly unfamiliar. Software applications that we listed included Google Drive, Keynote, OpenOffice Impress and Draw, YouTube and the ones listed above. As I noted them on the whiteboard, we briefly discussed what they knew about each and this process activated and connected the project to their preexisting knowledge. We then narrowed the list down to a handful that I knew offered free versions and that I had been able to access on a university computer.

Next, I explained the project tasks to the students. First, as a group they would research about and learn how to use one of the applications from the list. Then, still as a group, they would create a ten-minute presentation using that software which would both

inform their classmates about it and include a demonstration of how to use it. Third, they would each individually use the same visual aids and presentation plan created by their group to present and demonstrate the application to another group of students. Finally, they would write a short reflection on the project. These tasks required authentic communication and provided opportunities for practicing real-world skills with a goal of developing and presenting a demonstration. During the explanation, I provided students with the grading rubric, which included a set of questions to be addressed in their presentations (Figure 1), and I emphasized that they needed to include a demonstration of basic use of the software.

We then began the group research phase. I created research groups of four students each and asked each group to choose one application from the list that none of the members were familiar with using. No two groups could research the same application, and I operated on a first-come, first-served basis. The groups then began researching and learning to use the software. I allowed them to use most of one 90-minute class period in the computer lab. Though I was present, I expected them to do as much as possible without my assistance and also to do both their research and discussion primarily in English. During this class period I monitored and did some minor trouble-shooting. The groups then had two days until the next class meeting to finish preparing and practicing their presentations.

In the next class meeting we were once again in a computer lab and all students presented individually. Students presented while seated at stations where they could use one computer to present and one to demonstrate and the other students in the group could watch and ask questions. I made four presentation groups with one student from each of the research groups in each. That way, each student saw the demonstrations of all four other applications. Since there were always simultaneous presentations in the room, I video-recorded them using stationary digital video cameras for later viewing and careful evaluation.

<p><i>Must have:</i></p> <p>Given a greeting & said full name.</p> <p>Given a clear introduction (purpose, hook & preview).</p> <p>Answered the assignment questions fully.</p> <p>Spoken with clear language and intonation.</p> <p>Had good pacing.</p> <p>Had several slides supporting the presentation.</p> <p>Had a good physical presence.</p> <p>Was very close to 10 minutes.</p> <p>Been able to answer listener questions.</p>	<p>Up to one point will be deducted for each area of presentation form that is weak or not present. Lack in preparation or content may result in a deduction of up to five points.</p> <p>Score: _____/10</p>
<p>Assignment questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How can this software be accessed? Is it free, or is there a free version? If not, how much does it cost? – What can a presenter do with this software? What kinds of things is it good for? What things is it not very suitable for? – Overall, would you recommend this software to your classmates? Why or why not? – How do we use this software? What are the basic steps to creating a presentation with this software? 	<p>Notes:</p>

Figure 1. Software Presentation Rubric

Prior to the presentations, I gave the students peer evaluation forms. I instructed them to note whether each presenter had answered the assignment questions, had clearly demonstrated the software, and met other requirements. I also asked them to note one or two elements of the presentation they liked, make suggestions for improvement, and pose a question on the topic for the presenter. Additionally, I required that they assign a letter

grade to each presentation. They gave each completed form to the presenter only, for the presenter's use. After the presentations were completed, I assigned a one-page, typed reflection. I asked the students to explain what they thought of the software project as a whole, including the process, what they felt the best application they learned about was and why, and how they felt they performed on their own presentation.

Project procedures (2014 variations)

I made some changes in procedures the second year that I conducted this project. First, I conducted it mid-way through the first semester. I made this change because I decided to have the students make more extensive use of visual aids earlier in the course compared to the previous year and felt the knowledge and skills they developed would benefit them in other courses. Since the textbook units used in the first year were from the second semester textbook, I only extracted the specific sections related to visual aids and we completed them in one class period. This change appeared to result in a weakening of the context and thus the general understanding of the concepts that were at the base of developing and using aids, so in the future I would not extract these elements from the units they were embedded in.

I also increased the length of the presentations to fifteen minutes, primarily because there would only be four rounds instead of five due to a smaller number of students. I decided to make four research groups of either four or five students as I felt a group of three was too small. On the presentation day I split them into four groups of four and one of three. I asked the members of the original research group which had only four members to present last, and for the final round the members from the smaller presentation group were moved to other presentation groups so that all students could see each demonstration. However, the longer assigned length seems to have contributed to a feeling among many students that there was lack of adequate time to complete preparations.

RESULTS AND REFLECTIONS

Student Reflection

Thirty-eight students turned in the written reflections, 19 each year. These reflections showed primarily positive responses to the project, though there were a few areas for concern. I noted positive and negative comments and grouped identical or similar words and phrases to create categories. I then counted the number of students that made one or more comment in each category. There were over four times as many positive comments as negative, and seven of the ten areas commented on were positive (see Table 1).

One example of a positive comment was, "I really liked the style we gave a presentation. I was able to demonstrate and answer questions promptly because we were separated into small groups. In a presentation, I also used two computers and it made my presentation more clear and easy to understand." One related to the project topic was, "I never had this kind of chance to get to know more about other kinds of creating presentation programs." One comment related to teamwork was, "I learned two things from doing this project. One is that any teams need a leader because without a leader, team cannot cooperate well. Another is each person should be ready for self-sacrifice."

Table 1. Student Reflections

Reflection response type (<i>negative responses italicized</i>)	<i>n</i>
Learned about unfamiliar tools	24
Found it fun and/or interesting	19
Thought it was useful	11
Improved understanding and/or use of visual aids	11
Liked doing group preparation	10
<i>Felt preparation time was inadequate</i>	10
Liked presenting to small groups	9
<i>Unhappy with technical problems</i>	8
Learned elements of teamwork	5
<i>Didn't like preparing with others</i>	3

n = number of learners who made at least one response of this type (multiple responses by any one learner in any one category were counted as one)

Inadequate preparation time was the most common complaint. I intentionally gave limited time for preparation in order to require students to develop time-management and other related skills that they may need in other classes and in the workplace. Some students did show recognition of this, with one saying, "I first thought that the time given was too short to do anything, but now, I think it was a good task to experience. ...it gave me a great experience, opportunity, and the ability to think and act in a short time." There were also several negative comments regarding technical problems, including problems with access restrictions on certain programs in the computer labs. One learner noted that giving her presentation in the lab was frustrating because the browser was different from her home computer that she had practiced on. Another complained that PowToon slides could not be shared between group member's accounts and therefore the members had to share one account.

Despite these complaints, no student was completely negative about the project. One of the most critical ones opened her reflection with the statement, "Frankly speaking, this project was by no means easy but rather troublesome." Yet, after detailing the challenges in preparing the presentation, she concluded the section with, "However, in my opinion, [I] think the way of doing this project has certainly improved our abilities of presenting and creating as a group." This student also later commented about enjoying both listening to and giving the presentations.

Instructor Reflection

The software presentation project was generally successful in achieving the objectives I set for it and was well received by the students. In terms of engaging students in construction and expression, many of the students were able to engage in creative expression in developing their presentations, but I am less convinced that these presentations represent the kind of lasting, productive construct (e.g. a virtual world or an ongoing science experiment) described in Levin and Bruce's (2003) taxonomy. As for engaging learners in inquiry and communication, the project did lead to a fair bit of inquiry into the software packages. It also facilitated communication mediated by technology, such as

working asynchronously on shared files within the applications. I observed a great deal of discussion about the software and negotiation regarding division of work and the content of the presentations during the preparation phase. During the presentations, students asked each other many questions, including instances of negotiation of meaning between peers, while presenters used the software to demonstrate and clarify. There were some occasions where students resorted to using their shared L1, but this was uncommon. In the presentation and demonstration phase, presenters and listeners maintained almost exclusive use of English throughout. I believe the sustained use of L2 arose from a combination of the input being in the L2, the existing communicative competence of the learners, and a shared belief that using the language was essential to improving their skills.

As to learners managing their own learning, students worked autonomously to learn how to use the software. They searched online for it themselves, found and used tutorials both within the software sites and on external ones, and only occasionally needed to ask me for clarification or guidance. I saw numerous instances of peer-instruction, commonly one group member learning how to do or where to access something and then explaining that to the other members.

Another objective was critical reflection on the applications and their uses. The research questions made this an integral part of the assignment and in their presentations all groups showed evidence of having done it. Also, 28 students made critical comparisons of two or more of the applications in their reflections, commenting on things such as suitability in various contexts or for certain types of presentations, relative monetary cost or lack thereof, ease of use, and available features.

The objective of critical reflection on the process itself was only partially achieved. This was part of the assignment for the written reflection, and 29 of the 38 reflections showed what I considered to be clear reflection on the process, but nine did not clearly address the process in any detailed way. These results could be improved with more specific, detailed reflection questions as well as model answers. As it stood, learners did comment on issues

related to improving technology use, managing time, managing tasks in a group, learning from peers, team building, and ease of questioning and answering in small groups. Some of their comments on time management prompted me to realize that students would benefit from two class periods dedicated to group preparation rather than just one for this project.

The objective of a greater understanding of the digital tools available was achieved. Twenty-four students made explicit reference in writing to having learned about unfamiliar software. I am also confident, based on discussions in class, that all students were introduced to at least one unfamiliar tool and learned to use at least one new one. A related objective was practice using the tools, and all students worked on creating presentations with at least one tool. Also, most students used the new tool exclusively when presenting.

There were technical challenges each year. One of these in the first year was that the group using SlideSnack found they were not allowed to create a presentation of more than five minutes. On their own they chose to combine SlideSnack with PowerPoint as a work-around, and only later realized they could have made multiple SlideSnack presentations and done them successively. Also, there were problems using Prezi both years. The group in the first course found they couldn't use it on the default browsers in the computer labs. I had tested it with an alternative browser on a faculty computer, but students couldn't find that browser on their computers in the lab. I had to go consult with the IT support staff during class, and then had to show the students where to find the other browser which was somewhat hidden. In the second year's course I was already aware of these problems and was prepared to show students how to access the alternative browser. However, it turned out that presenting with Prezi had been rendered completely impossible in the labs by a system upgrade and new security settings made between terms. I only learned of this near the end of the preparation class period. I had to ask this group to use PowerPoint to present with as I felt there was no other reasonable work-around. The group had already put significant work into learning to use Prezi and in creating their demonstration, so it would have been unfair to make them start over. The use

of PowerPoint was a lesser burden than starting anew, but it still added extra work and prevented full demonstration of the software. While the various technical problems allowed me to emphasize to the students the need to be prepared for when technology fails to work as expected, I realize that I should have done more to be sure it would work, such as testing it myself on a student machine or consulting with the IT office in advance.

A FINAL COMMENT

I believe this project will work in similar learning environments with intermediate or advanced learners. Additionally, this could work equally well or perhaps even better in a second-language environment with varied first languages, especially in academic language and skills courses. However, in an environment where the students are not already comfortable with conversational English I would be wary of attempting this project without significant modification. Without this basic competency they may not engage as much in discussion and negotiation in English and may not be able to adequately understand the software tutorials and instructions in English.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas E. Bieri is an EFL instructor at Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan, with over 25 years of experience working in higher education, including positions in technical services and teaching in the USA, Australia, and Japan. He holds a BA in Women's Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, an MA in Applied Linguistics (Teaching Second Languages) from the University of Southern Queensland, and a graduate certificate in Educational Technology from Michigan State University. Email: thomasbieri@yahoo.com

CREATING A NEW SPACE FOR LEARNING WITH BLACKBOARD

Esther Boucher-Yip, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the writer describes a project to re-design her ESL writing course in a blended learning environment. The course management system, Blackboard, was used to create a new learning space that extends beyond the classroom. Flexibility and accessibility of online materials motivated student learning and improved writing performance. In addition, self-paced grammar exercises and quizzes provided language practice and helped students reflect on their learning. However, issues such as monitoring students' independent study time, assessing learning, and connecting online and in-class activities need to be addressed when planning and structuring a blended writing course.

INTRODUCTION

Having taught college writing for several years in a traditional semester system, I was faced with teaching the same course content in half the time. My new institution, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), uses a term system with seven weeks in each term. I realized that there was not enough time to cover the same course content as a 14-week semester. With this reduction in class contact time, I had to consider ways of ensuring students enrolled in my writing class achieve the same learning outcomes as in a longer traditional semester. To make up for this limited classroom time, the university stipulates that student are expected to spend

approximately two and a half hours engaged with course materials for each contact hour in the classroom. Therefore, it is essential that they undertake work outside the classroom on a regular basis and use their independent study time effectively. The reduced class time and the expectation for outside classroom work meant I had to rethink how I teach writing and, more importantly, consider the potentials of using technology to create a new learning space for my students that supports their learning outside the classroom. Motivated by these practical and pedagogical reasons, I considered the various models of applying learning technologies and how they might be used effectively in my ESL writing course.

Studies have revealed that the application of an online course management system (CMS) has become a critical resource in the college education system (Lee and Kim, 2014). In one study, Hodges (2004) notes that a CMS has the potential to allow students to actively engage in and improve their personal learning performance through technology-supported programs. Various types of CMSs such as Blackboard, WebCT, and Angel/CMS, increasingly popular in the United States, have been used to deliver courses at a distance, to support the traditional classroom, and to supplement coursework. These platforms are also known to promote asynchronous and synchronous teacher-student and student-student discussions and interactions. Functions such as these are important considerations when instructors unfamiliar with the advantages of a CMS look for ways to integrate educational technologies in their teaching. The generally positive reports on the use of CMSs have encouraged instructors to experiment with web-enhanced teaching to deliver course content.

One successful approach in using a CMS is the blended or hybrid model. Since blended or hybrid learning combines two methods of delivery of instruction – the combination of the best elements of online and face-to-face education – this model offered a practical solution to serve my pedagogical goals. With reports on students' success in academic classes that found blending instructional technology, course content, and in-class activities promotes learning, I decided to explore the use of Blackboard in my ESL writing class.

BLENDING WITH BLACKBOARD

Fortunately for me, the course management system at WPI, Blackboard, is available and widely used by instructors for various purposes and levels. Each instructor is given a course site to populate at the start of each term. However, my previous experience with using Blackboard had been limited to posting announcements and Word documents. I realized I needed to know more about using Blackboard in order to create an alternative student-centered learning space that would support my classroom instruction. I worked with the university Academic Technology Center staff to learn more about features in Blackboard and identify functional advantages that best served my teaching needs. Within Blackboard there are a number of tools available for instructors to choose from. By selecting which features (e.g. instruction, communication, assessment) to make available, it is possible to customize the interface and the learning experience. In other words, by bringing together a selection of tools or features instructors can create a varied learning experience for the student. By using a password, students can access Blackboard courses from any location with a connection to the Internet, allowing them to undertake independent learning at their own pace and time.

Somewhat overwhelmed by the features and tools available in Blackboard, I decided to select only practical applications relevant to my writing class. For more ideas of how to blend with these applications, I reviewed published reports of best classroom practices with Blackboard. In their study of Blackboard use in a hospitality program, Lee and Kim (2014) describe the use of informational features and found that students responded positively to Blackboard's functionality. The researchers suggest posting all important course elements such as announcements, lecture, audio and video recordings, syllabi, quizzes, and grades, which they found impacted students' academic performance. Mathews and Latronica-Herb (2013) in describing their use of Blackboard in a political science classroom found that the use of features such as groups, blogs, and assessment strengthened student engagement and interactivity. In the case of teaching language courses, Blackboard was adopted at Sheffield Hallam

University where instructional designers developed language study packs as a response to the reduction of face-face class time. Scott, Lyne, and Pink (2002) noted that by incorporating a variety of media (texts, audio, video) and activities (drills, quizzes) students enrolled in four language courses were able to practice receptive skills of reading and listening. Certain features of Blackboard can also yield potential advantages in a writing classroom as Newman (2011) found. When her students were allowed to submit course work through the Blackboard dropbox, she noticed a higher level of participation. Newman explains that “student writers feel more control over their writing efforts and accomplishments in the online environment.” (para.5)

Encouraged by these positive reports, I decided to utilize the instructional and assessment functions within Blackboard that were consistent with my teaching style and course goals. Having considered the fundamental questions of why and how to blend (Liang and Bonk 2009), the key challenge for me at the planning stage was selecting *what* to blend.

BLACKBOARD AS A LEARNING SPACE

Teachers of ESL writing frequently teach and discuss grammar as a separate component or in the context of a writing assignment. Whether using a language- or process-based approach (or a combination of both), second language writing teachers spend many hours of classroom time engaging students in activities that build knowledge and skills in grammar to improve writing. With the reduced lecture time and the possibilities Blackboard offered, I decided to facilitate grammar learning in a new space. In using this new learning space, the goal was to engage students in learning, reviewing, practicing, and mastering grammar rules on their own. In this virtual learning environment students would be free to move from one resource to another. Thus, migrating part of my course to a virtual space would also enable me to focus on students’ writing and language needs in the limited class time we had in the term.

Over one summer, I developed a repository of grammar materials and called it the English Grammar Lab. Since research

concerning students' perception of Blackboard elements noted that students were more likely to use instructional and assessment features (e.g. course documents, lectures, grading tools, etc.) and less likely to use communication tools (e.g. discussion boards, blogs, etc.), I focused on utilizing the user-friendly assessment features in Blackboard. Firstly, within the English Grammar Lab, I created folders with specific grammar topics for easy access. All my course materials related to grammar were uploaded directly into Blackboard. PowerPoint slides can be easily uploaded under the course materials tab as well as handouts and other Word documents. Then, I used commercial and free multimedia materials that appeal to a variety of learning styles. In the United States, textbook publishers such as Cengage Learning and Bedford/St. Martins offer free resources when their textbooks are adopted. Instructors can choose to create or use their own PowerPoint slides or upload chapter slides that supplement these textbooks. Embedding multimedia files can also be included under the course material tab. Before using publicly available resources on Blackboard, reviewing the *Copyright and Fair Use* guidelines posted on the Blackboard website guided me in selecting web links that were appropriate under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 2010. I decided to use video clips from YouTube that discussed grammar rules. Utilizing video clips in this way allows the course to draw on free and available resources on the Internet and offers learners easy access to additional forms of media which can add variety to the course. For students who prefer to put on their ear phones and listen, I included links to grammar podcasts such as Grammar Girl's free podcasts on iTunes and Stitcher (<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>). To create students' awareness of other grammar and writing resources, I posted several web links of free online resources in each folder. Next, I linked access to resources from other learning environments such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>) and vocabulary building sites (e.g. <http://www.learnersdictionary.com>). Guided language practice sites available on the Internet such as Daily Grammar (which offers grammar teaching tools), Grammar Practice Parks (includes games and practice) and Grammaropolis (more language drills) are fun and

interactive resources that I found were helpful and linked them in each grammar folder. As some of these sites may revise their content periodically or require instructors to seek permission to link, I found it a good practice to visit these sites frequently and I sought guidance from my campus librarians about permission and copyright issues.

Finally, to reinforce student learning, I capitalized on the assessment features. One of the nice assessment features in Blackboard is that it permits the setting up of drills and quizzes in a variety of formats (e.g. fill in the blank, true or false, multiple choice and matching) with feedback given to students upon completion of the task. In this way, instructors can customize or create their own interactive exercises and choose the type of feedback. In addition to developing my own grammar exercises, I used a pool of exercises from a test bank available from the textbook publisher, Bedford/St.Martin's (2005). Since instructors are able to purchase this easy-to-use CD ROM without adopting a textbook from the publishers, I decided to only use this testing tool kit. This ready-made resource offers grammar exercises with two levels of difficulty. The test bank provides detailed feedback into selected response to drills and quizzes. I found this grammar test bank that automatically corrects exercises and quizzes the most useful, and it reduced my grading workload.

On the first day of class, I explained to my students how my blended course is structured and my expectations of the work they will undertake outside the classroom. Students were told to take the self-diagnostic writing assessment that covers grammar exercises on Blackboard. Providing students with an ungraded exercise not only allowed them to become familiar with the features in Blackboard and be comfortable in the new learning environment, it also allowed me to identify students who had difficulties navigating the system. It was crucial that any initial problems with using Blackboard be addressed early in the term.

In the limited number of face-to-face class meetings, I introduced writing conventions and models, summarizing and paraphrasing skills. When time permitted, I discussed language issues in the context of the writing assignments students produced. Adopting the process approach to teaching second language

writing, I paid special attention to the editing and proofreading stages. I wanted my students to learn these skills and their personal grammar error patterns—that is, the particular errors that they tend to make over and over; then, they are expected to carefully proofread their papers with these errors in mind. When students presented their work and reflected on their errors, I encouraged them to review the grammar instructional materials and resources on Blackboard, thus shifting the responsibility for learning basic grammar rules onto the student. Over the course of the term, this approach worked well, especially when students understood my expectations and the course goals. Furthermore, I observed that students made fewer of these patterned errors in their final essays.

DISCUSSION: WHERE DOES REAL LEARNING HAPPEN?

Both course evaluation forms and my students' self-reflection letters submitted at the end of the term led to a number of interesting findings. Firstly, students' reaction to and comments on the Blackboard components were mostly positive. For example, one student wrote in her reflection letter, "...the activities on Blackboard were fun, but sometimes the grammar exercises were difficult. I managed to do well in most of them." Another student said, "I still have a lot of grammar problems to fix in my essays, but the online exercises helped me to correct my errors." Comments on the evaluation forms such as, "I had forgotten a few things in English writing, but I checked with your resources on Blackboard and I used them to improve my assignments" and "...the Blackboard exercises which are of different types enhanced what I've learned from class" suggest that students used the resources to support their in-class learning. Further feedback indicated that my students were extremely happy that grammar resources were available on Blackboard. Many students commented on the flexibility and accessibility of the English Grammar Lab that was embedded in the course site. Students also wrote that they enjoyed greater flexibility to complete the self-paced exercises on their own time. One student commented that she had "taken the practice exercises many times to understand her errors" whereas another had been

motivated to explore other sites on learning English. In answering the question “How has your writing improved?” many students said that they noticed fewer grammar errors on their final drafts. This is true for most students who recorded fewer total number of errors on their Error Awareness Sheet at the end of the course. There were also students who reported that they are more aware of the importance of grammar for effective second language writing. All students unreservedly thought that using Blackboard in language courses was a good idea. Their improved writing as evidenced in their final essay submissions suggests that my students were able to transfer their learning from the virtual learning space to their writing assignments. Although it will clearly take more time and learning for these ESL students to consistently apply grammar rules and principles in their writing, my students’ feedback and self-assessment indicate that there was some degree of learning transfer.

Secondly, while I was delighted by students’ responses, I was concerned about how much time they reportedly spent on course materials outside the classroom. Since one of my primary goals in using Blackboard was to facilitate the use of out-of-classroom time, it was important for me to find out how independent study time was used. Initial survey findings showed that students were spending less time than expected in reviewing Blackboard materials and completing online exercises. Even though all my students accessed the online materials and had done so frequently, the reported numbers of hours spent on Blackboard were below my expectations. One drawback in using Blackboard was that I could not monitor how much time students spent reviewing course materials. Longer time spent on online activities does not necessarily mean learning takes place; however, it could provide some insights to students’ engagement with the materials. I later learned that students often multi-tasked when they were studying online and some were not aware of the time spent when working in a virtual environment. These data suggest that student learning took place outside the writing classroom, but being “digital natives” students may see online activities as a natural component in their lives and not be fully engaged when working online as they would in a traditional classroom. To address this concern, I was explicit

in requiring students to document their independent study time in the form of learning logs with special attention to the length of time they spend on Blackboard.

Finally, some students expressed confusion with the self-assessment exercises in Blackboard and the course grading criteria. Students had unrealistic expectations of their grades. Comments such as “I was able to achieve 100% in all the on-line quizzes, and I expect an A grade in your class” and “Since I completed all the exercises on Blackboard I will pass this course” prompted me to reexamine and adjust my allocation of grade weighting. The self-correcting exercises and quizzes that allowed students multiple attempts to improve their scores were created with the purposes of encouraging students to reflect on their learning and to promote learner autonomy. However, as with most college students who are primarily assessment-led, my students expected more credit for completing these exercises. In the subsequent terms, I made the formative nature of these assessments explicit to students, and I increased the percentage of the overall course grade for Blackboard assignments. Through the test management system in Blackboard, I limited the opportunities to make multiple attempts at online tasks and included frequent low-stakes tests, such as short quizzes or self-check activities worth no more than a few points each.

Even though my students’ learning performance may not be a direct result of blended learning, students’ positive feedback suggests that this web platform heightened students’ engagement with course materials. As with Newman’s (2011) experience with her students writing with Blackboard my students also reported that they felt more control over their writing efforts and accomplishments in the online environment. Through this new learning space I was able to monitor my students’ learning behavior and progress and offer support to underperforming students early in the writing stages. Knowing my students’ learning needs also helped me make effective use of class time to teach language skills that would improve their writing performance.

The flip side of this model, however, is that the underperforming students found it challenging to manage their online workload, complete all writing tasks, and connect their online learning with

in-class activities. For some students it was hard to make decisions about what to study and in what order. According to Ellis and Kuniarwan (2000) the flexibility of non-linear learning (in this case, indirect teaching) may increase complexity for some students. This raises the issue of providing students with non-linear (self-directed) access to materials to promote autonomy in language learning. Although some research findings show learners' control over the learning environment is important to improve the learning process (Cagiltay, Yildirim, & Aksu, 2006), there should be a combination of direct and indirect instructional methods in the course structure and design. In other words, to facilitate real learning in such a blended model, instructors need to help students select the sequence of instruction, structure their knowledge, and navigate the materials in Blackboard. In some contexts, blended courses are not designed to be mainly used by students independently, but rather as an integral part of and complement to the face-to-face instruction.

CONCLUSION

The use of blended course design allows instructors to imaginatively redesign any course to fit the needs of the learner. The organizational and pedagogical advantages offered by Blackboard certainly allow for instructors to creatively manage and structure a blended course design. In the ESL context, designing effective CALL materials in language teaching, as recommended by Reinders and White (2010), can be supported by such a platform. Advantages such as access to materials, storage and retrieval of student learning records, integrating different modalities, and providing feedback made it possible for me to extend my teaching and students' learning beyond the traditional classroom to a new space. It had also allowed me to successfully deliver the same course content taught in a traditional semester in a 7-week term.

Without doubt, the integration of Blackboard in my writing class improved my students' writing skills and understanding of grammar rules. It had a positive effect upon motivation levels and independent learning. In addition, I found that my students

were engaged in classroom activities and in their own learning. However, I learned that more or easier access to class material does not necessarily lead to better outcomes for under-performing students who still need direct instructions in the classroom. While using Blackboard provides a self-paced environment for learning grammar, having students stay 'on-task' with classroom work and applying concepts learned calls for a more structured approach that links online learning with in-class activities. Furthermore, a predetermined sequence of course materials will help underperforming students.

Experimenting with a blended learning model has enabled me to see the potentials for providing ESL students a more varied and effective learning environment and to help them on the road to autonomy. However, developing an effective blended course does require new teaching skills, especially technical skills in planning, monitoring, and assessing student performance in the virtual environment. I learned that managing both learning spaces calls for flexibility in assigning in-class work that matches students' progress online. Finally, engaging students in the learning process, particularly at the beginning, promotes sustained learning in a blended course.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Esther Boucher-Yip is an Assistant Teaching Professor of ESOL in the Department of Humanities and Arts at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Massachusetts, USA, where she teaches writing and communication. She has taught English in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, China, United Kingdom, and the United States. She has graduate degrees from the University of Cambridge and the University of Leicester and has carried out research in English language teaching, issues in language education, and sociolinguistics. Email: efboucher@wpi.edu

COLLABORATIVE REFLECTION IN AN ONLINE INTERCULTURAL JAPAN – CANADA EXCHANGE

Jennifer Claro, Kitami Institute of Technology, Japan

Sawako Akai, Huron University College, Canada

ABSTRACT

In an online intercultural exchange, language learners communicate with each other in their target language(s) for the purposes of practicing and improving language ability and gaining cultural understanding. In this project, partnered students in Japan (studying English) and Canada (studying Japanese) posted videos of themselves speaking, using a private Moodle website. Videos allow for multimodal communication, which increases social presence and helps to prevent miscommunication. Results showed that students preferred videos to text-only communication and felt they gained important cultural insights. Based on this project, a six-phase model of teacher reflection that incorporates the use of student feedback was developed.

INTRODUCTION

In an online intercultural exchange involving two classes and two teachers in different countries, collaborative reflection is essential. Informed by data from student online reflective journals, class surveys, and our own observations, we engaged in collaborative

online reflection that enabled us to identify what was working, what wasn't, and how to improve our project design.

In this chapter, we introduce our project and present the model of reflection that helped us to plan and improve our online intercultural exchanges.

ONLINE INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGES

Online intercultural exchanges (OIEs) have become common in language classes around the world. In an OIE, language learners communicate with one another in their target language(s) for the purposes of practicing and improving language ability and gaining cultural understanding (see Basharina, 2007; Belz, 2002; Guth, Helm & Farrah, 2012). Students in an OIE get authentic target language practice, as well as direct contact with the target culture, in a personal way that would not likely occur outside such an exchange.

From October 2012 – January 2013, 40 students at a university in Japan studying English communicated with 36 students at a university in Canada studying Japanese by each making 12 self-recorded videos and posting these videos in a shared password-protected Moodle website (see below). All students made videos in both Japanese and English.

Students made suggestions and voted to name our project 'The International Cultural Experience' (ICE). Since then we have referred to our first project as ICE 2012, the first iteration of ongoing ICE projects. This chapter focuses on ICE 2012 with some references to the subsequent ICE 2013 project.

TEACHER REFLECTION IN MOODLE

Moodle is a popular open source learning management system that is easy for both teachers and students to use. Moodle allowed easy posting and viewing of videos within the private Moodle environment. We also used Moodle as a site for our own teacher reflection. Our Moodle space, with its threaded forum discussions, worked extremely well as a place to record and discuss every

aspect of the project. We made over 600 posts in 15 forums from the planning stages to the end of ICE 2012. Our Moodle forums, because of their threaded nature, structured and organized our discussions in a way that would have been impossible by using e-mail alone. Any point could be discussed in detail over multiple posts without getting lost.

Following is a model of the phases of reflection that emerged from our Moodle discussions over the two years of ICE 2012 and ICE 2013. We refer to this model throughout the rest of the chapter and suggest that it can be used for individual or collaborative reflection. Our model reflects elements of both action research and design-based research models, and incorporates a focus on reflection and change.

Table 1 *Phases of Reflection*

Phase	Time ¹	Activities	Feedback and Other Data
Initial Reflection	Before	Teachers reflect in writing (privately or publicly) on their classes and consider what can be done to improve them.	Feedback from needs analyses is very useful. Teachers' own experience and knowledge of their students' capabilities and limitations is vital.
Study	Before	Teachers read case studies, other research papers, blogs, etc. to get an idea of what is possible. Teachers try out the most appropriate technology/tools.	Case studies and other articles, blogs, etc. document how other teachers used various technologies and what they learned from their experiences.
Plan	Before	Goals and objectives are set, and a plan is created that will link goals to activities. How and when to collect student feedback is integrated into the plan.	Data includes teachers' own experience and knowledge of their students, as well as information they have gathered (from case studies, etc.).

¹ Many of these phases of reflection are not limited to before, during, or after the project, but could be done at various times.

Concurrent Reflection	During	Teachers analyze all available feedback. Teachers make decisions on whether revisions to the plan are necessary. This is an ongoing phase that lasts over the entire class or project.	Data consists of student feedback (may include journal writing, surveys, class or group discussions, informal teacher-student discussions, etc.) and teacher observations.
Retrospective Reflection: a) Immediate b) Long term	After	Teachers review the class or project and ask questions like "What worked, what didn't, and why?" and consider how to improve.	Data consists of collected data and teacher observations, the original plan, and previous reflections.
Meta-Reflection	After	Teachers read through their field notes and journal entries. Revisions to the reflection cycle may be made to improve it.	Data consists of teachers' own previously recorded reflections.

In the following sections, we look at how we reflected on all phases of our first project, ICE 2012, following the phases of reflection above. We include ICE 2013 as well, when appropriate. All words in italics were taken verbatim from Moodle.

INITIAL REFLECTION

1. Define goals for the project. Why do we want our students to interact?

Through discussions in Moodle, we decided that authentic and meaningful interaction between students should be our main goal. According to class surveys, 57.6% of the students in the class in Canada and 87.1% of the students in the class in Japan had never had a discussion in the target language with anyone other than a teacher. Students in both Canada and Japan traditionally learn a foreign language mostly from their teachers and their textbooks. Their usual conversational partners are their own classmates. This is far from authentic language use.

We hoped to use the Internet to bring students out of the classroom and into the world of the language and culture they were learning. Language use in context is seen as the goal in sociocultural views of language learning, where the focus shifts from acquisition to participation (Sfard, 1998).

“To learn to use tools as practitioners use them, a student, like an apprentice, must enter that community and its culture... Learning is, we believe, a process of enculturation” (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989, p. 33).

We hoped that students’ participation in an OIE and meaningful interaction in the target language with their peers, university students of their own age, would make the language come alive and help them to enter the community and culture of the language they were studying.¹ As well, intercultural contact has been found by researchers to increase motivation for learning a language (e.g. Kormos & Csizér, 2007).

As learning is a process of enculturation, and because of the vital role that culture plays in language learning (Kramersch, 1995), we decided to include a second goal of students learning more about each other’s cultures. Discussing culture with students living in that culture helps avoid stereotypes and textbook descriptions. Instead, students learn real-world knowledge directly from the source, from students living in that culture.

STUDY

2. Read research articles about previous OIEs to identify best practices and potential pitfalls.

We set up a Google document (see <http://tiny.cc/9t5oix>) where we listed and reviewed the most relevant research articles written on OIEs. We wrote summaries of many articles and what the positive and negative results were. It became apparent that creating strong student relationships was an integral part of a successful exchange. Where exchanges had negative results (e.g. Belz, 2002),

¹ In the Canadian class, two-thirds of the students were non-native intermediate to advanced-level speakers of English. Thus, many ICE students used English as a lingua franca in this project.

student relationships had suffered because of too much focus on task completion and/or a lack of initial ice-breaking activities. 'Failed communication' (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006) occurred in some projects that required students to do collaborative tasks with their international partners. We hoped to avoid these problems by intentionally focusing on the quality of interactions instead of collaborative task completion.

3. Review <http://webtoolsforforeignlanguageteachers.wikispaces.com>, our Web Tools wiki,¹ in order to identify the best tools to use for our project.

It became apparent from our web tools review as well as from our review of research articles that text-based communication is very limited. In face-to-face communication, eye contact, facial expression and other body language, and voice all carry vital paralinguistic information that communicators transmit and receive. Text-based communication excludes all of these, and can lead to misunderstandings (see e.g. Belz & Müller-Hartman, 2003; Ware & Kramersch, 2005) that can cause negative cultural stereotypes (Belz, 2002). However, social presence increases in videos and contributes to "authentic projection of the self" (Caspi & Blau, 2008, p. 326).

Because we wanted authentic communication for our students, we decided to use student-made self-recorded videos, which allow for multimodal communication that is more natural than text-only communication (Kock, 2005). While live video chats would have been the most natural and authentic, as they are most similar to face-to-face communication, we thought they would be too difficult for our students, many of whom have a lower intermediate level of linguistic competence. Language learners at the beginning and intermediate levels need time to process input and prepare a reply (Lee, 2007; O'Dowd, 2007). In Lee's (2007) study, students with lower levels of listening competence had difficulty understanding native speakers in live chats.

1 We (Sawako and Jennifer) met in an online course at OISE, University of Toronto, where we are both doing a Ph.D. in Education. Our first collaborative project was making a wiki (Claro & Akai, 2012) about how teachers can use web tools like blogs, chat, and forum discussion in their language classes.

Students were asked to write a transcript of what they plan to say in their video, and this was posted below the video. Transcripts help students who have problems understanding what was said (Bray, 2010). Thus, making and viewing videos requires the use of all four skills: speaking and listening (making and watching videos) and reading and writing (transcripts).

PLAN

4. Make a concrete plan (week by week). Choose topics for student discussion. Set dates.

We decided that each student would have two partners in the other class, as we believed that having regular partners would help trust and good relationships to grow. All students communicated with one partner in English only, and one in Japanese only, for the duration of the project. Students had three days to make a video for one partner, and made another video, in the other language, for the other partner, three days later. There were two discussions going on at the same time, one in English with one partner, and one in Japanese with the other partner. Thus students played the roles of language teachers as well as language learners. All students could see all videos, but were required to watch only their partners'. Video communication lasted two weeks per topic, with the third week of the topic designated for an online survey in Moodle and online reflective journal writing.

We decided on three topics. In Topic 1, 'Getting to Know You', students had to post self-introductory videos, make video replies to partners, and discuss topics of mutual interest (university major, hobbies, sports, movies, music, etc.). In Topic 2, 'University Life', students responded to a survey in Moodle about university life, analyzed survey results and compared Japanese university life and Canadian university life in video posts. In Topic 3, 'Winter Celebrations', students were asked to describe local traditions as well as their own family traditions, to discuss winter celebrations, and to make a card for each partner.

Students were asked to look at the webcam when speaking, to use intonation and facial expressions, to speak slightly slower than

usual, and to use easier vocabulary when using their first language to answer questions and ask their own. Students in Japan were asked to use furigana (the Japanese phonetic alphabet) to help students in Canada understand any new kanji (Chinese characters). Students were also asked to post photos and images for added input. For more details on ICE 2012, please see Claro (2015).

CONCURRENT REFLECTION BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Periodic student reflective journal writing and class surveys were vital to the success of this project. We needed to know exactly what was going well and what was not going so well, from the students' point of view, and what they were learning. Sample journal questions included, "Was your cultural understanding deepened by this project? If so, how?" and "How could this project be better next time?" Writing in their online journals allowed students to reflect on their experience of the project, and they often wrote rich descriptions that were very informative.

We reflected continuously throughout this project: before, during, and after. We reflected in class and took field notes during and after class. We wrote in our own online reflective journals in our discussion space in Moodle, replied to each other's posts, and had video chats and text chats. We discussed problems until we found a way to solve them. We shared our successes as well. This extensive recording of observations and reflections, and discussion of problems to the point of resolution is what we mean by "collaborative reflection".

Here is an example taken from a forum discussion we had about student reflective journal writing:

Jennifer: Some questions are answered quickly, seemingly without much reflection (as a task, not having much interest in it). How can we get (some) students to reflect more deeply? "Dig deep!" should be our motto for the journals maybe.

Sawako: I do not think we can expect them to reflect deeply from the beginning. It is mid-term exam time here and

the students are busy. I think that their reflection skills will improve at the end of the project, by reflecting regularly and reading other's reflections.

After further discussion, we decided to simply encourage students to reflect more deeply in their journals. It became clear that time was indeed an issue. When students had more time, they wrote far better reflections. So we tried to schedule journal writing accordingly, and we gave extra time when needed.

Because we had done so much initial reflection in Moodle prior to the project, our reflection and communication patterns were already set in place by the time the project started, and they continued throughout the project and for months afterwards. Student and teacher reflections, as well as some survey results, have been incorporated into the following sections.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Using Self-Recorded Videos for Communication and Language Study

Making a video takes more time than a text message. According to our first survey, it took students in both classes 75–105 minutes to make one video in English or one in Japanese, and most of this work was done outside of class. Time consumption is perhaps the biggest disadvantage of videos, yet students agreed that videos are better than text-only for both communication and language learning. In an online Moodle survey, 87.9% of students in Canada and 92.5% of students in Japan agreed with the statement "Videos are better for communication than text only." In addition, 87.9% of students in Canada and 90.0% of students in Japan agreed with the statement "Videos are better for language learning than text only."



This is baseball cap, ball, and glove. This is my treasure. This is how you grip. This is how you throw.

I want to talk to many people about many things. If my English become high level many years later I want to learn French, I am in to studying English now. Which point do you feel difficult in Japanese? How do you think of English and a Japanese different point? I'm looking forward to reply! Bye!!

Figure 1. Excerpt from a student video about hobbies

This finding is supported by the students' reflections in their online journals in Moodle, on using videos for communication. Students found that they could understand each other better because of the facial expressions and other body language they could see in the videos.

Video communication is way superior to text only since one can understand their message more clearly. Through videos I can understand what emotion my partner has with regards to what is being talked about. Even just a smile can set a whole different tone to the video. (Student in Canada)

Videos also made students feel closer to their partners.

After making some videos, I started to become happy with the reply from my partners, and then I think that I began enjoying making videos... I was able to tell my partner what was happening in real time by the weekly video making, and this made a situation like we were having a face-to-face dialogue, and I think that this helped make our distance closer. (Student in Japan)

Finally, students could also use the videos and transcripts for language study and practice.

When learning through videos, we can learn how to pronounce, where to put the accent on and what kind of facial or body expressions come along in certain situations. When learning through text only, we are only able to focus on how to write and read, so we miss many other important factors that impact on the language used in communication. (Student in Canada)

As teachers, we were very pleased to see how well students communicated through videos. We believe that relationships could not have developed as much as they did without students being able to see the faces of their partners and hear their voices. We feel the extra time investment is worth it. Still, through reflection, we realized that students could interact more frequently if they did not have to make a video every time. We solved this problem by introducing "Open Forums" in ICE 2013 (see below).

An Authentic and Meaningful Experience

Teachers and students both appreciated the chance for students to encounter natural language rather than language from a textbook.

The students were very excited by their replies from Japan. They were showing the videos they received with their classmates. During break or after class, some students asked me about some Japanese words and sentences they did not understand. (This is good. The students are now seeing authentic Japanese.) (Sawako's field note)

In both countries, students often used the words "real" and "natural" in their journals to describe their communication.

Make a video message by this project, and I can experience communication using real English was splendid. I felt like being able to understand the usage of grammar and the word in natural form by using English for communication. (Student in Japan)

The practice of reading, writing, listening and speaking feels more natural than a mock conversation activity we get out of a classroom environment. (Student in Canada)

In Topic 3, an intentionally non-technological activity was to make a bilingual English/Japanese Christmas card (students in Canada) or a New Year's card (students in Japan) for each partner. Teachers sent all the cards and some snacks to each other, and in the first class of the New Year, students read their cards and ate the snacks. Students on both sides enjoyed this very much, and treasured their cards. A New Year's gift was also sent from Japan, a traditional New Year's door ornament called a *shimenawa kazari*. Cards, snacks, and the ornament added to the authenticity of the project.

Many students wrote that they had found their ICE experience to have personal meaning for them.

The most memorable part of this project is friendship... This project is a bridge to link us. We meet each other in the video, teaching and learning under the project. During the learning, we unconsciously make great improvement by these activities. It is precious experience in my university career. (Student in Canada)

Before this lesson, I was not interested in foreign cultures. Now, I want to learn about many cultures... I realized that I can communicate with many people through English. My aspiration to learn English has increased by leaps and bounds... In this project we can interact with same age foreigners. I thought this revolutionary English study way is very interesting. (Student in Japan)

As teachers, we found that forming good partner relationships was a main focus of this project for students. Good partner relationships seemed to result from the following:

- Students found things they had in common and discussed them.
- Students asked interesting, topic-related questions, and answered their partners' questions.
- Students used natural facial expression and voice intonation, and spoke naturally, often with enthusiasm.
- Students made videos on time.
- Some students communicated outside of the project by using Facebook and/or e-mail.

RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTION: IMMEDIATE

We made two major changes to our model for ICE 2013 based on student feedback and our collaborative teacher reflection on ICE 2012.

1. To promote interaction between students who were not partners, and to increase access to cultural artifacts (movies, music, other target language videos), in ICE 2013 we created two Open Forums in which students posted video clips from the Internet, and replied to anyone using text only for discussion. The Open Forums were very popular (over 5000 student views of each Open Forum) and helped students to interact with more students than in ICE 2012. However, survey results indicated that their favourite mode continued to be one-to-one video posts to and from their partners. In Japan, 67.6% of students and in Canada, 66.7% of students chose regular topic discussion with their partners over open forum discussions as their preferred mode of interaction.
2. We changed from "University Life" to "Culture" for Topic 2 in ICE 2013 because several students indicated in their journals and in surveys in ICE 2012 that they had not learned much culture from their discussions.

In order to improve the cultural aspect in ICE 2013, we also asked students to video 'culture' (it was left up to students to decide what examples of culture might be) that they saw around them in Open Forum 2: Culture. Japanese cultural videos included, for example, live taiko (Japanese drums), many kinds of Japanese food including oden, miso soup, and Pocky, and local ice floes. Canadian cultural videos included a garden market, Canadian money, and Christmas lights and decorations.

As a result of making culture the focus of Topic 2, and because of the cultural videos that students made and watched, students were more enthusiastic about the culture they had learned in ICE 2013 than in ICE 2012.

RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTION: LONG-TERM

One of the main drawbacks of this project is that it was very time-consuming for teachers to set up and it took a great deal of time to facilitate once the project was going on, especially the first iteration, ICE 2012, when we had to do everything for the first time.

The biggest benefit of this project for the teachers was the chance to get to know our students so well. We watched hundreds of videos and got to know our students' lives and interests in far greater detail than we could have in a traditional class. One of Jennifer's students in Japan had a gecko named Snow as a pet, and another had a black belt in karate. One of Sawako's students owned three guitars, wrote music and songs in Japanese, and performed. We got to know our students as real people for the first time. This was a huge change for both of us, and a very welcome one. The classroom atmosphere changed a lot as a result, and teacher-student relationships changed too.

Before looking at meta-reflection, we would like to return to our model of reflection, showing how the output of one iteration feeds the input to the next one (see Figure 2). As Figure 2 demonstrates, if teachers plan subsequent iterations of the project/class, the next phase after meta-reflection should be initial teacher reflection again. The reflection model is thus cyclical, with continual reflection, change, and improvement integrated into the design. All phases will likely take far less time in the second and following iterations.

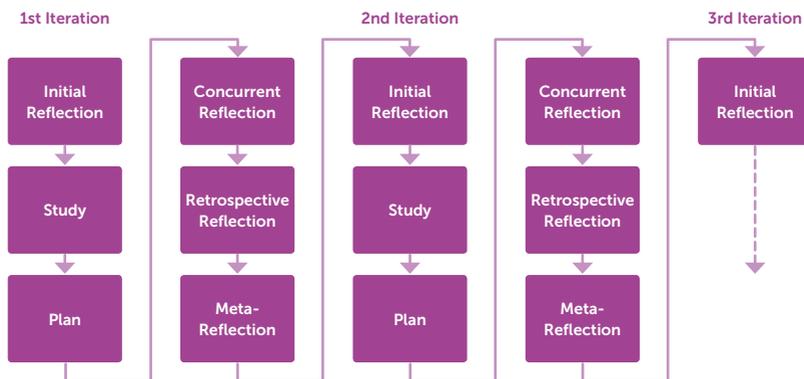


Figure 2. Model of Reflection

META-REFLECTION

We reflected a lot on our reflection process during the writing of this chapter. Our reflection process was organized, but we found that it could use some improvement. We have decided to not send e-mails outside Moodle anymore because in Moodle everything is organized and easy to find. We have also decided to have regular video chats to refresh our relationship as we live so far apart. We believe that these improvements will contribute to improve teacher reflection and better online intercultural exchanges.

CONCLUSION

In using any new technology in a class, gaining insight into how students are experiencing that technology is vital. In this project, through student feedback and teacher collaborative reflection, we attempted to understand the student experience real-time and to adapt the project design concurrently to meet students' emergent needs.

ICE 2013 is available for viewing and download (after registration) into any Moodle site from <http://tinyurl.com/k678nh9> for teachers who wish to use it in their own classes. All activities

have English and Japanese explanations. If you use our ICE model, we would love to hear from you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jennifer Claro is an English lecturer at the Kitami Institute of Technology, Japan. She is also a Ph.D. student at OISE (University of Toronto). Her research interests include culture and its effects on foreign language learning, technology in EFL, and the role of motivation in language learning. E-mail: claro1@mail.kitami-it.ac.jp.

Sawako Akai is a Japanese lecturer in the Department of French and Asian studies at Huron University College, London, Ontario, Canada. She is also a Ph.D. student at OISE (University of Toronto). Her research interests include second language acquisition, online intercultural exchanges, and teacher development. E-mail: sakaimor@uwo.ca.

MAKING EFFECTIVE USE OF THE REALITY IN VIRTUAL REALITY

Douglas W. Coleman, University of Toledo, USA

Kasumi Yamazaki, University of Toledo, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative analysis of five years of teaching-interns' reflections on the same ESL lesson that uses two modalities: a traditionally simulated environment and a 3D virtual world. Our analysis shows that both modalities have inherent limitations, though these can be overcome to different degrees. The analysis of interns' reflections also allows us to identify the necessary conditions for *reality of function* (Jones, 1982) in both lesson modalities. In the end, we find that the criterion of *reality of function* is the overriding factor in choosing the modality.

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of studies have examined three-dimensional (3D) virtual worlds for enhancing teaching and learning. For example, we analyzed five years' use of a street directions lesson in an adult basic ESL class with proficiency levels from beginner to low intermediate. The students, with various native languages, cannot understand metalinguistic explanations in English; thus, the course uses a show-don't-tell approach rather than explanation. Materials include slide shows, realia, and a 3D virtual world. In this paper, we discuss a lesson combining both traditional (paper-based/realia-based) and 3D virtual modalities.

Decades ago, Klein (1986) countered Chomsky's longstanding claims that language is the only input needed for language learning (Chomsky, 1966; 2000). As Klein said "the information received in parallel to linguistic input in the narrower sense [the sound of speech]" makes learning possible (p. 44). Observational studies (Halliday, 1975) and experiments (e.g., Xin, 2012) also confirm parallel sensory material is required. Virtual environments can provide parallel sensory channels; unfortunately, language teachers using virtual environments often don't fully understand how to best exploit them, often using them simply on a "more is better" principle similar to practices from input-based methods (e.g., Krashen, 2003). The resulting lack of coordination in parallel sensory input in a virtual environment as a backdrop, with no real advantage over a text-only chat room.

One of the authors (Coleman) supervises the basic ESL class. Graduate student interns (a role co-author Yamazaki had several years ago) deliver lessons, after which they write reflective analyses of the learning activities. Co-teaching allows interns to use each other as individual models and to model conversation interactions. The supervisor both engages in reflective analysis and comments on the interns' reflective analyses, providing an ongoing meta-analysis.

Based on the reflective analyses from 2009 to 2013, we discuss how a 3D virtual world came to be a *part of a lesson*, not a replacement for its low-tech predecessor. We explore interns' analyses of *both* lesson modalities — the traditionally simulated environment and the 3D virtual environment — to determine when modality affected an important element of CALL simulation: *reality of function* (Jones, 1982).¹

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

One lesson modality uses a flat map, the other, a 3D virtual world called New Victoria (Coleman, 2014); see Figure 1. We examine

1 Although here we discuss the virtual environment for a street directions lesson, the environment is expanding to include other linguistic functions which more effectively addressed in a virtual environment than in a classroom.

interns' reflective analyses to separate realities from perceptions. We identify not only interns' understandings but also the real effects of lesson modality on learning and on the assessment of learning.



(a) Flat Map.



(b) New Victoria.

Figure 1. Visual comparison of the two lesson modalities.

(The reader is cautioned to keep in mind that New Victoria is a dynamic 3D representation, not a static image.)

The Two Lesson Modalities

The traditionally simulated environment is a flat map with moveable markers for people (one male, one female), a compass

marker, and other small markers representing buildings and other objects. Street names appear along the streets. We used movable markers so they could be relocated and sometimes turned face down (for a person who can see where their destination is, directions are, in the most practical sense, meaningless).

Because students vary from beginner to low-intermediate, instead of telling, we show. We communicate directly about things, not about language. For example, we point at a stop light and say, "This is a stop light," not "We call this a stop light or a traffic light or a traffic signal." If we want to give alternative ways to refer, instead, we later (after identifications of other things) point at a traffic light and say, "This is a traffic light." Even later we might point at the same object and say, "This is a traffic signal."

Both breadth and limits of association are present in the input (Coleman, 2007). Showing breadth of association for "intersection," requires providing a variety of types of intersections, not just one shaped like a cross but also T-shaped intersections, forks in the road, a road meeting a roundabout, non-right-angle intersections, and so on. Limits of association must also be shown, for example, by saying "This is a fork in the road" when gesturing at a fork, but then "This is not [shaking head] a fork in the road" when gesturing at a different type of intersection.

Assessment of the ESL students' learning is ongoing. Because the street directions tutorial is team-taught, one intern introduces a few terms, then uses another intern to demonstrate how to respond to a comprehension check. The first intern says, "Show me a traffic light." The second intern points at one. The first then asks a student to respond. As input builds, checks require more difficult responses, for example, "Is this a traffic light?" or "What is this?"

We generally introduce identifying tasks before action-tasks. After objects are identified, we can demonstrate actions like "go two blocks," "turn left," "turn right at the second traffic light," and so on. When explanation is not possible, a substantial amount of very precisely crafted show-don't-tell input is required for an effective lesson. Interns are briefed for about three weeks before

their practice teaching to achieve basic competence in this show-don't-tell approach, appropriately-focused comprehension checking, and provision of breadth and limits of association.

The virtual modality for the street directions lesson is implemented on the 3D platform OpenSim (2014), an open source Second Life work-alike. OpenSim is not a virtual world, but server software for creating an on-line virtual world. One of the authors (Coleman) runs the 3D virtual world used in the street directions lesson (New Victoria). New Victoria consists of a small downtown, suburban areas, and a nearby beach resort village. In all, it contains a railroad station/heliport, police station, hospital, public library, museum, and a number of offices, shops, apartment buildings, and houses. Careful attention has been paid to functional detail: streets are named, with conventional street name signs at every corner. Intersections have traffic lights, stop signs, or yield signs. There are sidewalks, crosswalks, and other signage to provide for functional realism and meaningful communication.

The virtual modality was originally added to the street directions lesson as an experiment, with three underlying motivations. First, the virtual world would be fun and increase student motivation. Second, it would give interns experience in CALL, in particular to virtual worlds. Third, the virtual world would increase assessment validity, since students would navigate a 3D environment from a realistic point of view, rather than moving a marker on a map of from a god's-eye view (the critical importance of this difference in point of view is discussed below).

It quickly became clear that New Victoria could never replace the map completely. Showing something like "go three blocks" takes a moment on the map. In the virtual world, it takes as long as an avatar takes to walk three blocks. Thus while it was clear the 3D virtual world would bring something useful and exciting to the lesson, it was not a panacea.

About the Data Source for the Analysis

In analyzing interns' reflective comments, we take into account that they are still learning how to teach using a show-don't-tell

approach. This is a necessary part of separating their perceptions from the realities they observe. We restrict ourselves to the most representative comments about the relevant issues.

REALITY OF FUNCTION IN THE TRADITIONALLY-SIMULATED MODALITY

In his classic *Simulations and Language Teaching*, Jones (1982:4) explains *reality of function* in a learning simulation; learners

must mentally accept the function the simulation requires of them. They must stop thinking of themselves as students, and avoid standing one step away from their activities. They must step inside the simulation mentally and behaviorally....

In language learning, reality of function implies that what people say has situated real-world meaning. If a teacher moves a small *human figure* on a map and says, "Drive three blocks; turn right," reality of function is lacking. If the teacher gives the figure to a student who can see where the library is and says, "go two blocks, turn right, and go one more block; it's on the right," reality of function is also lacking. Directions are for someone who *doesn't* already know how to get to a destination.

Even though we are very careful, we find that sometimes a map thwarts reality of function. Interns easily spot some issues with reality of function but miss others.

Features of the Map that Thwart Reality of Function¹

Interns' reports frequently note that typical use of a map for a lesson on street directions compromises reality of function. During a comprehension check, an intern gives directions and watches whether a student, Sarah, follows them. (Interns are identified anonymously by letters; students are given pseudonyms.)

...Intern L let Sarah practice.... Since Sarah could see where the location was, she would not listen to Intern L and moved the

1 Our arguments in this paper apply to the use of a map in simulating a real environment. They do not relate to the use of a map in teaching map-reading skills, which we regard as a separate and very distinct kind of linguistic skill.

[person-marker] in the direction she knew would get her to that specific location. (Intern M, Fall 2009)

The course supervisor had a work-around the intern at first ignored; after a mid-class break, he gets the intern to try it.

[To] elicit a real-world scenario of a person not knowing where something is, [the intern] flipped over [some of the location-markers], mixed a few... around, and gave Sarah directions to the airport and the Chinese restaurant. Since the [markers] were flipped over, Sarah didn't know where to go. (Intern J, F 2009)

The supervisor devised this approach to preserve reality of function. However, as Intern M noticed,

Even though Sarah did not know where she was being taken, she still had a tendency to move before Intern L gave her a direction. However, the "hidden" location worked more than the "not hidden" location. (Intern M, Fall 2009)

Intern M isn't able to see exactly what is wrong, but knows a problem persists: Sarah sometimes still moves before receiving directions. This may seem puzzling. However, Sarah knows her destination is a face down building marker. As Intern L sends Sarah across the map, fewer and fewer potential destinations remain. Interns note Sarah's motivation ebbs, but then increases when Intern L stops trying to direct her to a specific location, instead sending her wandering all over the map. Intern L apparently was aware of the cause of the motivational problem.

Intern L didn't give a specific destination to reach. Sarah seemed more motivated than in the previous sections [of the lesson]. ... Sarah could not figure out where the destination was, so [all she could do was] follow Intern L's directions. This kind of uncertainty made the communication meaningful.... (Intern K, Fall 2009)

"Authenticity," a related issue, occasionally appears in intern posts. Here is an example of a comment on the map itself.

I think that incorporating [local] landmarks would make the lesson more authentic ...also pretty useful.... (Intern O, Fall 2012)

If Intern O meant that local landmarks should be incorporated into the existing map (of a fictional town), it would be neither authentic nor useful. If she meant a Toledo map, we would be back to the situation with Intern L and Sarah. On a map of familiar territory, the student receiving directions to a specific place would be able to see how to get there and would not need directions. If the intern directed the student randomly all over the map, it is hard to see how authenticity would matter. The assumption that authenticity will create meaningfulness (or reality of function) is common, but often entirely unwarranted.

Other Lesson Elements Affecting Reality of Function

Intern and professor reports reveal other effects on reality of function. For example, Intern N placed two markers on the map and asked students to move one (representing a man), then the other (representing a woman).

There was some inconsistency; in one set of directions, the marker [for the man] went from being “Bob” [a character created on the fly by Intern N] to being “you” [in reference to the student]. (Spring 2010)

This is partly an affective issue. Reality of function requires learners to “avoid standing one step away from their activities” (Jones, 1982:4). Intern N exacerbated the negative affect by asking a male student to sometimes move the male person-marker, but at other times, the female person-marker, inconsistently switching not only back and forth between “you” and “Bob” but also between “you” and “Sue.”

The issue involves more than affect; the difference between second and third person (“you” vs. “Bob” / “he”) is being conflated. Furthermore, the meaning of “turn right” or “turn left” depends on whose right or left is being referred to. If the marker represents *me*, I should understand “turn right” as meaning to the right of the way the figure faces. But if the marker is just a thing I am holding, I may think in terms of my right, not the figure’s.

REALITY OF FUNCTION IN THE 3D VIRTUAL WORLD MODALITY

Unlike students using a map, those in a 3D virtual world lack a god's-eye view. They cannot see their destination; they have a normal eye-level perspective. The resulting uncertainty about which way to go makes the directions they hear meaningful.¹

In addition, a map contains *flat* representations of stop signs, traffic lights, and so on. On a map, street names appear written along the surfaces of the streets, not on street signs. Buildings are represented by flat markers with images. A virtual world contains three-dimensional representations that block your view, exhibit changes in perspective as you move, and look more like the real thing.

Features of a 3D Virtual World that Can Thwart Reality of Function

A 3D virtual environment can avoid the ways of a flat map can thwart reality of function but, based on our analyses of reflective reports, the best results require that we take special care.

We first used the New Victoria virtual world as a motivational add-on after students seemed fairly competent following more complex directions on the flat map. We had two avatars in-world. One, operated by Intern P, was placed at one location. We placed another avatar for the student quite some distance away. The intern used in-game text messaging to give the student directions to her location. The student's avatar appeared on a projection screen at the front of the room. The intern operated the other avatar from a laptop at the back of the room; only she saw her avatar. We moved the intern and student avatars to different in-world locations to give each student a chance to enter the virtual world and follow a new set of directions.

1 Even though avatars in Second Life and OpenSim can, by default, fly, the OpenSim software has settings to ban flying in New Victoria; other scripting also restricts users' ability to move their view away from their avatar (called "camming" in Second Life and OpenSim). Thus, the student's point of view is effectively restricted to a very realistic one.

The text messaging had obvious negative effects. The input using the flat map had emphasized spoken English, with little emphasis on written forms (“speech communication for our learners would have been more beneficial,” Intern F, Fall 2012). Also, the text-chat window covered enough screen area that it sometimes “made it hard to read the [street signs], see the landmarks, or even [Intern P’s avatar]” (Intern F, Fall 2012).

One intern suggested that “students could have asked Intern P [by speaking to her]... instead of typing” (Intern D, Fall 2012). However, Intern P herself noticed a problem that would have made that solution unworkable:

...the person controlling the [second] avatar needs to be in another room.... I was watching what they were doing and wanted to intercede before they actually asked for directions.

When a person is giving directions by phone or text-message, she cannot see the other person. Because Intern P *could* see the student’s avatar on the projection screen while she was sitting at the back of the room, Intern P gave directions that someone would not give if across town. For example, when Intern P looked up at the projection screen and saw the student’s avatar facing the wrong way, she told him to “turn around” (noted by Intern Q, Fall 2012). This kind of event seriously damages reality of function.

Using Earlier Insights to Avoid Thwarting Reality of Function

By Fall 2013, Vivox’s voice service (Pulver, Seaver, & Toga, 2005), used by Second Life and other on-line games, was available free to educational OpenSim virtual worlds; this allowed us to abandon text-chat. From then on, students in New Victoria have heard oral directions rather than seeing written directions they had little experience with; there is no longer a chat window to interfere with their view.

Also, starting in the Fall 2013, the second avatar has been operated from another room. This made it impossible for the directions-giver to see the student’s avatar and give omniscient directions as Intern P had the year before.

Analyses from Fall 2013 note none of the problems that in the previous year's run of the lesson had been caused by text messaging or by operation of the second avatar within view of the projection screen. There were marked improvements in student motivation, for example. As Intern D observed,

Even though [moving the avatar with the arrow keys] was challenging at times, the whole experience was a plus. Adolfo, Elena, Felice, myself, and Intern R enjoyed the experience. It motivated us to get to the right directions to see [the professor] was waiting for us at the end of the directions. It was an achievement to know that you followed the directions correctly when we finally saw him! (Intern D, Fall 2013)

Interns understood how the greater reality of function resulting from the point of view in a 3D virtual environment improved not only student motivation but also assessment validity. Note this example from one reflective report:

The virtual reality world was a great exercise that forced students to really think about directions and locations as they had to depend on their knowledge of directions and listening skills to understand and follow the directions to make it to their instructed destinations. There was a sense of accomplishment as we followed the directions and saw [the professor] (who was giving us directions) waiting for us at our destination. It was rewarding to hear him say "Hi, there!" (Intern R, Fall 2013)

These reflective analyses show us in hindsight that when following directions to meet someone, we typically have a positive desire to find the person. This adds to reality of function. Also, even if we do not have an intention of actually meeting someone for a later purpose, we can take this activity as a "hide-and-seek" (Intern S, Fall 2013), which is also an exciting, game-like, and problem-solving activity that provides an alternative kind of reality of function in which the finding is an end in itself.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on five years of reflective analyses of interns and their supervising professor, we have come to understand how the 3D virtual world New Victoria was successfully integrated into an ESL street directions lesson. We have identified some key conditions in the implementation of virtual worlds that may facilitate or perhaps hinder learners' acquisition. For instance, during the initial implementation of New Victoria, we found that the reliance on the text-chat system may result in a lack of speech-based communication. In addition, when the 3D virtual world was utilized with both participants in the same classroom environment, we observed that the participants occasionally facilitated a conversation that was unrealistic functionally. While the purposes of developing two modalities to teach street directions were initially the same, we observed aspects in which each the modalities aid or thwart reality of function in the lesson and thereby contribute to or detract from its effectiveness.

Interns are asked to go beyond considering only general intentions and intuitions about whether or not those intentions have been achieved; they are asked to examine concrete aspects of the learning environment and effects on learners as revealed in observable behaviors. The effect of having a god's-eye view of a map is one example; it means the learner can actually ignore directions if they already can see where they are going. The effect of the text-chat window on a learner's ability to see street signs and other landmarks is another example. In conducting any lesson, teachers need to examine how their own actions and other environmental factors affect learning. They cannot do this as effectively if they lose track of the fact that learners are real people in a real environment. We need to look for concrete cause and effect in the real environment in which learning occurs, not limit ourselves by looking at language, period.

As teacher educators, we take a large responsibility in preparing teachers for elements of learning to communicate in a target language that are impossible to explain but which can be shown. We found that even a show-don't-tell approach in a traditional

simulation environment has certain limitations with regard to *reality of function* that can be overcome only in a virtual world environment. On the other hand, we also found certain limitations that are unique to virtual environments. These findings, based on several years of reflective analyses by interns and the supervising professor, have helped us identify some key issues in the potential of virtual reality in CALL — in particular, how to make the most effective use of the *reality* in virtual reality.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Douglas W. Coleman is Professor of English at The University of Toledo, where he teaches in the MA Program in English – ESL. He has been active in the fields of CALL and teaching through simulations since the 1980's, currently focused on the New Victoria virtual world. E-mail: Douglas.Coleman@utoledo.edu

Kasumi Yamazaki is Assistant Professor of Japanese at the University of Toledo, where she teaches advanced level courses of Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) and culture. Her current research focus is on CALL utilization, examining the use of 3D virtual worlds into JFL classrooms. Email: Kasumi.Yamazaki@utoledo.edu

QUIZLET FOR LEARNER TRAINING AND AUTONOMY

Kelly J. Cunningham, Iowa State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the language learning potential of Quizlet, an interactive flashcard sharing website and mobile application, through reflection on its application in several classes. Following a brief overview of how to use Quizlet, the article expands on the site capabilities and their use for language learning. Then the discussion moves to the learner training needed for its effective use with an example of how to integrate Quizlet in the classroom. Finally, the potential of Quizlet for facilitating learner autonomy is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

“Awesome, awesome, this is awesome. Thank you, thank you, thank you so much for showing us this.”

The preceding sentiment was expressed by one of my students, a mother and displaced worker in my summer ESL reading, listening and grammar classes, as she used Quizlet to practice new words during our lunch break. Sentiments like this have convinced me that the decision to introduce Quizlet to my students was a good one. This article reflects on my experience in implementing this “good decision” so that others might learn from it in applying Quizlet in their own teaching and learning.

Quizlet (<http://quizlet.com>) is a browser based online and mobile application that provides a platform for the creating,

sharing and practicing of matched information such as one might find in a set of flashcards (see also Gaer, this volume). This engaging platform can motivate students to study through its convenient interactive features. Most importantly, when coupled with appropriate learner training, Quizlet can promote learner autonomy and engagement in the second language classroom.

BACKGROUND

The examples and reflections in this paper all stem from experience with various ESL classes in the United States. The classes were in intensive English programs (IEPs) at community colleges and a university and at an academic ESL program at a community college. While international students at the university IEP fell within the typical college age range of 17–23, those at the community colleges ranged in age from 17 to 75 and included displaced workers, international students, local high school graduates and the spouses of international expatriates. Their formal educational backgrounds ranged from less than elementary school to postgraduate while their technological proficiency had equal spread. My prior experience introducing new CALL tools to these groups helped me identify strategies and tasks that made Quizlet accessible to and useful for each population.

QUIZLET OVERVIEW

Quizlet is a free platform with optional paid subscriptions. While the paid version (\$25/year) allows for advanced class tracking and the ability to add original pictures and audio, which may be of particular use in lower-level courses or for pronunciation practice, the free version offers a wide range of possibilities on its own and works well in many contexts. This paper focuses primarily on the free version. Users first need to create an account and sign in, which allows for tracking of individual progress and linking to shared sets.

The technological familiarity of students may dictate the amount of guidance and time needed for setup. Students need

an email account that they can access in order to set up a Quizlet account. However, while this may seem matter-of-fact to many, this could not be assumed for my students. Although all of my students should have had accessible school email accounts, this was not always the case. While some considered email a part of their daily routines, others found it more difficult to access. Such variance in technological familiarity could be seen throughout the account set up process. For my class, this meant some students were able to finish the sign up process quickly and independently while others required a full class period and constant assistance. Such variation was not limited to Quizlet or to this class. Most CALL implementations reveal some level of difference in technological familiarity between students. Having worked through new tools with these learners before, when I introduced Quizlet, I was expecting this variation and prepared for it.

To accommodate different learners, I used paper-based screenshot guides with additional practice exercises at the end for those who finished early. These allowed quick students to explore the tool while giving less confident students the guidance they needed. Having these self-directed guides allowed me to spend more time helping the students who needed it while more independent students could move forward at their own pace. The guides also enabled some of the more proficient students to help less proficient students through the process. These partnerships kept students engaged and built on the underlying community atmosphere of the class. Such an atmosphere coupled with paper-based guides when introducing new tech-based tools in the classroom made implementing new tools easier.

However, it is important to collect the screenshot guides for setup after verifying that all students have Quizlet accounts. On occasion, I've forgotten this crucial step, which resulted in those less proficient students following the setup instructions to simply use the site. Once I collect these, I provide similar screenshot instructions on how to access the site. My less technology-proficient students often rely on these to access the site independently. However, I've found such guides must be complete and explicit because these students will often follow the guides exactly. There is no room for assuming that a student knows to

click 'OK', for instance. I've found it helpful to have someone else test the guides prior to distribution to find any missing steps or confusing areas.

Once logged in to Quizlet, "sets" can be created and shared. Each card in a set has a setup similar to a flashcard with a side designated for a term and the other for a definition. Users need not be limited to this traditional setup, however. The platform can be just as easily used for grammar, fill ins and conversation patterns as for vocabulary. Users enter the terms and definitions in list format.

Quizlet allows users to enter terms in three ways: 1) import term-definition sets, 2) enter their own definitions and terms online or 3) enter a term and use the "auto-define" feature to pull up user-contributed definitions and select the one that best fits. This last feature may be particularly appealing to language learners who may view it as a convenient source of authoritative definitions. However, use of this feature requires significant discernment, and lower level learners seem both the most likely and the least qualified to use it. For instance, auto-define suggests that a simple concrete word like "box" be defined as "a 1900 uprising in China," which is likely not the sense of "box" a low level language student would be looking for.

Thus, I've found it is important to teach students not to rely on auto-define and instead to consistently help them find better sources for definitions. In my class, when entering words together, we would consider student created definitions and check these against online or paper-based dictionaries. Even after careful instruction, practice creating sets together using online dictionaries and regular reminders, some students would still occasionally link their words to unsuitable user-contributed definitions. Regular monitoring seems to be necessary to overcome this convenient, if not always effective, feature.

In addition to or as a substitute for text, images may be added to the definition side of a card. However, on a free account, these are limited to a narrow set of searchable images, which rarely provide a good match. Paid accounts allow for the inclusion of user images. If you have a free account like I do, you can still benefit from this feature by having someone with a paid account share their set with you. A friend of mine created a range of sets for

low-level learners complete with beautiful pictures. She's shared them with me so that my class could use them, too.

Sets have a number of sharing and organization options. They can be organized in folders, given levels of visibility (completely public, completely private, by password only or by class) and shared with instructors or classes of students.

Adding all of your students to a Quizlet "class" makes sharing sets with them easier. The "invite more people" tab under each class can be shared for access. My students with poorer eyesight and lower technological proficiency often preferred having the URL printed clearly on paper. For this reason, I also typically used shortened links (<http://bit.ly>) so there was less to type and was careful to point out the case-sensitivity and any ambiguous characters (0 vs O).

Once students have gained access to teacher-created sets or created their own, a variety of built-in activities await. The most basic is that of flashcards where students can view the terms as cards with optional audio. The "learn" feature allows students to view one side of the card and type the other with immediate and tallied feedback. However, to get a term "correct", students have to type the definition exactly. Luckily, the feedback screen also includes an "Override: I was right" link where users can compare their answer with the correct answer and identify if it was indeed correct. I've found many learners, however, may lack the discernment to effectively use this feature, most often leading to one of two outcomes: 1) students do not use the feature even when they should, often leading to frustration from an abundance of incorrect answers or 2) a complete overuse of the feature when overconfident students assume they know more than they do. Although I show students how to use this tool, the skill required to use it effectively is not easy to develop.

The "spell" feature allows students to hear the definition or term spoken at various speeds while viewing the opposite side of the card and then type it to check spelling and get automatic feedback. The "test" feature can automatically generate different versions of a test for a set using a variety of input parameters including written, matching, multiple choice and true/false questions; whether questions give the term, the definition or

a combination; and how many terms from the set are used to generate the test. The “regenerate test” button creates new iterations for students to practice with. After completing the test, students can view total and question-by-question, color-coded (red: incorrect or green: correct) feedback.

Two games are available to aid students in practicing as well. The first, “scatter,” is a matching game where students drag a term (or definition) to the corresponding definition (or term). Correct matches disappear from the screen. An onscreen counter keeps track of the time and displays the student’s previous best score, encouraging students to race against their best with the goal of clearing all the words in the shortest amount of time.

The other game, “Space Race,” also uses time as a motivator. Definitions float from left to right across the screen. Students need to type the corresponding term before the word leaves the screen. Definitions that leave the screen without their terms being entered count against a limited number of ‘lives’ while those successfully entered add points to the score. As the game progresses, the definitions come increasingly quickly with multiple terms on the screen at once. I’ve found students who are not proficient at typing or have poor eyesight tend to benefit less from this game initially due to precise spelling requirements and speed. To involve everyone, including these students, I have used it for a whole class activity. This allowed these students to shout out the answer as I or another student typed. The collective knowledge of the class enabled the game to go on longer with increasing speed, enlivening the class. My highly proficient classes sometimes rarely got any wrong, leading to the need for careful monitoring to end the activity before students became bored but not so early as to cut off engagement. This can be a difficult balance to master. Other classes required several restarts as they gained proficiency.

In addition to the browser-based site, Quizlet has limited-feature mobile applications (apps) for both Android and iOS devices. The Android app includes *flashcards*, *learn* and *match* while the iOS app includes *flashcards*, *learn* and *scatter*. These apps have been favorites of my students who regularly used them to study on the bus on the way to class, on breaks and whenever they had a little time. Students remarked at how they were

studying more and able to study in a variety of locations since the app allowed them to study easily and covertly in public spaces. The apps have been some of the best resources for promoting and achieving learner autonomy, particularly because students used them without much guidance from me.

LEARNER TRAINING & PROGRESSION ACTIVITIES

Learner Training

Hubbard (2013) defines “learner training as a process aimed at the construction of a knowledge and skill base that enables language learners to use technology more efficiently and effectively in support of language learning objectives than they would in absence of such training,” (p. 164). Learner training for Quizlet, then, must address both the technological aspects of how to use the platform and its features as well as how to harness those features effectively for language learning. The focus of the training will shift depending on the objectives of the class and the population of learners.

Learner training is important with any population of students, but it becomes particularly important for those of older generations and those with computer anxiety. In order to increase the ability of older adults, training should address goal setting, social support, self efficacy and computer anxiety (Poynton, 2005). Providing scaffolded activities and prolonged engagement throughout the course can help do just this, provided it is done in a supportive atmosphere that does not rush learners but helps them to accomplish small steps. Even when I felt the activities had been well scaffolded for the class as a whole, some of my older learners who were less comfortable with computers might get lost and discouraged. Because of this, I started giving them even shorter steps and focused activities. This allowed them to accomplish tasks without being overwhelmed. If these students could enter two words, or were able to use a practice activity without someone actively showing them what to do, it was a moment of triumph. This is where the screenshot guides played a major role because students knew they had support and were

less likely to give up than when they did not have such guidance regardless of whether I or other students were around to help. These learners would be particularly proud of accomplishing even the smallest tasks and Quizlet seemed to be one of the platforms that allowed for such triumphs to occur.

Learner training is not confined to certain populations. Even “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b), or perhaps digital natives in particular, can benefit from learner training as they typically do not have the digital literacy in educational technologies needed to successfully use them to further learning (Ng, 2012). Although the training needed for digital natives may differ from that needed by older adults, the training should still include exposure, explanation and practice with the different functions of the tool, in this case Quizlet, and clear alignment with learning objectives and tasks with explicit goals. These younger more technologically inclined students were the ones in my class most likely to benefit from using Quizlet for independent vocabulary journals where students were required to add five words a week, as they often had an easier time mastering some of the technological aspects but needed concrete ways to use the platform for language learning.

Prolonged Engagement

In either case, prolonged engagement with a tool is a critical part of learner training. Mentioning or demonstrating a tool once is usually not enough to allow learners to take full advantage of its features and use it for autonomous learning. Using a tool like Quizlet in a single course over a period of time, reiterating its purpose and extending its capabilities seems to function much better than occasionally mentioning it. This extended use could include weekly in class use, perhaps through whole class competitive scatter games on a smart board or in pairs, or whole class space race games with the goal of beating previous high scores.

What is likely to have an even greater impact is when a new tool is implemented in multiple classes and levels across a program. This allows learners to see widespread utility in the tool and know that their efforts in learning to use the tool will serve them

well beyond a single activity or class, making them more likely to invest in it and become accustomed to its use. With Quizlet, such widespread implementation is easy given its set-sharing features. Instructors can easily share their created sets with other instructors and multiple instructors teaching the same content can share the editing of a single set, cutting down on the workload for all while creating more resources. Such collaboration and widespread implementation can lead to a range of innovative uses as instructors' unique contributions and experience combine to generate greater possibilities. As learners encounter different uses in their classes, they will better understand not only how to use Quizlet but also its educational and language learning potential. This type of "pedagogical training" (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013) thus helps them further develop strategies for future language learning use.

Scaffolded Activities

The key to achieving effective learner training lies in careful scaffolding. After the setup and the provision of support materials for students, Quizlet's features can be introduced. Creating sets together as a class is a solid first step. In my reading or listening class for instance, students would read or listen to something in class and keep a list of words to focus on. As a class we would add these to a set in Quizlet one at a time with students helping to discover the meaning using online or paper-based learner dictionaries and prior knowledge. This helped students help each other and develop independent skills in definition discovery they would need in future autonomous learning. This set would be shared with the class for practice.

Then as an instructor, I created a set for each student in the class, titled with their names, and shared it and editing permissions with the class. Each student would then open his or her own set, be instructed how to edit and then the class would add some of the key vocabulary words together. In class, I could help students do this, providing interpersonal and technological support, as they worked their way towards independently adding words to their sets. The process of adding words after listening or reading would continue throughout the course. To maintain student engagement,

students were given weekly homework to add five words to their sets from vocabulary they found throughout the week. Students would be invited to share a selection of their new words with the class each week and others might add these to their own sets for further practice, beginning the process of student-to-student learning. For many, this worked well while others never completely mastered it. Those less likely to use it in this capacity included those with very low technological proficiency or access and older adults who were much more comfortable with a pencil and notebook. These students were, however, able to still use other features of the site effectively.

Practice features were then introduced one at a time beginning with the flashcards and learn features. After an initial introduction, class lab time was allotted for students to practice with the feature and headphones provided or encouraged given the audio features. Some students would have an easy time using the feature and those who had trouble would have the support of their peers and instructor. In subsequent classes as students finished activities early, they were encouraged to use Quizlet to practice. Most of them would do this without fail with many staying after class and during breaks to continue using Quizlet. With the immersive focus many developed, the only issue came in trying to pull them away from it again when moving to the next activity.

LEARNER AUTONOMY AND REACTIONS

Learner Autonomy

This continued and independent use led students to greater autonomy. For learners to gain autonomy in their language study, there are several necessary components including an initial motivation on the part of the learner (Godwin-Jones, 2011), which Quizlet seems to bring out in students.

A fellow instructor remarked that while traditional paper flashcards are a “hard sell” with younger university students, the online version in Quizlet sparks their interest and everyone enjoys the speed games (K. Campbell, personal communication, June 30,

2014). She stated that upon entering her course many students studied only by rereading or rewriting exercises until they had memorized them and many would never sit and practice spelling or writing. However, Quizlet has kept her students completely absorbed through immediate feedback and its appeal to visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. I built on her experience and have seen the same thing happen with my own students. Those who used to sit and fill pages of their notebook rewriting a single word to practice because it was their sole concept of “studying” are fully engaged with Quizlet and seem to come alive.

When properly trained and shown how to use Quizlet for studying, a wider range of students seem to study. These students then seem to study more actively, frequently and for longer periods, based on what students have reported in class. Perhaps future studies could look into this further.

Autonomous Learners

My students became more autonomous learners through their work with Quizlet in class. Showing students how to search for other user-created sets can help them extend this autonomy and helping them master the ability to share these found or their own created sets with others can help them build peer-to-peer support systems and create a community for learning. I found that students sought out or made additional sets, sometimes translating or adding grammar. They would ask me to create more of our exercises in Quizlet so that they could practice them again and again in different ways. Creating a simple set gave my students multiple opportunities and ways of studying that fit their interests, and they took advantage of that. I saw students finding or adding and then studying irregular verb lists and concepts and vocabulary from other classes they were taking. They took the training and goals from class and expanded use of the tool to suit their own learning needs. That is precisely what we are seeking when introducing new tools and providing learner training in hopes of moving our students towards autonomy.

FINAL REMARKS

At its heart, Quizlet remains a simple matched answer setup. It is therefore limited in how it helps students work with a new language. However, an instructor can create and inspire students to create sets that go beyond simple vocabulary learning to stretch its capabilities. In the future, we may see instructors extending these capabilities more by integrating third-party applications (those from other developers) and teaching students to use them or by incorporating links to concordance lines to give a wide array of authentic language in use in an organized format or copying concordance lines to sets to help students learn how words might function differently in context. Using the paid features, such as the incorporation of images for dual coding and audio hints, can take the use of Quizlet far beyond traditional flashcards.

However, it is only with appropriate and ongoing learner training that our learners will become autonomous users that take full advantage of this platform for their language learning goals. It is up to instructors to guide them into identifying these goals and helping pair them with tools and training to achieve their goals.

In order to become autonomous, students need strategies for continued independent learning and a willingness to develop them over time (Godwin-Jones, 2011). Quizlet can be a gateway to helping learners develop strategies for independent learning as its interactive game-like platform seems to lead to such a willingness for continued development. As my experience has demonstrated, an instructor can play a critical role not only in introducing students to such a tool but in helping them realize and extend the language learning potential of it in meaningful and interesting ways.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly J. Cunningham holds an MA in intercultural studies & TESOL and a graduate level certificate in online teaching. She has taught in a variety of ESL programs in the Chicago suburbs from survival refugee courses to academic writing and has conducted teacher-training workshops in technology implementation. Currently, she is a PhD candidate co-majoring in applied linguistics and technology and human-computer interaction at Iowa State University where she studies feedback and technology in second language writing. Email: kellyc@iastate.edu; kelly.stryker@gmail.com.

THE GAMIFICATION OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Nick Einterz, University of Colorado at Boulder

Russell Moon, University of Oregon

ABSTRACT

ESL/EFL instructors have long been concerned with student motivation. As instructors sharing this concern, we employed a gamification approach to student learning. Gamification leverages the motivational aspects of games in non-game activities. Adding gamification to outcomes tracking, we believe that student motivation increased when students were encouraged to track their outcomes. In this chapter, we reflect on the challenges and successes of such a gamification approach to student learning.

INTRODUCTION

Gamification is the use of game mechanics to “engage people, motivate action [and] promote learning” (Kapp, Blair & Mesch, 2014, p. 10). Kapp, et al. provide one of the pithier and more useful definitions of “gamification”, an approach to reorganizing the learning experience that holds the promise of increased student motivation (McGonigal, 2011; Sykes & Reinhardt, 2013). As casual observers of our students’ interest in games, the two of us have long been interested in gamification but have struggled to find a consensus method of implementation in curriculum or classrooms. In this article, we outline our particular approach to the gamification of language learning, an approach that relies heavily on computer technology. We then describe a gamification

methodology used in university-prep ESL classes for international students, along with a discussion of future directions for this methodology.

Our model for the gamification of language learning begins with a series of reflective observations about three distinct but related domains: the language-learning process, computer-based learning management systems, and game design. The first of these observations is that language-learning curriculum lends itself to organization from simpler to more complex structures. As educators, we define specific objectives/outcomes for students to meet (e.g., write a well-formed simple sentence), and place those outcomes within a framework that reflects a step-wise process (students will be able to write well-formed simple sentences before tackling compound or complex sentences). Our curriculum includes learning outcomes that require students to demonstrate the use of discrete grammatical and lexical features. These targeted features, such as vocabulary and grammatical items, are typically arranged in a sequence that corresponds to the student's progression from beginner to intermediate to advanced proficiencies. This sequencing lends itself the concept of "leveling" in a gamified system.

The second key observation is that computer-based learning management systems, such as Blackboard, Desire2Learn (D2L) and Moodle, may be well adapted for framing and organizing the complex skill-trees of the language learning process. The third observation is that rule-based games (everything from Monopoly to Super Mario Bros. to field hockey), are engaging precisely because they offer an opportunity to pursue structured, objectives-based activities (McGonigal, 2011; Kapp, 2012).

These three broad domains—language-learning, learning management systems and rule-based games—may be integrated with one another as a result of overlapping similarities and complementarities. In our own classes, we have gamified our language-learning curriculum by organizing learning objectives according to the logic of game mechanics, which we will explore in depth. *Game mechanics* refers to the collection of methods used to gamify an activity, thereby engaging participants and motivating them to further action (Kapp, 2012). Our approach to

gamification makes use of four game mechanics (though there are many others): rule-systems, goal setting, feedback and leveling (McGonigal, 2011; Kapp, 2012).

GAME MECHANICS

Rule System

The foundational game mechanic is the rule system. In a gamified language curriculum, the “rules” describe the successful demonstration of a learning outcome. For example, if our learning outcome is to write a well-formed restrictive adjective clause, part of our “rule” must include a clear definition of this clause type: namely, that it is essential to the meaning of the noun or noun phrase that it modifies. A good game has a well-defined set of rules, not to punish the unorthodox or incorrect, but to create the conditions for achievement within a set of constraints (McGonigal, 2011). One of the reasons that we find games so engaging is that we are often presented with an objective and a limited number of ways to accomplish this objective (McGonigal, 2011). If chess could be won by merely sweeping an opponent’s pieces off the board with a flick of the wrist, the game would cease to be entertaining for anyone above the age of three. Likewise, a language class in which competency is assessed according to vaguely defined notions of linguistic proficiency (“I understand what the student is trying to say” or “This does not resonate with my native speaker’s intuition”) rather than clearly communicated rules, may not fully engage a student.

Goal Setting

In order to gamify our curriculum—to make it interesting and motivating—we establish narrowly defined learning objectives that are linked to class work. By shifting the focus of the class away from the goal of “learning a language” or “passing a class” and toward the discrete learning objectives, we are able to connect the student’s performance on assignments with skills-based objectives. In our classes, student performance and progress is charted according to the successful demonstration of learning outcomes

(e.g. the student can successfully produce meaningful sentences with restrictive adjective clauses). Each class assignment, whether it is a test, a paper or group discussion, is associated with multiple course learning outcomes listed on the syllabus. Student success is determined by focused assessment of each learning outcome across multiple assignments, and grades are framed in terms of successful demonstration of these outcomes, not the aggregate score of combined assignments.

Feedback

Feedback is the next game mechanic critical to our gamification methodology. Indeed, the educational system is designed to deliver and record feedback (at least summative feedback). Our students' response to grade feedback seems so universally familiar that it may be overlooked for what it actually is. Feedback is a powerful game mechanic that educators use to motivate students and one of the reasons why the educational process already partially resembles a game.

In education, we can use feedback to greatest effect if we provide an account of what students have done and how they can improve—the Assessment for Learning approach. Of course, this approach predates gamification and has been advocated by educators and scholars for many years. Incorporating this approach into our gamification practices, we have attempted to clearly link feedback systems to learning outcomes so that students both know what is needed in order to successfully demonstrate the outcomes and are motivated to do so because the next steps are made explicit.

Leveling

The fourth and final game mechanic constitutive of our approach is leveling. This game mechanic also underwrites our notion of modern education—students move through an academic program by passing on from primary school to secondary school, beginner to intermediate to advanced, and this advancement tends to define academic progress. Even those students who seem indifferent to the learning process may display some

motivational stake in passing from one level to the next. In contemporary education, however, leveling is a high-stakes proposition—failure to move on can lead to social stigma, significant loss of time and effort, and the demoralizing sense that one is not capable. To be sure, students are motivated to “level-up”, but this motivation is largely predicated on the fear of failure. Again, educators would do well to take their cues from well-designed video games, which motivate players to level-up by promising new skills and abilities at the next level and by playfully withholding more challenging problems and “secret” knowledge (Tekinbaş & Zimmerman, 2003; Kapp, 2012).

GAMIFICATION MECHANICS IN PRACTICE

Gamified Goals and Objectives in the Classroom

Communicating curricular objectives during the course design process can be a challenge for instructors. A school district or department’s administration typically communicates objectives to teachers as a set of standards which teachers are trained to interpret and then incorporate into curriculum. However, making student objectives clear and relevant to students throughout the duration of a course is never easy though seen as paramount. Game designers, like teachers, prioritize objective-setting in the design process. Since game designers must communicate clear objectives without ever directly communicating with users, teachers can take cues from game designers who build clear and explicit objectives into the fabric of their games (McGonigal, 2011).

Games do an excellent job of directing players’ attention to objectives (McGonigal, 2011). Games employ different strategies to communicate objectives, from explicit objectives written in unambiguous language to implicit objectives that arise through gameplay to non-linguistic visual representations of progress. These strategies may keep the game organized and focus a player’s efforts without distracting from gameplay. For instance, video games such as Tetris and Pacman display player progress during gameplay in terms of points.

Instructors, like game-designers, must clearly communicate objectives in multiple ways and consistently. Both game players and students need to be reminded of their work's purpose. With this concept in mind, we attempted to communicate clear, easily understood objectives through tools available in Desire2Learn (D2L), our university's learning management system. While using D2L to communicate objectives consistently throughout the term, we focused on two important questions: what language best communicates the course objectives, and what non-linguistic strategies are available for communicating the objectives?

We began by addressing the question of appropriate language. Our department defines learning outcomes to standardize curriculum, promote consistent assessment strategies, and support instructors' curriculum design process. Thus, the learning outcomes (Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), in our administrative parlance) are written for an audience of instructors and phrased accordingly. Instructors understand such language and, further, understand why learning outcomes are beneficial to students. However, students may not understand the language or the rationale of SLOs. In order to clarify these SLOs for students, we assigned a shorthand title to each outcome. SLOs such as, "Recognize and understand form and function of the structures covered in this class and use them in original written text with increasing accuracy," became "Grammar in Writing and Reading." Simply put, the function of this shorthand was to consistently remind students of important class objectives.

Afterward, we focused on non-linguistic representations of objectives and appropriate ways to display the SLO descriptions in conjunction with graphics. Most games utilize multiple graphics to communicate objectives, such as maps with legends and leveling charts. So, in addition to listing the SLOs on the course syllabus, we employed two additional visual devices in D2L to communicate objectives. The first was a "Competency Pyramid", a D2L tool that allows instructors to organize assignments, tests and objectives into a tiered structure (See Figure 1.0 below). The system allowed us to associate students' performance on activities with the bottom tier of the pyramid, performance on the broader SLOs with the second tier, and overall course achievement to the top of the

pyramid. Each time a student logged into D2L, the competency pyramid appeared on the left side of the screen as a reminder of the course's objectives. Upon accessing each tier, students could see how each activity related to the SLOs, the course's main objectives.

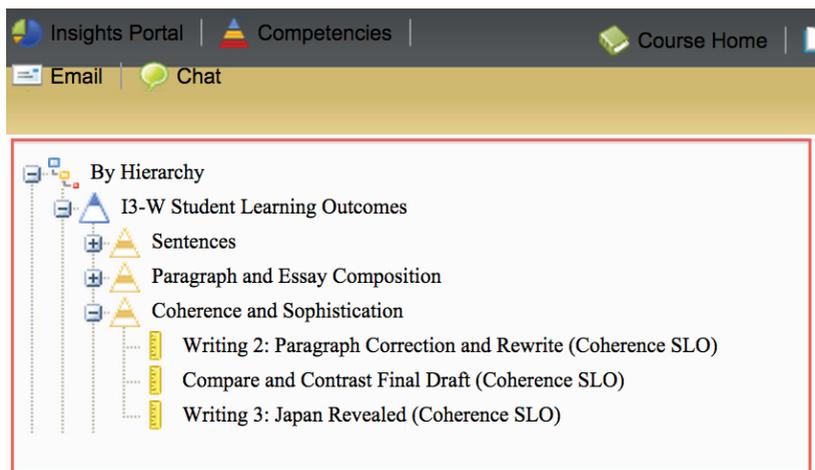


Figure 1. The competency pyramid in the Desire2Learn course management system.

To further communicate these objectives, we incorporated them into D2L's grade book feature. While many grade books are categorized by assignment types, e.g. homework, tests, and essays, ours was categorized by SLO. We created a category for each learning outcome, using the shorthand titles listed in the competency pyramid. This allowed students to interpret their grades in terms of class objectives. By communicating the objectives through the pyramid graph and grade book categories, we intended for course objectives to become a central focus for our students rather than a syllabus boiler-plate to be ignored.

Upon reflection, there was some evidence that the way we drew attention to course objectives was an effective gamification device. Through a qualitative survey of 27 students in three different classes, we cautiously interpreted an appreciation for the clearly communicated objectives. In response to the question, "Did knowing about the Student Learning Outcomes for this class

help you to improve specific writing skills?," 19 students responded with a 4, 5, or 6 on a 6-point Likert scale, while 5 responded with a 6. In response to the question, "Did seeing your SLO grades on each writing assignment help you to understand what you needed to do in order to receive a good grade for the whole class?", 26 students responded with a 4, 5, or 6, while 13 responded with a 6. Lastly, in response to the question, "Did the ability to see your grades in D2L at any time motivate you to work harder compared to a class in which grades were not available online?", 26 students responded with a 4, 5, or 6 while 16 responded with a 5 or 6. Considering both students' survey responses and their in-class feedback, clearly communicating objectives seems to have some positive effect on how students understood the gamified course goals.

On the other hand, we encountered some obvious limitations in the graphic representation of course objectives. Course management systems, like D2L, have limited graphical output capabilities; we believe that enhanced or personalized graphics would have been more effective in maintaining students' attention. Aesthetics are a major concern in video game design (Kapp, 2012). We hypothesize that more stylized and customized graphics would further engage students. Additionally, when game players design their own avatars, they are given an opportunity to personally customize the avatar's aesthetic features. If D2L had numerous design options, students could have helped design ideas for SLO representation, which could have further encouraged students to focus on course objectives. In general, the more influence students have over course objectives, aesthetic designs, and course content, the more engaged they may become in their progress.

Gamified Feedback in the Classroom

The manner in which a game provides feedback may determine whether or not a player enjoys the game. Since game players expect in-game feedback and are purportedly motivated by such feedback, we modeled our class feedback on video game feedback systems. In particular, we wanted our feedback to be fast, accessible, and directly linked to objectives, just as in a video game. This is also consistent with trends in contemporary assessment.

Specifically, we organized the grade book according to course objectives (as detailed above) so students could understand their grade as a reflection of their ability to demonstrate SLOs. Since assignments were associated with specific SLOs, this relationship was represented in the pyramid graph as well as the grade book (see Figure 2). Also, papers were assessed with rubrics that used learning outcomes for criteria, for example, "Essay and Paragraph Structure- 9/10" (see Figure 3). For any given writing assignment, students received written feedback on the document itself, point totals in terms of course objectives—both in the grade book and on rubrics—and percentages on the pyramid graphic, which represented successful demonstration of the learning outcome.

Essay and Paragraph Structure SLO ▾	
Compare and Contrast Final Draft (Essay and Paragraph Structure SLO) ▲ ▾	Writing 3: Japan Revealed (Essay Structure SLO) ▾
<input type="text"/> / 10	<input type="text"/> / 10
7 <input type="text"/> / 10	6.8 <input type="text"/> / 10
7 <input type="text"/> / 10	6.9 <input type="text"/> / 10
7.9 <input type="text"/> / 10	6.9 <input type="text"/> / 10
8 <input type="text"/> / 10	9 <input type="text"/> / 10
8.9 <input type="text"/> / 10	7.5 <input type="text"/> / 10

Figure 2. Assignments categorized by SLO in the grade book.

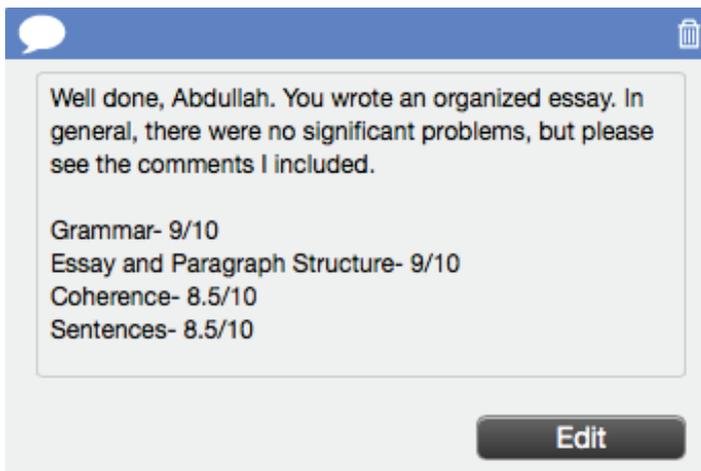


Figure 3. The in-document rubric included on student work in addition to comments and grammar marks.

In hindsight, these feedback types appeared to have three main positive effects. First, students better understood their performance on writing assignments but also showed an understanding of how their work did or did not meet course objectives. Further, we observed fewer questions and complaints about students' mid-session and final evaluations. Second, the multi-faceted feedback reminded the instructor of how assignments adhered to institutional expectations. The SLOs guide and standardize curriculum, and instructors are expected to consistently refer to SLOs during curriculum development. By tying SLOs to every aspect of the assessment process, we better justified assignments and grades to both students and administration. Students expressed a better understanding of why they earned the grades they earned, and if necessary, the instructor could better communicate to the administrators how the coursework related to curriculum guidelines. Third, students more clearly understood why they earned a particular grade and could then use this understanding to focus on skills that needed improvement. Some students were so eager for feedback that they checked the grade book and pyramid graph several times a day. The typical 'offline' class may provide grades once or twice a session, yet these analytics suggest that some students would prefer much more

frequent feedback, perhaps in order to both fully understand their progress and to stay cognizant of how to improve.

Providing three forms of feedback also presented some problems, such as occasionally creating confusion for students and more work for instructors. Typically, students receive one grade for one piece of work. Some of our students reported that it was initially difficult to interpret three different types of feedback. At times, we had to provide additional explanations to show how the grade book, the pyramid graphic, and the rubrics worked in conjunction to communicate grades. Since other instructors only used D2L's grade book, not all students thought to check the pyramid graph regularly. When necessary, we would project the pyramid graph on the whiteboard to remind students of its function. Lastly, this gamified feedback system required significant attention at the beginning of the session and added steps to the assessment process throughout the session. But by redesigning some of the automated functions of the online assessment tools, the assessment process could certainly become less cumbersome.

Gamified Leveling in the Classroom

In many ways, leveling in a game works as a scaffolding device for players. Whenever players complete one level, they move to another. The levels become more challenging and can inspire a sense of accomplishment. Typically, the player is rewarded for her accomplishment and ushered into a more difficult game experience. Like scaffolding, leveling ideally motivates a player to seek more leveling for the sake of achieving the overarching goal.

Designing a leveling system in D2L required the use of "release conditions". This standard LMS function allows instructors to hide quizzes, online assignments and supplementary materials within the system until a student achieves a certain objective. For example, a student might complete all work associated with the objective, "Coherence and Sophistication in Writing", with an 80% or better. Once recorded in the grade book, a score above 80% would trigger the release of hidden content for the student earning that score. In our writing class, hidden content included "secret projects" and access to an online typing game.

Secret projects were challenging extra credit opportunities for students that deviated from typical class work, and the typing game prepared students for timed-writing assignments and in-class typing tournaments. In both cases, the content that students unlocked deviated slightly from the course's focus but was meant to be intriguing and helpful. Out of curiosity, students develop the motivation to discover the hidden content. But once they determined that the content was helpful for class activities, they engaged quickly and completed the activities with a sense of urgency. Upon unlocking secret projects, students could choose to either complete the project for a small amount of extra credit and extra practice or ignore the project altogether. If completed successfully, the student could apply the small amount of extra credit to any assignment they chose. If students did not complete the assignment, they could make as many attempts as they preferred until the end of the session. On average, students opted to practice more as was evident by the number of times they accessed content modules in D2L. As students had the opportunity to practice more frequently, we decided to raise our expectations and grade secret projects strictly.

Student motivation for unlocking the typing game was different, however, since they earned no extra credit for playing the game. Instead, the practice served two purposes: 1) students gained valuable typing and spelling skills, which improved their essay writing skills, and 2) students became more adept at the typing games themselves, which prepared them for in-class tournaments. As students unlocked the typing game, it placed students into teams for the tournaments. Once students realized that their team's success was contingent on each member's game skill, learning to play well became an important, socially motivated objective.

Generally, we found leveling to be a useful gamification device. The group leveling and play experience of the typing game promoted team building and helped create classroom community. Students were especially motivated by the idea that uncovering and then practicing the hidden content would lead to success for their team in class. Unfortunately, like gamified feedback, setting up and maintaining a leveling system was labor-intensive.

In order for leveling to work well, the process has to function as autonomously as possible. Students, like players, have little patience for a leveling process that is unrewarding or fraught with problems and will stop playing an unengaging or poorly made game. For our classes, leveling required our constant attention to D2L and some trial and error to ensure that it was as automated as possible. When the leveling process did not run smoothly, students would become annoyed or, worse, simply disengaged. However, by using D2L, which allowed us to more readily and immediately observe students' interaction with class materials, we were able to adjust our leveling techniques quickly. D2L also allows teachers to import the leveling settings from past classes to present ones. Therefore, after initially implementing and troubleshooting leveling techniques in one session, we were able to apply those techniques and continue to fine-tune them in subsequent sections by importing those leveling settings. Lastly, the analytics of past classes are always available and continually informed our leveling strategies. In short, students' negative reactions to any poorly designed leveling strategies became helpful feedback for the overall curriculum design.

FINAL REMARKS

"Games make us happy because they are hard work that we choose for ourselves" (McGonigal, 2011, p. 28). Even though education may feel mandatory and overwhelming for many of our students, a gamified language learning curriculum, a difficult workload to be sure, may help students focus their attention on their potential progress rather than their potential failures. As noted, education has already been partially gamified, though not in such a way that places learners at the center of the process. The prevailing narrative around education may be too consequential and fraught with anxiety: pass and thrive or fail and permanently lose out. Gamification can help us to rewrite the narrative of education—a new narrative in which learners can explore complex subjects, playfully, by achieving objectives discretely and possibly trying on different identities in virtual spaces. Though our model of gamification and discussion of rules, goals, feedback and leveling

do not touch upon some of the more interesting domains of game research (such as identity and virtual space), we do hope to build a theoretical model predicated on basic gamification principles that will eventually extend into this new and exciting territory.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nick Einterz has been teaching academic and technical writing for 10 years to both American and international students. He is the Technology Coordinator at the University of Colorado, Boulder and serves as the chair of the tech interest section for Colorado

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. Email: john.einterz@colorado.edu

Russell Moon has been an ESL professional for 13 years, 7 of those spent abroad in China and Japan. He served as Academic Technology Coordinator at the the University of Colorado, Boulder and currently teaches and provides technology support at the University of Oregon. Email: russellmoon@gmail.com

REFLECTIONS ON USING MOBILE TECHNOLOGY: QUIZLET

Susan Gaer, Santa Ana College

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a research study with continuing education students conducted during the summer of 2014. The purpose was to determine exactly what the best process is for introducing mobile apps to this population. Quizlet, a mobile flashcard application, was introduced to high intermediate ESL adult students to discover if the students would engage and use this application to expand and improve their vocabulary. This study was done in order to see if students would not only use but also create their own electronic flash cards to enhance their study of vocabulary.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile technology can be seen as emerging because although it has been around since the early 1970's, mobile devices have evolved substantially in the last few years. As Ray Kurzweil said, "Mobile phones are misnamed. They should be called gateways to human knowledge" (quoted in Garg, 2013). This is the essence of why I believe mobile devices have so much potential as language-learning devices. They put knowledge in the hand of the user. With mobile technology, typical teacher tools no longer need to be carried from classroom to classroom. Mobile devices enable each student to enter the classroom equipped with a recorder, camera, word processor and a phone. Learning goals in ESL/EFL

are always related to learning how to communicate and the mobile device is a communicative device. Mobile learning environments are often called MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) (Hockly, 2013). There are many reasons for using MALL in second language learning. Since most students carry these devices around 24/7, they allow students to study when and where they want to (Kim, et al., 2013). Students have also reported an increase in ownership of their work and that they study more when teachers include mobile devices (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008).

Although people consider me to be an early adopter and I have already been successful in using mobile devices in the classroom, I wanted to see if I could get my students to use these devices to develop more autonomy in learning. The aim was for them to feel empowered and use these devices for language learning ultimately without teacher direction. According to Reindeers and Hubbard (2013), "for learners to be autonomous, they need to control access and not have that access control them...they need to develop knowledge and skills for selecting the best technology for particular learning objectives" (p. 11).

THE SCHOOL SETTING

I work at Santa Ana College in the School of Continuing Education. According to the 2010 US Census, Santa Ana is the 11th largest city in California with about 20% living below the poverty line. This is higher than most of California which averages about 15% below the poverty line (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0669000.html>). According to a Pew Research study, as of January 2014, 58% of Americans owned a smartphone. Even students with little access to other digital technology generally have a device (<http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/mobile-technology-fact-sheet/>). I was trying to provide my more mature learners with the ability to learn how to use these devices in learning English. I hoped to provide this population with social equity by using mobile technology as recommended by Traxler (2013), who stated that mobile devices are important for both language learning and equity and a "mobile and connected society" (p. 11).

This study was conducted in the summer of 2014 with two intermediate classes of about 15 students each. The class met 3 hours a day for 9 weeks in an open entry/open exit enrollment system, meaning that students can enter and exit the class at any time during the semester. The teachers in these programs thus need to be incredibly flexible and recycle material on a regular basis. The school has no computer lab for students but does have access to computers in the classroom with two configurations; a one computer classroom or a ten computer classroom. Typical classes are usually 40 students per class, and it is difficult to teach students how to use technology when there are so few computers for so many students. Grading is not done in a traditional manner; instead, multiple measures are used to determine when a student is ready to move to the next level. Multiple measures include testing, classroom work and participation, teacher and qualitative evaluation. Most students in the continuing education system work between 40–60 hours a week and therefore have very little time to spend doing work outside of the class. In addition, if students do not feel like they are learning, they quickly stop coming and this affects funding for the class. In terms of technical support, the school provides wireless access on campus.

The Students

The class used in this study was the highest level ESL class that the school offers: high intermediate. Because of their work schedules, most of the students indicated that they had very little time outside of class to do homework. I had about 30 students in the two classes who ranged in age from 18 to 75. These classes were small compared to the school's average class size. due to the fact that it was summer session. It therefore seemed the ideal time to try something new. Based on a survey done in my class in summer 2013, 90% of the class had digital devices, but only 50 percent of that 90% had wireless access for those devices. For approximately 10% of the students the wireless devices were the only digital devices that student had access to, as they did not own a landline or a computer. The students had a wide variety of devices including iPhones, Android phones, tablets and laptops that they carried to class. Often these devices had no paid

service and students availed themselves of free Wi-Fi located in coffeehouses, in their workplaces and at school. Students used their devices as their sole communication devices, and in most cases were quite proficient in texting in their native languages. About half had access to computers, but since there was only one computer per household, (average household has 4+ people in it) these computers were often used only by the children in the family for school purposes.

The Problem

The summer class was a 9-week class of 12 hours per week. This is a much shorter period of time than the school's traditional semester of 13–16 weeks. So, I worried that with the reduction of classroom hours, students would not progress through the level. I really wanted to find a way to engage them to learn while they were not in the classroom. The class was a multi-skill class but I had decided to focus on improving their vocabulary to increase their reading ability. Previous research has indicated that reading improvement requires internalization of contextualized vocabulary (Anderson, 2012).

The Intervention

I decided that one of the best ways to help students to internalize vocabulary was to use "spaced learning" to review and practice vocabulary learning. In the specific form of spaced learning I used, long term memory is created in spaced intervals where study is done with a 10-minute break for three intervals, resulting in better learning (Kelley and Whatson, 2013). In my adaptation, I asked the students to study the cards for 10 minutes then take a break and to do this three times a day.

To increase autonomy in learning, I decided to experiment with Quizlet, a flashcard program that is available on all mobile platforms as well as on the computer to improve students' vocabulary (see also Cunningham, this volume). Quizlet was appropriate because it would allow students to study vocabulary learned in class, was easy to use, and provided audio for students to study previously learned vocabulary. Quizlet also had an offline

version, so that students could download flashcard sets (a group of flash cards on a given topic) on their phone while connected to the school wireless, but study at home offline. In previous semesters, students had indicated that they did not use paper flash cards because they were too hard to study on the go. Under the assumption that more study outside of class would improve their vocabulary, I wanted to see whether if I made this tool easily available to students, they actually would use these flashcard sets autonomously. Through surveys and Quizlet's tracking feature, I hoped to find an answer.

THE PROCESS

I started off by modeling Quizlet. I showed students how to download the app on their phones. Then I had students make accounts using either their Google, Facebook or email accounts. Everyone easily got the accounts. I next had students find the class where I had previously created a set of cards ready for them to use. Because I believe in the importance of modeling, for the first month I had planned on creating sets for them related to class readings. Readings included life skills (such as home/car safety), current events and short literature and fiction. Vocabulary words were determined by having students highlight unknown words in a reading selection. I would then compile the list and create the sets in Quizlet. During the first week of class, I developed a paper survey (Figure 1) which I gave to all students in the class.

1) Have you downloaded the app?	Yes	No	
2) Did you get an account?	Yes	No	
3) Did you join the class?	Yes	No	
4) How often do you review the cards?	Every day	Once a week	Never
5) Do you feel that Quizlet is helping you use vocabulary?	Yes	No	
6) When was the last time you looked at a Quizlet set?	_____		
7) What else would you like to add:	_____		

Figure 1. Quizlet Survey

Within the first two weeks of this project, I had to be absent from the class for one week. One of my students offered to help me by being a “vocabulary manager”. Her job was to gather the list of vocabulary that the class had and send them to me via email so that I could make the sets. While I was away, she offered to create the sets for me. I made her an administrator on the account and was extremely excited because this is exactly what I had wanted to happen. However, she was quickly overwhelmed finding definitions as she describes in the following email. Note that this and other student emails reported in the paper are taken verbatim.



On Jul 1, 2014, at 11:05 PM,

Hi Ms. Susan,

I am done with today vocabulary. But I am sorry, seem I cant take this work anymore.

Let me explain to you. I don't know how to drive car then I have to ride my bike from my house in Westminster to our school (I am learning to drive car during weekend now and I hope I can get license soon). It take me 4 hours riding bike everyday . It wasted a lot of my time. I also take 3 English classes in our School from 10:30 to 6pm everyday and 1 more English class in Westminster Church.

I have to leave home early morning and back home arroun 8 pm, after having dinner, take bath and do some housework, I don't have time much later. Our class learn very fast. There are a lot of vocabulary, I have to remember word, meaning and pronunciation. That is a lot of work. I am sorry to say that but I cant remember all vocabulary and do all homework. Since I take this Quizlet work, it take me more time and I cant do any homework. I know it is good for me too but my problem is time. If I drive car, I will have 3 hours more to do all of this then it would be ok.

I guess I have to study intermediate 3 again in next Season (Fall Season). I want to study it well and remember all of words, grammar...in this book. I don't want to pass the test but I just can learn 55% of it or maybe less. Because my purpose is I am able to study in College later.

I really like Quizlet, it is very useful. If you want, I still can make list of vocabulary on Quizlet but no definition. Could you please ask other people do it for me?

I am sorry for making you disappointed. I hope you will understand.

This was the first time I thought about how difficult it must be for students to find definitions of words. I had thought that empowering students to create definitions would help them become more autonomous, but the difficulty of the process made it too difficult. One of the other things I noticed is that it didn't seem like students were using the sets I made. Quizlet keeps statistics of sets studied. The survey showed that most of the students had accounts and had joined my class, and that they were all using it. But according to the Quizlet stats, that was not the case. I told this to the class and one student mentioned that unless you actually used the LEARN button on the app, it didn't track your stats. See the email below sent from one of my students.

I often review vocabulary Quizlet every day to learn vocabulary and pronunciation, it is great, i like it a lot. Thank you very much for giving us such a amazing useful English website. I know u feel disappointed because u work very hard on it but seem not many people study on Quizlet. There is 1 thing u should know that if i dont click on "learn" button then u cant see that i had learnt this lesson. I guess that is reason u did not see many people learn it but actually they did, they just didn't click on learn button. We didnt play game on Quizlet because learning vocabulary and pronunciation took a lot of our time. No more time for game : (

I think that it is very interesting that the student was able to point out that there was a mismatch between tracked data and student use. Fischer (2007) notes this sort of mismatch as a problem with student self-reporting, but this case importantly shows that the performance of the tracking technology can be responsible for the mismatch as well.

Two weeks later, I did the survey again, but this time I gave it online using *Google Forms*. I sent the survey out during the weekend and got five immediate responses. 15 students took the online survey. I gave the survey twice in July at the beginning and end of the month. Each time I gave the survey a few students surfaced and explained their problems. One student got the account the first day with me, but forgot his email that he used so he couldn't access it on the computer. He also couldn't make sets. Another student finally confessed that she had no email account. So I helped her access free email. It appeared that the survey itself served as a way to get students to reflect about their own experiences as both times I gave the survey, problems or possible solutions to problems were expressed by the class. By the end of the summer semester, I had a total of 30 students using the sets I had created. I also noticed that student data showed increased use of Quizlet as the summer went on.

REFLECTION

I have to say that nine weeks is a very short time, but in that time I had exactly 1/3 of the class use Quizlet for their own purposes. This would suggest two things. First, it seems that they hadn't known of the educational potential for using mobile devices and that this project made them aware of this. Second, once students learn about an app that works on their devices, they can try to use it autonomously once they understand its potential. For example, two students showed me how they were using Quizlet sets to study medical terminology (they were doctors and were studying in my class to learn enough English to take the Medical exam) by using the Quizlet translation feature. I had not told students that they could translate their sets as I was trying to get them to function in English, but they figured this out by themselves in another example of using autonomy. Another student created audio cards to study on the go, by recording her Quizlet translations into an MP3 file. She did this by opening the Quizlet on the computer and pressing record on her phone button to record the Quizlet continuously on her phone. The student indicated that because she had to flip through the cards on the phone app, she could not do this while driving. That is why she recorded the Quizlet as an MP3 file. She suggested that other students should do this as well. She also used the translation tool. She made more than 15 of her own sets for different points, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary on Quizlet. This is a very innovative way of using Quizlet, extending it as a pronunciation tool as well as a vocabulary tool.

I believe that these observations can be classified as success. In addition, students did use the sets that I developed. I received a few emails about this like the following:

Thank you Susan , I practiced on Quizlet program and very excited . This hepl me to remember words a lot .It is including listening , writing , and reading too .

Have a nice day

Interestingly enough, although at the end of the class 15 students had taken the online survey, 7 more students took the survey after the class was over. So access to the online version increased my data showing that students are using the sets and thinking about the survey even after the class is over. This is a major success because they are still using Quizlet sets even though the class is over and their autonomy has increased in the knowledge that they could take the survey on their own without teacher direction.

Although the focus of this paper is a reflection on the use of Quizlet on students' personal mobile devices, based on my experience I would like to offer tips to other teachers who would like to explore having students use any apps on their mobile devices for language learning. For this purpose, I would like to recommend some basic guidelines:

- 1) Model the use of target applications that you want students to use in the classroom and have students participate with you.
- 2) Be certain students have an email account
- 3) Avail students of wireless access points both on campus and off. Many cafes and public places often have Free Wi-Fi.
- 4) Have chargers available for students so that in case their devices are not charged when you model the activity, they can charge their phone in the classroom.
- 5) Keep in electronic touch with students often during the implementation of a new application.
- 6) Give students positive feedback frequently but also inquire about barriers using the app. Try to help students overcome the barriers by giving them immediate help and feedback.
- 7) Be careful not to embarrass students and be discreet when showing them how to access basic resources on their device.
- 8) Don't let frustration prevent you from using mobile devices. Many students have not used mobile devices for language learning before. Although they might look proficient (using dictionaries, translation tools and texting), they most likely don't know the power of their device in language learning.

CONCLUSION

Mobile Devices are powerful learning tools. Although most students carry such devices, they don't really understand how to harness the technology to increase language learning. Results from my study confirm this, as students were not using their devices for learning beyond translation when I first started this study. Teachers need to help students to use their devices more strategically to scaffold learning. Activities that teachers need to include on a regular basis would benefit by regular modeling, allowing students to return regular feedback via surveys, journals or group discussion and continually adapting application use according to ongoing student evaluation. Teachers should not assume that students know how to use applications just based on surface observations such as seeing students use the device translator or texting. I believe for the population of students I had, that if I continue using Quizlet as a vocabulary-learning tool, the students will eventually become comfortable enough to use the tool more autonomously. Through apps that are easy to use, fit your learning objectives and teaching style with appropriate modeling, and consistent practice, English language learners will engage with learning both inside and outside of the classroom by use of their mobile devices.

A final note: Two weeks into the fall 2014 semester, I had 44 students registered on Quizlet. By December 2015, I had 83 students actively using my Quizlet class. Perhaps this very reflection taught me how to better engage students with their devices as a language learning tool.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Gaer is a Professor at Santa Ana College School of Continuing Education. She has co-authored books and teacher manuals and is currently the Series Consultant, Project Success, Pearson ELT. She holds a master's degree in English with emphasis in TESOL from San Francisco State University and a master's degree in Educational Technology from Pepperdine University. Email: susangaer@gmail.com

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CLASSROOM RESEARCH: A SOCIAL LEARNING SITE IN THE TEENAGE CLASSROOM

Helen Legge, British Council Milan, Italy

Marion Odell, British Council Milan, Italy

ABSTRACT

In this article we discuss an activity designed to engage and extend learning and language practice outside the classroom through the use of a social learning site (Edmodo) within a year-long project to trial the platform with young learners. Edmodo is a type of educational resource which can help teachers meet the demands of students who, in our particular European context, are increasingly connected and social learners. We describe the activity, which combined a murder mystery EFL game with a timed messaging Edmodo feature, and reflect upon its success with a view to refining our own teaching practice and developing new and more effective tasks.

INTRODUCTION

The use of technology in teaching is evolving rapidly, as the recent explosion of apps, online tools and social media use in education demonstrates. In many European schools some integration of tablets, smart phones and computers in the language classroom is now the norm. Many courses are delivered as online solutions or

contain elements of blended online learning, such as extra online homework activities. Our teaching reality is no different with our school pushing to engage learners with all means possible inside the classroom, while extending our reach outside the time spent in the classroom in order to enable learning to take place when it is most convenient to the learner.

The question of whether the learners who are growing up in this technological shift are also changing as a result of this digital wave, has been discussed by several authors and have been referred to with new terms, such as 'Millennials', 'Generation Y/Z' and 'digital natives'. Prensky (Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, 2001) believes that these learners prefer learning through networking and collaboration, which is an idea shared by many, although others debate that this may be a convenient myth and bound only to a limited few, more aptly referred to as the 'digital elite' (Brown and Czerniewicz, 2010). It may also be that the ever-connected, digital generation have grown accustomed to obtaining immediate information and have grown impatient with other forms of information gathering and that naturally there will be a preference for them to use what is familiar in order to learn. It is also possibly an example of Oblinger's (2003) "Information-age mind-set" which suggests that students who have grown up with technology differ in aptitude from those who have not. Teachers could abandon the new generation of learners to technological tools without the guidance or skills that they need to use them appropriately, if they do not take the technological aspect of our society into account when delivering lessons. The idea that this generation has an innate ability to use technology is somewhat extreme, but it cannot be denied that they have grown up in a technological world and they approach technological tools with enthusiasm or, more importantly, without fear. Harnessing this enthusiasm and readiness appropriately can surely facilitate learning opportunities.

Following a concerted push to incorporate elements of mobile learning in our EFL classroom, a school policy was created for use of a social learning site (SLS), in our case Edmodo, as a homework 'catch up' tool with all adult classes, where each class has an online space to interact and post what had been covered in each

lesson. Teachers could choose to integrate the site further, but this was entirely optional. Selected young learner classes also participated on an experimental basis. One year on, though we had many moments of success, it is apparent that there is a lot more to successful ICT integration than simply a decision to use it. Using Edmodo was surprisingly challenging for two main reasons. Firstly, the teenage students involved, who we had assumed were so-called “digital natives”, did not demonstrate the interactive skills needed to complete the online tasks. Was this an example of the need for taught critical thinking and analytical skills, which has been observed recently in our context (Calvani, Fini, Ranieri & Picci, 2012)? It may be true that teenagers have an ability to handle devices and online tools which are designed to be extremely user-friendly, but we mistook this for an encompassing ability to manage all technological environments and this did not prove to be the case. Add the lack of experience for most younger students in online interaction beyond sharing statuses and selfies with friends and family, and the result was that our expectations were pitched too high.

Secondly, we assumed that our own enthusiasm and interest in the idea would be shared by our students and that they would diligently participate in online activities, respecting our usage policy, while embracing this 21st century approach in the classroom. In reality, we often struggled to engage learner interest in Edmodo and found it was not easy to set up successful, productive activities. Clearly, even highly experienced teachers need carefully targeted training to transfer their teaching skills from the traditional classroom to an online learning environment such as an SLS, even when the use of such an environment is only an extension of classroom activity, not the principal hub where learning takes place. It must be noted that our students had signed up for traditional face-to-face courses and that the Edmodo project was a simple extension of this into an online environment, but that at the time of writing this article, our school does not offer blended courses. We believe this contrast between student expectations of what the course would offer and the actual integration of that digital tool could have been a key element of the sporadic success we had. Another point to add is that students

self-organised quickly at the start of the course and had already set up their own exchange for homework using a popular mobile app. Perhaps this too contributed to the lack of interaction on Edmodo.

It became apparent through our monthly catch up meetings with other teachers involved on the project, that what makes the integration of any ICT tool successful is the same as what makes any activity successful. There needs to be a clearly explained objective; students must be clear on how to carry out an activity so there must also be instructions; expectations regarding interaction and feedback must be carefully set; there must be a way to collect and monitor student output; finally and importantly, the activity must be relevant and engaging.

Although, as experienced teachers, our school provided no training in task creation in online learning, our self-directed, MOOC-filled professional development gave us an edge and the enthusiasm to approach the use of Edmodo with sufficient skills and knowledge to create productive episodes with our classes. One such episode is described in the following section.

ACTIVITY, IDEAS, OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN

The best example of how we integrated the valuable elements of Edmodo on the year-long experiment can be seen in a game-like activity one of the authors (Marion) set up for her students half-way through the English course. Although gaming and gamification of learning is quite a hot topic in current teaching circles, games for English language learning are not new. As a result, the transition from paper-based game resources to digital gamification may not be difficult for those EFL teachers who are already familiar with gamification in the language classroom, and the activity below shows how easily traditional EFL games can be hosted in an online environment. Game play in learning seems to provide a safe and motivating method of consolidating language and evaluating progress (Reinders and Wattana, 2014). One particular gamification aspect which is increasingly being integrated in education is the use of badges (see Ahn, Pellicone and Butler, 2014 for a recent evaluation) which is also a feature

offered on Edmodo and which we made use of across the project to reward and motivate students for both linguistic and non-linguistic participation.

Designing the Activity

Edmodo offers a timed messaging function which allows messages to be prepared beforehand and set to post to the class at a specific time chosen by the teacher. This tool is contained in the 'Note' feature and involves choosing a delivery time\date from a drop down calendar. It is a very simple tool which is often used for sending reminders about class work and homework.

The delayed release of information creates a situation where students have time between posts to develop theories and to respond, but also offers the opportunity of instant feedback from peers and the teacher in a very similar way to Facebook. It engages the students outside the classroom, in their private domain, blurring the lines between learning inside and outside the classroom (Stockwell, 2013).

This timed messaging feature was used to redeploy an activity called "Elementary dear Watson", (Hadfield, 1987, p. 22) from which the short reading for a case study and 20 clues were programmed into the timed messaging function. Delivering small chunks of information every 4 hours through the SLS, which provides both app notifications to the students' phones and email notifications, it acted as a push mechanism, stimulating activity at strategic intervals (Stockwell, 2013). Students were asked to interact with the information and each other using the language structures presented during class (modals of deduction) in order to discuss the murder mystery and to develop hypotheses to discover who the murderer was. One added bonus of using the Edmodo app on a mobile device was that students had more flexibility as to when and how they could engage with the content.

In order to accommodate different preferences for online communication, students who were less comfortable with the public and social aspect of the activity were invited to simply show their presence as readers by using the "reaction" buttons on Edmodo. There were also the options of leaving a smiley or a

short comment in agreement with someone else. This meant that there was a core number of active students leading and initiating the activity alongside another group of more passive learners. This allowed the quieter students to have less intimidating channels for expression and to participate in a less noticeable fashion. The teacher judged this to be a fair representation of class time and also a similar interaction pattern to that of other social media and it met the objective of exposing students to real, engaging language practice, both active and passive in nature. The previously mentioned social preference of this generation of learners was the driving factor behind choosing to combine the linguistic aim of the task with the relevant 21st century skill sets, such as collaboration and problem solving, on the SLS, in order to provide students with both what we believe they want (social learning) and what we believe they need (language practice) as learners.

Objectives

Surprisingly, during the first year of Edmodo use, we had noticed difficulty in fostering extracurricular student activity in the project as a whole. Students were not using Edmodo to engage with each other fully and their activity was limited to posting homework and checking for teacher feedback. Initially we had hoped that interactive activity would have developed naturally on the site, going beyond the basic requirements of catching up on homework. Once we realized there was not going to be spontaneous interaction, we discussed strategies with the other teachers to overcome the issue, analysing our task creation and how to motivate students to interact more. Clearly the added benefit of creating a healthy online learning community was that students would be able to learn from each other, become autonomous and more frequently engaged with language content through mobile access, but this did not happen so easily.

The group of English learners involved in this specific activity were at an age where they were legally permitted to create online networks (age 13+) and should be aware of benefits from using them. They were at a CEFR B1.2 level and were 14–18 years old. The mixed age group (and typical teenage-related reserves) was probably part of the reason it was difficult to convince students to

engage naturally with each other. As Reinders and Wattana (2014) mention, perceived linguistic competence and social confidence affects a learner's willingness to communicate and this is no different in an online context. Our students met in a face-to-face class twice a week and most learners had a very demanding homework schedule with their high school, again factors which are likely to have affected levels of participation. The teaching objective of the activity was to give extended and more natural practice of the language point, modal verbs of deduction. The aim was to engage them for about 30 minutes in chunks between one lesson and another.

This activity was to be completed as homework and the rationale behind the specific interaction was to promote continued interaction over a longer period of time, rather than one homework session, to keep the use of English between lessons at a more sustained pace. Students were expected to comment on the input provided by the teacher and on each other's contributions and this was clearly communicated at the beginning of the activity.

TASK COMPLETION AND REFLECTIONS

Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) suggest social context is a prime learning factor for our learners, the so-called "net generation" (net gen) saying, "the net gen often prefers to learn and work in teams. A peer-to-peer approach is common, as well, where students help each other" (Ch. 2, p. 7). A social learning system is, by definition, catering for the supposed preferences of the new generation of learners in our own teaching context, Brown and Czerniewicz's (2010) "digital elite". In fact, our learners were very enthusiastic when presented with the task for homework. This took very little time to set up as they were already familiar with the platform and already had the app installed on their mobile devices since we had been running the project for a few months when this activity was introduced. They seemed to understand the expectations for interaction and task completion. About two hours after one face-to-face lesson, the case study was published with instructions. Students responded quite well to the task, using the structures

introduced and interacting naturally; however, some students used less challenging language structures and more limited contributions (see Figure 1) which made a hovering online teacher presence necessary.

With careful teacher guidance and prompt feedback on posts and structures, the target language being produced at the end of the activity was notably better than that produced at the start of the activity (Figure 1). Contributions were longer and more complex and it was clear that students were engaging with each other and the task (see Figure 2). There was evidence of appropriate and mature social interaction for real communication despite the contrived circumstances.

One reservation about this activity was that by trying to promote natural language usage through what was essentially a controlled practice activity, off-target language which was correct and sometimes more natural was underlined for correction. This was at odds with the idea of spontaneous communication and raised questions about how this kind of activity, while aiming to promote natural exchange, tended to limit and, at times, censure, precisely that natural exchange. When designing the task, we needed to clearly decide whether the focus of the task was on accuracy or fluency and needed to communicate this clearly to students. Once again, this could have been clearly stated in a rubric. From reflecting on this specific activity, we felt that teacher intervention and correction in an SLS environment would be an interesting area to investigate further.

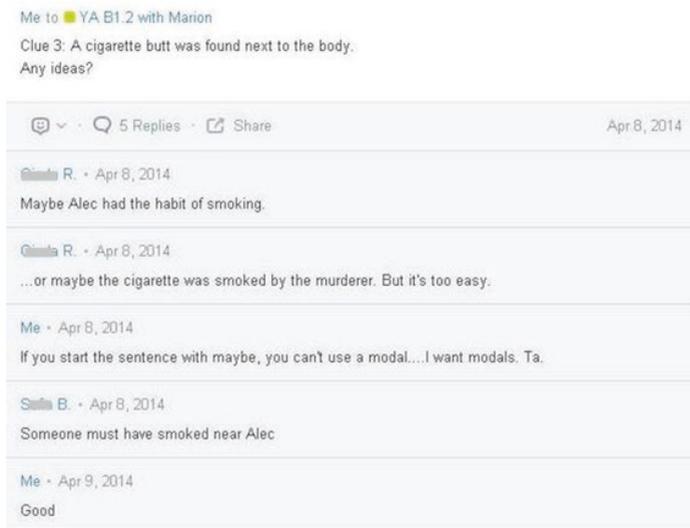


Figure 1. An example of student reaction early in the activity. Here the target structures are uncertainly wielded, student contributions are brief and teacher presence is evident.



Figure 2. Example of the exchanges between students after two days of practice with the target language. There is more natural interaction and the target structures are clearly consolidated. Students show signs of interacting with each other using structures for agreement.

Upon reflection of this particular task, it would have been useful to provide students with a language checklist and task rubric with specific examples of what was expected to complete the task. An extremely simple example of such a rubric can be seen below in Figure 3, although we have not yet tested this on our students:

Murder Mystery Task.	
Focus: Modal verbs of deduction (accuracy: the teacher will give feedback on your use of these grammar structures)	
Interaction: You will comment with your ideas and respond to at least two of your classmates' comments.	
Expected structures: These show you are able to apply the structures we have learnt in class.	Unacceptable structures: These are structures which avoid the use of the grammar we have learnt in class.
The victim <i>must have known</i> the murderer	
The murderer <i>could have gone</i> out the window.	
Mr X <i>can't have killed</i> him because...	
<i>Maybe</i> Miss X killed him.	
He <i>probably</i> knew.	
The killer <i>didn't leave</i> by the door.	

Figure 3. Example rubric

Although in this example, the teacher was able to guide students to correct their own language by being ever present and rather heavy handed, the three aspects of objective setting, instruction giving, and online presence are areas where we have perceived the strongest need for training in the field of online teaching. The effectiveness of our strong teacher presence may demonstrate the teacher control element Hubbard (2004) mentions in his discussion on learner control in an online environment, where the clarity of higher teacher control can make novice (or rather, in our case *younger*) learners more comfortable learning online. Although we have the skills for setting up tasks in a face to face classroom where instructions can be checked, and the teacher can monitor how the task develops and also where students can observe peers and clarify their progress, we noticed that the online environment requires a more careful approach to communicating expectations

and providing specific examples of what is required. Students access the tasks as remote individuals and the opportunity to check understanding with peers is limited, if existent at all. In agreement with observations made by Reinders and Wattana (2014) on promoting willingness to communicate, the result of uncertainty in the areas mentioned above leads to a higher risk of losing face which is an important cultural factor in our teaching context and which could affect participation levels. Moreover, the lack of paralinguistic signals which aid communication in a face-to-face context, are entirely absent in this asynchronous, forum-style online interaction. The dependence on linguistic ability alone could also contribute to reluctance to post comments.

From a teacher point of view, over the length of the project we increasingly realized that online task participation is heavily influenced by the teacher presence. If we want an activity to be successful, we need to be frequently present during its progression, interacting with posters and encouraging contributions. On the whole, all teachers commented that they found interaction was more productive when the teacher was more involved. Just as a teacher guides activity and learning in a face-to-face classroom, the same needs to happen in the online learning environment. However, due to the abovementioned obstacles to participation, we feel that the teacher also needs to pay careful attention to how tasks can be adapted to best suit this more challenging environment in order to motivate and guide student production. It must be remembered that this was an experiment which came from the teachers involved, not from a management decision, and that no formal training had been offered to deal with it. We applied knowledge we had gained from external sources and combined it with our teaching experience, adapting our behaviour as we went through the year. Our experience directly influenced how we now set up tasks in the Edmodo environment and allowed us to pre-empt many issues with successive classes, with more success.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it might have been easier to set up and sustain an activity of this type as part of a clearly mapped blended learning module where online learning habits are expected and structured. However, this experiment did lead to our objective of increased student engagement outside the classroom and there was also a clear improvement in the use of target language structures. In terms of developing and promoting independent learning, students manifested a clear interest in online interactions of this type for future learning opportunities, which supports our initial point about harnessing their enthusiasm for learning through these kinds of tools. This is clear from a survey which was carried out towards the end of the course with feedback such as “I liked it a lot. It’s a new way of learning”, “It’s a great way to do our homework” and “I’d like to use it more!”. By the end of the activity, students were interacting as much with each other as with the teacher, though they did not tend to turn to peers for correction and evaluation – another aspect which could be investigated further alongside carefully communicated expectations and rubrics. On the whole, the activity was successful although it needed intensive care to guarantee this success. This kind of *intensive care* is not always sustainable where teacher workload and enthusiasm are key influencing factors. There should therefore be ongoing teacher training in creative task design with relevant linguistic goals, culturally meaningful and relevant content and support for teachers who are starting out in this area.

The success of tasks of this type depends on a number of methodological factors, including effective instruction giving, encouragement, and timely and realistic feedback from peers and teachers. To this end we also highlight the need to provide clear expectations of student and teacher interactions at the start of the activity, perhaps by providing an easily accessible task rubric and language checklist for students and teacher to refer to. If there are clear language goals and communication objectives, there is less reluctance to take part as the risk of losing face is reduced. There is also less need for intensive teacher activity with

the result that teacher presence can be limited to a monitoring and encouraging role, leading to students being more inclined to engage in freer communication.

A final word should be made about our social context. The majority of students come from a section of society which has easy access to internet and mobile devices; however, this activity could readily be adapted to make it more accessible to students and schools with more limited technological resources. Email releases or text messages could be used, or even a central website or blog which students simply need to have access to in order to formulate the hypotheses, writing diary inserts using the target language which could then be discussed and compared in class.

FINAL REMARKS

What went well: The Edmodo feature permitted successful delivery and completion of the task set, adding an element of mystery and interest to the task. We noticed that the students used language structures which were appropriate to the learning objectives when supported by the teacher. The students were enthusiastic about the use of the platform and engaged when offered encouragement and support.

What did not go well: Some students chose to participate in the task without focusing on the required language elements, although this improved when the teacher pointed it out. Students also responded to the teacher and the task, but not to each other.

Thinking about this experience, we believe that many of the issues could be resolved through better task design, integrating a task rubric which clearly demonstrates acceptable and unacceptable language use, what the teacher is looking for, and what will or will not be corrected. A rubric would also set specific expectations for student-teacher and student-student interaction, improving linguistic and interactive development as a result.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Helen Legge is a teacher and coordinator at the British Council with 15 years of experience in the Young Learner and Adult classroom. Over the past few years, she has been focusing on integrating learning technologies into her lessons and for teacher training. She is enthusiastic about online education with an interest in the benefits of communities for professional development for teachers. Email: helen.legge@britishcouncil.it

Marion Odell has taught for 17 years in Milan and experienced in great depth the many EFL contexts in this complex city, from corporate training to very young learners at the British Council. She has been exploring technology in the classroom for many years and is now trying to motivate colleagues and students to do the same. She herself is enjoying learning from the exciting world of online courses and MOOCS. Email: marion.odell@britishcouncil.it

FACEBOOK GROUPS: A TOOL FOR WRITING ENHANCEMENT AND LANGUAGE SKILLS EMPOWERMENT

Grazzia María Mendoza, Zamorano University, Honduras

ABSTRACT

Technology for learning proves effective when it caters to students' needs and interests. Based on the language learning needs encountered in our institutional context, Facebook (FB) groups proved relevant due to their engagement scenarios and because they provided additional exposure to the L2 for skill improvement. This paper reflects on success and challenges of the use of FB groups and results obtained related to writing and overall language enhancement. It shows student empowerment in learning and language skills improvement. Particularly it shows how FB groups can be a useful resource for language skills development through varied activities and set-ups.

INTRODUCTION

Technology addresses students' interests while learning not because of technology itself but due to experiences provided (Podolski, 2008). This statement becomes true for us at our private, agricultural university located in Honduras with a diverse student body from 20 different countries in Latin America. At Zamorano our students take English only three hours per week and have a heavy workload with half days of courses related to

their major and half days of working modules where they learn-by-doing in diverse work plants like dairy, meat, and aquaculture. As a consequence, and because they are required to learn English as a second language, we have had to search for different ways of continuous exposure to the language without adding to their already hefty academic load. One of the solutions considered was technology since it is readily available for our learners in our context. All students have a computer, broad bandwidth internet in their dorms and classrooms, smartphones, and/or tablets. Based on the conditions stated, the decision was made that technological platforms would be the means to allow learners to enhance their language skills when not in the English classroom. After all, the only way to learn a language is to live it and breathe it.

Since the aim was to select the right technological tools to aid our academic work, we focused specifically on tools and platforms appropriate for academic settings, like Ning and Wikispaces. The type of challenges encountered in the initial stage in 2009, were that students continuously lost their passwords, they had trouble setting up the account even with tutorials, there were limits on uploads, editing could become a hassle at certain points, but most importantly the motivation aspect was lacking due to unattractive platform graphics for our student population, whose ages ranged from 16 to 24. In addition, some initially free platforms became paid programs. During the next step of our search we found Facebook (FB) and its group feature. We decided on FB as it meant all the issues mentioned before were solved and students were already engaged in the tool because they used it regularly for entertainment. The focus now was academic, which put FB into a totally different perspective and hopefully would benefit learners and teachers.

The realization of our project began in 2010 with a pilot group. This group was designed strictly for testing and validating FB groups as a learning tool. Some of the aspects in which we worked were learning about settings, learning potential and collaboration, schedules and tasks, coherent assessment, but most importantly to establish the impact on students and their response towards learning with the tool. In order to have a clear notion of what we wanted to accomplish during the pilot course

we worked on different aspects during this initial process, such as: (a) manuals with guidelines regarding specific settings required, which described how to set up the group, the privacy settings to consider, and the way in which students would join the group, create usernames and respond to assignments, (b) different types of tasks (listening, writing, reading) that addressed learner needs in and course objectives, (c) different deadlines based on assignment and level of difficulty, (d) data collection tools to determine impact on student motivation: online and printed surveys, focus group interviews, and class discussions on the importance of the tool and relevance for student's learning.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The beginnings of the project were marked by an important need to understand how the features of the group worked and to consider several aspects related to the use of this type of tool for language learning. As stated by Wong (2009) using Facebook for academic settings has several pros and cons with privacy being one of the most important issues. As a consequence, and based on this research, we started to address the privacy aspect primarily, as this posed the greatest threat concerning use. In order to make sure students and teachers would not feel their confidential information was being shared, they were all taught how to protect and secure their FB accounts by setting the appropriate privacy filters. We also made sure that the FB groups were closed or secret/restricted, this helped keep away spammers and/or unknown users outside from each of the academic groups. To be sure all participants had clarity on these guidelines, tutorials were designed for all those involved, and these were shared constantly until privacy protection became a habit for everybody. We have emphasized following guidelines to guarantee not only security of personal information but also a comfortable online working ambience.

One of the reasons for setting up a pilot group was to measure the level of attitude and reaction of the students to the platform. It was necessary to determine how collaboration could be generated, define which tasks would create more impact,

and regulate assessment of both the impact and the academic development of the process. For this purpose, we created simple assignments: (a) Watch a video and reflect on what it means to you as a professional in the field of agriculture, (b) read the following quote and determine what the author meant by it and how it relates to you personally, or (c) read the following article and make a connection to your field of study. These were simple tasks, which generated responses we could assess based on rubric indicators. As the project evolved we moved on to more complicated tasks that implied collaboration.

Step 1 – Watch the video, read the article, and write a comment giving your opinion.

Step 2 – After several comments have been posted by your peers, choose two and reply to them stating whether you agree or disagree with the opinion stated. Be sure to check back on their replies to your comment and reply if necessary.

This was a bit more complex, and required more planning and attention from the students. We finally created the really complex tasks where they were required to read, reflect and post a comment using different genres of writing: (a) factual, (b) opinion, (c) descriptive, (d) persuasive, and (e) argumentative. The purposes of all of these tasks were to establish guidelines for writing assignments and decide areas that we wanted to focus on: spelling, punctuation, format, genre content, fluency of written discourse, transitions, coherence, and cohesion, as well as how each task would be assessed and how the rubrics would be designed to address course objectives.

After the assignment completion phase was done, we needed feedback from the students. So we developed several surveys, online and in print, where we discussed aspects related to what they preferred, their opinions on assignments, their feelings towards using the tool outside the classroom, and how they considered this new process influenced their learning of the language. Afterwards, in focus groups, we asked similar questions. To close the triangulation process we obtained information from class discussions and comments on reflective FB posts.

This initial pilot work was not graded. The intention was to allow learners to become familiar with tasks and obtain their feedback, and in addition it allowed teacher's reflection on what worked or not. With all the information obtained, we were able to make several relevant decisions that would allow FB to be the tool to enhance writing and learn the language, letting us include it as authentic assessment within our writing evaluation system.

THE ACADEMIC WORK AND RUBRICS FOR ASSESSMENT

The academic work in the FB groups was originally piloted for writing. It was meant to be the space where students would reinforce their writing by integrating skills in the form of tasks related to reading varied articles, listening to a variety of videos or reading comments and reflections from peers. As the work progressed, posts were designed around intended outcomes, writing genre studied and assignment guidelines. Tasks were guided by the syllabus outcomes and teaching objectives, integrated listening and reading to writing, and had as their ultimate purpose to allow practice and development of writing outside of the classroom context. Writing focused on three important areas throughout a year: the basic paragraph, the traditional five-paragraph essay, and finally encouraging writing without a limit of paragraphs, while adhering to coherence and cohesion in written discourse plus effective use of transitions.

To assess the work, a series of rubrics were designed. Performance indicators included elements related to the 6+1 traits of writing (Education Northwest, 1984): (a) ideas, (b) organization, (c) voice, (d) word choice, (e) sentence fluency, (f) conventions and (g) presentation. We also considered aspects pertaining to critical thinking, coherence and cohesion, establishing connections with prior knowledge and reflective processes directed to problem solving and creation of ideas for their contexts. Rubrics were different depending on the language level taught. During this process it was interesting to find out that providing the rubric to students ahead of time not only allowed them to be aware of what was expected of them (Jackson and Larkin, 2002), but also helped them focus on the topic and write coherent comments.

One important aspect of all the work developed is that collaboration was made possible for students of all years, since in the FB groups there are freshmen, sophomore and junior students interacting. Moreover, this diversity brought into the groups varied perspectives on one topic and thereby helped develop values such as respect for others' opinions, tolerance of diversity, team work, and empathy to different real life situations, as by-products of the original objectives. This became evident and continued to develop as we tried joint projects with students from the different years promoting collaboration on problem solving tasks and different assignments. The project has generated a rich environment appropriate for learning and interacting.

THE LEARNING CURVE OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

These four years have been an interesting learning experience as users of FB groups for teaching. We have noticed that students are more aware of their use of English when they are not in the classroom. At the end of every year we usually run statistics of performance, which level students begin at and what level they reach by the end of a certain period, the scores they have in the different areas listening, reading and writing, and how this connects to the overall grade score or performance. When we have statistically compared scores previous to 2010 with present ones we have found an increase in performance as evidenced by grades, but most importantly by their use of the language. In addition, we have noticed students are more motivated to learn and to speak in the language, and not only motivated to use it but to search for the appropriate usage. They have moved away from simply using it telegraphically both in writing and oral discourse, to writing and speaking with complete sentences and complete ideas. Their effort is seen and the hard work is continuously rewarded with the progress they make.

Statistically, data collected reflect how students registered in intermediate writing courses reach advanced skills after consistent work on the tool for a year. Based on results of pre-tests and post-tests (SLEP/TOEFL) for 2011 and 2012 we have seen students who

scored between 30–50% in their writing sections increase their scores in a year to a range of 65–75%, which means a 46–67% improvement. The overall scores went from a 65 in their SLEP score to a range of 75–85 or in TOEFL scores from 450 to 515–525, an approximate percentage rate of improvement of 15–30% in the SLEP scores and 14–16% of improvement in TOEFL scores. These results contrast past scores in 2007 and 2008 where we observed a rate of scores improvement in the writing sections of 13.8% and an overall score percentage of improvement of 22.8%. Along similar lines, engagement evaluated qualitatively based on comments from students in focus groups contrast with past feedback where English was seen as extra workload, a hassle and an unnecessary course. More specifically, writing was mentioned as a boring task they would never need in the future. After we started using the FB groups, only 10% percent of students involved stated that FB groups were ineffective for them and made them feel distracted or not engaged, as opposed to 90% who provided positive feedback and comments towards tasks and assignments, based on end of trimester and end of the year surveys and reflections.

Furthermore, with regards to the reflective aspect, students mentioned that the tool has allowed them 1) to be more careful of their writing since they are writing for others to see their comments; 2) to prepare for their reading audience; 3) to make critical, reflective comments which are relevant and suitable for the task; 4) to try over and over until their comment is ready to post, in order to guarantee appropriate spelling, punctuation, and grammar; and 5) to recognize that learning has become more relevant to them not only for their English course, but for their field of study in general, since they have been able to establish relevance and usefulness based on tasks developed.

In our opinion, and at our level of work and experience, we have to agree with Mak and Coniam (2008) and Wichadee (2010), who found a positive impact of wikis in writing production. For us, it has been a similar experience with FB groups as students let their creative side rise and their learning of what is taught in the classroom is evident. Their motivation for improvement is obvious as they complete tasks before or within deadlines: they revise, edit

and proofread their work, and are motivated to have an audience read through their work; hence, they prepare accordingly.

THE CHALLENGES

Every project has its challenges and we had our fair share of these. They included issues with teachers, with learners, with institutional policies, and with parents. Each of these is expanded on below.

In order to address challenges presented by teachers, we focused on one area at a time. At first a few teachers in the English area were not too eager to embrace FB as a tool for learning, basically for two reasons: privacy concerns and a lack of confidence in using the technology. Privacy as mentioned before was addressed by creating tutorials, clearly outlining how to protect privacy and set FB accounts to restrict information and allow them to share only what was necessary in order to complete the process. Their low level of knowledge of technology was addressed by designing one-on-one mini-workshops to teach the fundamentals when it came to using the tool. Teachers who were more proficient in the use of the tool provided tips and tricks on its use, gave guidelines on how to search for readings and relevant activities that connected to the course objectives, and offered insights on best practices when using technology. Finally, in order to get them to buy into the project, the pilot was created and based on the work done, tasks, resources and aspects in general were worked out to guarantee success.

With regards to learners from indigenous areas who lacked technological skills we designed a special computer course with our information technology department to train them; this training was reinforced with tasks of our own in the multimedia lab and with our lab administrator. We made sure each student reached the level of technological skills necessary to become independent and avoid problems when using the tool. It meant creating a course, which started from the point of: "this is a computer and this is how you turn it on". It meant an important learning curve for everybody as we had to transmit not only knowledge of the language or the tool (software) but also awareness related to the use of a computer

and its accessories in the learning process of these particular students.

Next, institutional policies, which included blocking FB at certain hours, were addressed with the Dean of Students by showing tasks, by explaining the nature of the groups and the type of work the students were to do, by showing the results of the pilot group and by providing lists of students who would be involved in the tasks at specific times of the day and during specific periods of the trimester. We finally gained access to FB at all times for students as long as they committed to using FB during study hours strictly for academics and not for chatting or other distractors within the tool. We emphasized this agreement with our students, and we explained the importance of abiding by these rules for the sustainability of the project. Students responded well and complied with requirements.

Finally, the biggest challenge to solve and face was the fact that we had students with parents with certain political affiliations in their countries of origin who were restricted from using FB. For these users we created special accommodations: for example, we would let them create a false user with an e-mail they would use exclusively for FB, we allowed them to post from a peer's account or to send their response to the tasks by e-mail and the teacher would post on their behalf. This depended on the level of restriction or danger their access to FB implied. Each case was treated individually and only around 1% of students had issues or problems.

Although we had some success in mitigating these challenges, we have to get better at anticipating similar ones and overcoming them, as we will surely face more in the future.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As this project evolved, it allowed us to see that there are diverse possibilities and that the focus can be shifted to the other courses in our program. As a consequence, at present it has transformed into a project where specific groups have been set up with specific outcomes for the different levels in the program. For example,

low intermediate and low advanced FB groups have been created as a scenario to improve reading and speaking skills. Students go through a series of tasks with a reading focus: here they read and listen, and they are required to comment on posts; but a final product for each task might be a video or audio recording posted to the FB group. As another example, high advanced groups are created with the intention of providing articles and resources to read for research and enhance skills related to skimming and scanning for information, developing SQ4R and SQW4R¹ strategies and several other techniques related to reading material effectively when researching. Finally, and more recently, a pilot beginner group has been created to measure and determine improvement of vocabulary and basic writing for beginner students in our program. In this group tasks are related to work on developing vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar reinforcement through visuals and online grammar websites. In general, all groups designed on FB work towards developing text analysis, connections with fields of study, and critical thinking skills development.

The main objective with the tasks originally designed was to create an out of the classroom scenario to help increase language abilities, analysis, evaluation and creation, collaboration, independence, confidence, and of course enhancement of writing skills and language learning empowerment. As we have strengthened the use of the tool as part of our program, we have seen the development of skills and sub-skills, as described above. In line with Lund (cited in Meskill, 2013), our main concern was that tasks should respond to learners' backgrounds. Based on this premise, the work designed is connected to their agricultural backgrounds and emphasis is made on topics of relevance to students' interests, needs, and prior knowledge.

With all the challenges faced, with all the progress observed, we will continue the use of the tool, keeping in mind the enhancement of assignments and benefits students obtain in the development of their language skills.

¹ Reading strategies: SQ4R= Survey, Question, Read, Relate, Recite, Review; SQ4WR=Survey, Question, Write, Read, Relate, Recite, Review

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grazzia Maria Mendoza Chirinos has been active in ESL for 24 years. She has graduate degrees in International Education and TESOL. Grazzia is an accredited/certified teacher trainer. She has been a speaker at TESOL and Central/South America since 2007. Chair of International Participation Award (TESOL) 2012–2015 and is now Chair-Elect EFLIS 2016. Currently English Area Coordinator in Zamorano, responsible for curricular changes, program advancement, teacher training and implementation of technology for language development. Email: gmendoza@zamorano.edu

PEN PALS GO DIGITAL: REFLECTING ABOUT A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

Ana Maria Menezes, Brazil

Jennifer Verschoor, Argentina

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to describe and reflect upon a project in which students from Brazil and Argentina communicated online using the Edmodo platform. We based our project on the use of intercultural literacy as stated by Dudeney, Hockly and Pegrum (2013). The objective of the project was for students to learn about each other and the place where they live using the English language. Through this experience, we learned that with minimum supervision by teachers, our students managed to improve self-confidence in acquiring a foreign language by interacting with international peers.

INTRODUCTION

It is common to hear teachers say “students today are different from students fifteen years ago”; and this is true. The Internet has drastically influenced our relationship with information, and our students’ expectations concerning education have also changed. Teachers have ceased to be the main source of information, but have become a key part in the learning process by being a guide to students. As teachers aim to make learning more learner-centered, the development of projects with students has become an important part of classroom activities.

The objective of this article is to share a collaborative project carried out by teenage students from Brazil and Argentina, moderated by us, their EFL teachers, Ana Maria Menezes and Jennifer Verschoor. In addition to describing the project developed by our students in 2014, we reflect about the experience of devising and moderating this intercultural project and share what we have learnt with other colleagues.

This paper will begin by discussing some studies which influenced our work. It will then continue with our two different voices expressing our views of what we lived, the tensions each of us encountered, and how we overcame them.

LEARNING FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

Our project was theoretically grounded in readings about pen pals projects (Barksdale, Watson and Park, 2007; Kabata and Edasawa, 2011; Lewis, Chanier and Youngs, 2011), digital literacies (Dudeney, Hockly and Pegrum, 2013) and social presence (Menezes, 2014; Garrison, 2006; Leh, 2001).

Pen Pals

The practice of exchanging letters with a pen pal has been popular for many years. Later, with the popularity of the Internet, pen pal projects became more dynamic with the use of a different media: the e-mail. Nowadays, other possibilities of interaction have developed, such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Skype and some educational communication platforms such as Edmodo.

The potential benefit of meaning-focused communication projects has been discussed by different authors (Barksdale, Watson, and Park, 2007, Kabata and Edasawa, 2011, Lewis, Chanier, and Youngs, 2011). Barksdale, et al. (2007) mention benefits such as deep self-reflection, awareness of the world around them, and the stimulation to learn more about new topics. Kabata and Edasawa (2011) also present language learning benefits, such as vocabulary, grammar and phrase/sentential expressions, which can arise from

such projects. Lewis et al. (2011) highlight the development of research in the area of online exchanges for learning language and culture.

Making connections with others through writing has proven to be motivating to learners of all ages. Not only is it a way to learn a language, but most importantly it is a means for students to develop cultural understandings by building relationships with people around the world. Moreover, living in this connected world demands the development of different literacies than what was required in the past.

Digital Literacies

The Internet is constantly generating opportunities to hone ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills by allowing interaction between students and teachers using programmes and applications which foster individual production and growth of personal skills. Therefore, the integration of digital literacies into our teaching is fundamental in promoting innovative thinking and collaborative work. Technology is a key player in the teaching and learning equation. As teachers we want students to understand and use information in multiple formats and a wide range of web tools.

Literacy has not become technological, but there has been a shift from print to digital technologies, and with this, the emergence of new categories of literate practice. On the basis of this, theorists of digital literacies argue that the revolution in communication and information technologies has created new types of textual surface and hence, new literacies (Lankshear et al., 1997).

A useful definition of digital literacy is “the individual and social skills needed to effectively interpret, manage, share and create meaning in the growing range of digital communication channels” (Dudeney et al., 2013, p. 06). Dudeney et al. (2013) have organized the literacies they believe students need to learn into four focus points: Language, Information, Connections and (Re-)design. These are the key literacies they associate with each of the focus points:

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- Language: print literacy, hypertext literacy, multimedia literacy, gaming literacy, mobile literacy, and code literacy.
 - Information: tagging literacy, search literacy, information literacy, and filtering literacy.
 - Connections: personal literacy, network literacy, participatory literacy, and intercultural literacy.
 - (Re-)design: remix literacy.

Among the different literacies described by the authors we chose to emphasise the development of intercultural literacy, that is, to help our students communicate with members of another culture in a respectful way. Dudeney et al. (2013) also highlight the importance of the teaching presence in moderating intercultural projects such as ours by affirming that unless projects are well prepared and carefully managed, exposure to difference could lead to confusion, and misunderstandings, and could even reinforce stereotypes and prejudices. Similarly, Lewis et al. (2011) point out the different roles teachers may play when carrying out projects. According to the authors, in the initial stage of projects teachers are responsible for preparing students for the exchange and designing tasks. However, as the project starts, the teacher becomes more a facilitator who models social presence and identity for students.

For all the stated reasons, we were especially concerned about appropriately managing the interactions that would take place.

Social Presence

Menezes (2014) defines social presence¹ as the way people perceive their own presence and the presence of others in a virtual interaction and the willingness to develop an interpersonal relationship in order to learn collaboratively. In other words, if you feel noticed and acknowledge other virtual peers as potential learning partners, connections are bound to be built.

1 Original definition in Portuguese "Entendo presença social como a percepção de sua própria presença e da presença dos outros em uma interação virtual e a disponibilidade em desenvolver um relacionamento interpessoal tendo em vista uma aprendizagem colaborativa."

We believe that engagement with projects is closely related to building connections with the people involved, hence the importance of the development of social presence. If there is little or no social presence during a project, making connections might be a challenge. According to several authors such as Leh (2001), Garrison (2006) and Menezes (2014), people share more and make connections if they feel socially present and part of a community.

A key question we could ask ourselves is how the feeling of social presence develops. Daft and Lengel (1984) state that the choice of the media for the communication plays an important role in the degree of social presence to be developed. So, the degree of interactions generated depends on the media used for a certain project or an online course. Gunawardena (1995) and Garrison (2006) support this point of view and add that in addition to the communication media, the relational and social nature of online communication should also be taken into account. They affirm the importance of teachers and course designers in developing competencies in planning virtual spaces and activities during which interaction among students can take place. In this respect, Menezes (2014) points out that creating a virtual environment conducive to learning is much more than choosing a platform that allows participants to interact with content. It is also important for teachers to plan opportunities for students to interact and make connections with one another.

THE PROJECT

The idea was to have eighteen Brazilian students paired up with students from another country to communicate over the duration of four weeks. And why pair them up and not develop the project as a big group? A few years ago, I, Ana Maria, developed a project where two groups of students joined the same platform to develop similar tasks. In this previous experience, I had noticed that although they practiced the language, producing and sharing content, the interpersonal relationship among participants was superficial, and there was little engagement.

For this project, the communication process was a main goal.

My inspiration was “pen pal projects” where two people get to know each other using language as a means of communication. Then I asked myself, how can we develop a similar idea using tools my students are familiar with? I remembered hearing stories about pen pal projects first using letters and then more recently e-mails. As I had already been using a communication platform called Edmodo¹ with my students, I imagined we could have both groups interact there. As in pen pal projects, I wanted my students to use language to get to know someone their own age from another country.

The objective of the project was for students to learn as much as they could about the other student and the place where they live. At the end of four weeks, each student would write a report to their teacher about what they had learned.

As I needed a partner, I sent a message to a group of teachers from Brazil and Argentina with the hope an Argentinian teacher would agree to join the project. The World Cup was approaching and I had the secret dream to demystify some of the football rivalry between the two countries by getting Brazilians to interact with Argentinians. As soon as Jennifer Verschoor saw my message on Facebook, she accepted the challenge. Jennifer had twenty-five students and I had eighteen. For this reason, during one of our many weekly Skype conversations, we decided to form pairs and trios to facilitate interaction. We divided our students according to their nationalities, one Brazilian and one or two Argentinians, without following any specific criteria.

Jennifer and I discussed our different roles during the project. Dudeney et al. (2013) point out the importance of the moderation of online communication by teachers when developing the skill of nurturing connections in social networking spaces such as blogs and other online media, the connections literacy. In our case, we had students from different countries, from different social and cultural backgrounds, with a historical rivalry in football. Therefore, we needed to moderate this experience with care. Our role during the project was to have all students join an Edmodo group, divide them into small groups randomly and observe their conversation. The students’ messages would not

1 <http://edmodo.com>

be corrected by us beforehand considering that the objective was not accuracy, but to develop a conversation in English. As moderators, we would try to facilitate interaction among students.

PREPARING THE PROJECT

During the preparation stage of the project, we exchanged ideas via Skype once a week. Our first step was to open an Edmodo group which would be joined by our students. Once opened, the website generated a code which we would share with our students for joining. Then, we created small groups in order to add the pairs and the trios. This way, when the pair or trio communicated within the small group, the other students wouldn't be able to follow their conversation, only for us teachers. We had access to all the small groups to monitor the interactions.

Another space we prepared was a collaborative wiki, which would host the final reports and whatever we decided to make public. Although their communication was private, we opted to make the final reports public for several reasons. First, we wanted students to be able to read each other's reports and this way, learn from each other. Second, the wiki link could be shared with parents. And thirdly, other teachers would be able to see a little bit of what our project was about.

Table 2. Rubrics for participation created by us for this project.

CRITERIA	Good / Very good / Excellent
Engagement	- Student has been engaged since the beginning of project, joining platform and communicating with partner(s).
Appropriate language	- Student used appropriate language (clear and polite) to develop a conversation with partner(s).
Number of exchanges	- Student tried to develop several exchanges with partner(s) to collect information.
Information collected	- Student collected various types of information via text, photos, videos, etc.

We also decided to develop two rubrics to help students understand what was expected of them during the two phases of the project: participation (Table 2) and final report (Table 3). Based

on our extensive experience as online and face-to-face teachers, we believe building rubrics for projects can make the evaluation process clear and transparent as well as describe the levels of quality from excellent to poor so that students themselves are able to evaluate their own work. To that end, we brainstormed and discussed different criteria we found relevant for this specific project and how to share them with our students.

In class before starting the project, we showed our students the rubrics, discussed the criteria and answered their questions. Their biggest worry was about their partner being silent: “What if my partner doesn’t answer?” We calmed them down by reaffirming we would be guiding them throughout the whole project and that all of them would have to write a final report. Taking that into account, all students, Brazilians and Argentinians, would need to develop conversations in order to complete the final task, the written report.

Table 3. Rubrics for final report created by us for this project.

CRITERIA	Good / Very good/ Excellent
Language used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The language used by the student is clear and appropriate for the task. - Student makes some grammar mistakes, but can express ideas well. - Student tries to use new vocabulary and structure.
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sentences are coherent and understandable. - The text is divided in paragraphs. - The text has more than 200 words.
Information collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The student seems to have learned a considerable amount of information about his/her partner and the place where he/she lives.
Use of different media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The student has used different media (photos, videos or weblinks) to illustrate the interaction which took place.
Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The student has published the report on the wiki and shared with his parents. - The student managed to hand in the report within the deadline.

IT'S TIME TO START

How can we make sure that we are engaging students both in and outside the classroom? As teachers we have a big challenge ahead that can only be achieved successfully if we learn how to network together.

One of the reasons we divided our students into small groups was because we believe shy students feel more comfortable when they have a partner to share the responsibility of their learning with. Students were not exposed to the whole group and we considered this dynamic helped them feel safer contributing to the online discussion.

Therefore, we decided that our students had to start getting to know each other before starting this online journey. Each class had to prepare a short introductory video about themselves. For most students, this was their first experience creating a video for school and some students felt embarrassed when they had to record themselves.

THE EXPERIENCE IN BRAZIL

The group of teenagers I (Ana Maria) chose to develop this project with were intermediate EFL students from a Language Institute in the center of Brazil. They had two English classes a week, so that was the only time we met. Because of the short schedule, I had planned to use only one class to talk about the project and their communication would take place whenever they could after school. After introducing the project, I was gladly surprised by the enthusiasm I noticed in my students. Although they were supposed to communicate with their partners outside the classroom using their own cell phones, laptops or computers, at the beginning of every class, some students asked me to open their group conversation on the interactive whiteboard to see if their partner had written anything new or to show me pictures they had shared.

The first exchanges between pairs and trios were the most challenging. As our students are more used to communicating with their friends using Whatsapp and Facebook chat, they were trying

to use short sentences, like we do in synchronous chats (Figure 1). However, this didn't seem to be working. They were writing very little and the interaction was not flowing.

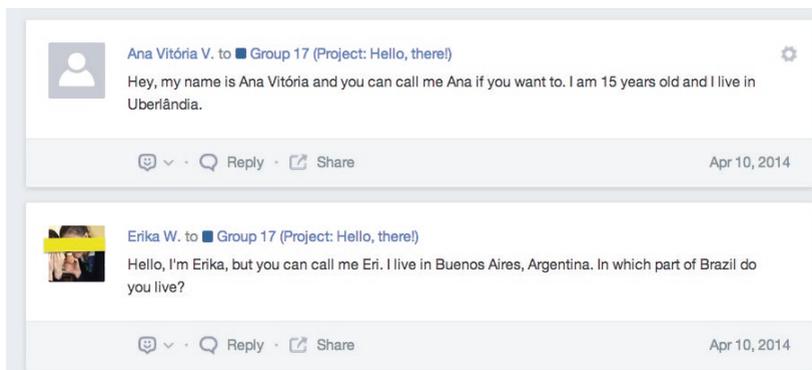


Figure 1. Screenshot of short messages they were exchanging at the beginning

I suggested they try to write longer texts and also send three or five questions along with each message (Figure 2).

Another tension we experienced at the beginning was the students' wish to use other spaces such as Whatsapp and Facebook to communicate with their partners. I explained they could if they wanted to. However, they would have to add me to their conversations so that I would be able to observe the interaction going on. I explained that it was easier to manage all the conversations in the same space and my presence within their small groups was there for their own protection. Finally, they agreed to communicate within the Edmodo platform, but many of them added each other on Facebook as well. Despite our fears, 18 out of 19 groups managed to develop interesting conversations. The most common topics discussed were music, sports, hobbies, holidays, school, pets and daily activities.



Ana Vitória V. to Group 17 (Project: Hello, there!)

It's ok, I was pretty busy these days too.

There is no beach in my town too, It's really sad.

I also love rainy days. Actually, these days it's raining a lot in my town and it's a bit cold, but not a lot. I love when the weather is like that. I usually prefer cold instead of hot.

It's pretty much the same in Brazil, we start in February and it ends in the beginning of December. We have about fifteen days of holiday in July and then the time between December and February. But this year things are going to be a bit different because of the world cup. We're having holidays in June and July this year, that's when I'm visiting the USA. Did your holidays also change because of the world cup? What do you expect of the cup?

Sometimes I'm in peace with my sister and we also do enjoy a lot of common things. We watched all the seasons of Supernatural together. But sooner or later we end up arguing again.

I don't think cinema in Brazil is very expensive, specially for me 'cause I pay half of the price because I'm a student. I guess for the adults maybe. It depends on the day 'cause some days are kinda special and they have discounts. But it's usually about 14 reais and I pay 6. What about Argentina?

I go to the cinema very often and I watch almost every type of movie, I don't have a favorite kind. Do you have a favorite one?

Figure 2. Screenshot of a longer message written after our talk.

An interesting exchange we report below was between a Brazilian student and an Argentine. They exchanged pictures of things they did on a specific day. So apart from using language, they used photos to show their routines and discover what they had in common. Students also used the opportunity to discuss a current concern in May and June 2014, which was the World Cup to be held in Brazil. This is an extract of the conversation which took place between two 14-year old girls.

Student A: Hello, how are you? Here yesterday it rained. I was so happy... :)

I think my holidays didn't change for the World Cup. I've never been interested in the World Cup, I like more the Olympic Games, though I enjoy watching the World Cup. What do you expect from the World Cup? Do you like the fact that they are going to be held in Brazil?

Student B: Hi, I'm fine. How are you? Well, about the World Cup... I don't really like soccer so I didn't care much when I heard it would happen in Brazil. But we're having some problems. The government is spending a lot of money with the buildings of the stadiums. Everybody is complaining. Brazil is a great country and I love living here, but like any other country

we have problems. There is poverty, the bad quality of the public hospitals, schools (teachers' salaries is terrible), etc. And instead of worry about it the government wastes all that money with stadiums. It's a sad reality. So I'm not really excited for the Cup. And I believe the country is going to have some trouble with all those visitors that are coming because of the Cup. I'm not sure Brazil is ready for a big event like that.

As can be seen from this extract, other than writing about lighter themes, students also discussed issues relevant to them.

THE EXPERIENCE IN ARGENTINA

The Argentinian students knew they would be representing not only their school but also their country. Once they understood the objective of the project, they immediately got engaged and gradually created a personal learning environment. At various times, students didn't know what to say, so we encouraged them to talk about themselves and ask their partners questions about their daily lives in Brazil.

During the project, students requested the possibility of meeting their Brazilian online friends face-to-face. This is something we had not planned. Our classes were at different times; therefore, we decided to create a room at Adobe Connect with the help of another educator, Heike Philp from Germany. She kindly allowed us to use one of her rooms at Adobe Connect to engage our students online.

Out of 42 students only 10 students showed up. A few of them had no webcam or microphone but could hear and participate by using the chat box, others had their webcams but no microphones working. However, the ones who participated seemed to have enjoyed the experience. This online meeting allowed me to learn more about my students, especially the shy students who were active online and managed to solve several technical problems.

IT'S TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

Although we had planned a four-week project, we had to extend it to six weeks because our students wanted more time to be acquainted with each other. The weeks went by very quickly for all of us. Most of them exchanged their Facebook addresses to keep communicating. For us, this is evidence that social presence was developed as they wished to keep the connections they had built.

As we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, their final task for the project was a written report where they would express what they learned about their partners. The writing of the report was divided in two steps: first students wrote a draft on a wiki which was marked by the teachers. We didn't correct all mistakes, but gave them suggestions and highlighted a few written mistakes. Students then, based on our suggestions, made the final changes and organized their reports on the wiki in three main paragraphs: the first one described the project, the second was about their partners and where they live and the final one about what they liked and didn't like about the experience.

OUR REFLECTIONS

What have we learned from this project? We have no doubt this has been an educational experience to all of us. The final report was vital to help us understand students' impressions. We asked them to be as honest as possible pointing out changes for a future experience. Although many of our students were resistant to using Edmodo for their communication, we were surprised to see that all students expressed positive opinions as can be seen from the extract below written by one of the students.

Since I never thought I would be able to talk to a person from another country, this project is excellent. I simply love it. I wouldn't change anything because it works this way and no one was harmed. Meet amazing people like Santiago and Victoria made me glad for studying English all this time because I know now that I can keep a long conversation in this language. The only thing that I might be sad is the fact that I will probably lose

contact with them. On the other hand I'm happy that I met them and I hope that teacher Ana Maria keeps the project going on and maybe spread the idea to the other teachers.

What about the technology used? We believe Edmodo was a good choice to host our project. This technology enabled the sort of communication which would have been more complicated to manage if we had planned this years ago. The similarity to Facebook helps students understand the interface; as a consequence, our students easily found their way around the platform and carried out interesting conversations. Moreover, the possibility to create small groups within the bigger group allowed them some privacy to talk to each other and at the same time it permitted us to supervise their communication. Another plus was the mobile app many students downloaded to their own cell phones which empowered them to be connected to each other easily and in real time.

In this project, technology came second and pedagogy came first. Technology was a means to make the communication among our groups possible. Having said that, the project was an opportunity for them to realize how well they can express themselves in English. Taking into consideration the positive aspects of our experience, it's also important to learn from the problems we faced. Some of the challenges were managing their insecurities concerning the language and giving them two extra weeks to communicate. The timeframe we had imagined for the project proved to be too short, and we decided to prolong the experience for two more weeks. As we see it, the longer people can communicate and get to know each other, the more connections they can make.

Concerning the linguistic aspect of the experience, although our original focus was not on language accuracy, it was interesting how our students noticed the Argentinians made fewer mistakes in English than the Brazilians. We, teachers, did not demand perfect English; however, students themselves observed the language used by each other.

We believe the project was successful in using technology to build a friendly environment where our students were able to

put into practice their language acquisition in real life situations. As English teachers, we were pleased to see our students communicating in English in order to reinforce world-wide connections, and this has shown our students how alike we really are.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ana Maria Menezes is an EFL teacher, teacher developer and online moderator. She holds an M.A. degree in Linguistic Studies, in the area of teacher development in virtual environments. She has written ebooks for EFL teachers: *Webtools Applied to Teaching*, *Developing the 4 Skills with Webtools* and *FCE Goes Digital*. Email: anamariacult@gmail.com

Jennifer Verschoor holds an M.A. degree in Virtual Environments, and a Specialization in Education and Information and Communication Technologies. She has written ebooks for EFL teachers: *My First Digital Journey*, nominated for an ELTons Award 2014, *FCE Goes Digital* and *Web Tools for your Quest*. She has given numerous workshops in Argentina and abroad. She is a Microsoft Innovative Educator. Email: jenverschoor@gmail.com

GOOGLE.DOCS: WRITING PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL USE IN ESL/EFL ENVIRONMENTS

Ulugbek Nurmukhamedov, University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign, USA

Irina Kerimova, Westminster International University in Tashkent,
Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, freely available Web 2.0 resources (e.g., message boards, personal blogs, and online wikis) have captured the interest of both teachers and researchers. Particularly, Google.Docs has gained popularity in second language writing instruction and has been utilized to promote writing fluency and accuracy, collaborative writing, peer assessment, and teacher-written feedback. This paper describes the pedagogical practices and learner use of Google.Docs in two different university classroom settings in the US and Uzbekistan to promote teacher-written feedback, collaborative writing, grammar, and vocabulary. We compare and contrast those experiences, sharing our reflections on learner and teacher challenges and how we addressed them.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it has become a normal routine for many English language learners to make use of Web 2.0 tools in order to text a friend to learn about homework, to use Google to search for

information for a homework assignment, to post a comment on YouTube, to comment on a friend's Facebook page, to send a tweet on Twitter, and to update blogs with personal stories. An increasing number of writing teachers, realizing the potential of such tools for writing instruction, have started exploring the use of message boards, personal blogs, online wikis, and Google Docs to create collaborative writing, peer assessment, and teacher feedback activities. Recently, the limitations and strengths of these tools have been under writing practitioners' scrutiny for their effective use in writing classrooms. The present paper discusses the challenges and the lessons learned from the use of Google Docs in two university settings in the US and Uzbekistan. Before introducing the application of Google Docs-driven activities in the two settings, we explain what Google Docs is and how it has been previously utilized to promote language learning.

What is Google Docs?

Google Docs (GD) is a web-based word processing tool. In GD, a document can be shared between two or more people, allowing both parties to write, to add to, and to edit the document simultaneously using the automated update feature of the tool. Novice users of GD can learn about it by browsing through <https://sites.google.com/site/docsforsl/home>, a website created by Firth and Mesureur (2010), who continue to maintain it. This website includes useful tutorials featuring GD and an array of GD-mediated activities.

Why is GD useful for L2 writing?

Writing teachers have used GD for a number of reasons. First, GD enables teachers to monitor students' progress. Because all the writing occurs online and drafts are saved on students' Gmail accounts, teachers do not have to formally collect the students' drafts (Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012). Second, teacher comments and peer feedback are also automatically saved, similar to the Microsoft Word format. Most importantly, dates for each revision, editing, and teacher feedback are saved, and the document is automatically updated (Kim, 2009). Third, students

can do most of their work electronically; thus it creates convenience because students do not have to carry a hardcopy draft, save the draft on a jump/USB drive, or send the updated draft to their emails after making changes (Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi, 2012). Fourth, it promotes collaborative learning by allowing students to share a document to work on a course project and to chat online at the same time in order to negotiate, contributing to the development of the project (Rowe, Bozalek, & Frantz, 2013). GD has some untapped potential for L2 writing classrooms and offers ways to enhance computer-assisted writing instruction.

This paper presents a set of activities involving GD use in a university-level intensive English program in the USA and an English-medium university in Uzbekistan. We decided to utilize GD not because it was a new technology for the students and teachers in our institutes; instead, we decided to implement GD to improve students' writing by introducing them to a tool that would help them interact efficiently with their writing instructors and peers on their writing assignments. For example, before the application of GD in the intensive English program, the students used to complete their journal writing assignments on a piece of paper. The teacher would write feedback on the students' paper and the students would not save their assignments in an organized way. However, when GD was implemented, the students were able to keep their journal assignments, including teacher-written feedback, and other classroom activities in an electronic document. Similarly, in the English-medium university in Uzbekistan, GD was used to provide teacher-written feedback on students' written projects and promote peer-review among the students. The implementation of GD in these two different contexts was driven by our course syllabi and objectives. As we know "the best of technology does not by itself create a productive environment" (Egan, 1999, p. 281). We used this technology to support teaching and learning.

Our interest in the implementation of GD in these two different contexts was incidental; that is, the two authors decided to use GD independently and learned about each other's GD-mediated teacher activities through a professional email exchange. It has been a spontaneous but productive teacher-to-teacher collaboration. Thus, our purpose to put together this manuscript

is to inform writing instructors in both EFL and ESL settings how GD was used in our respective contexts and to reflect on how certain learner and teacher challenges could have been avoided. By reading about our course activities, challenges, and reflections, other teachers who have never used GD before will be able to see how they might adapt GD for their own setting, or even whether they should.

GOOGLE.DOCS IN THE USA

Background

GD was used in the Program in Intensive English (PIE) at a mid-sized university in the southwestern part of the United States. Only intermediate and upper-intermediate learners of English used GD because they were enrolled in a special course called Writer's Workshop (WW), designed to provide PIE students with extra activities (two hours a week) promoting fluency and accuracy. In this course, students are taught to adopt appropriate rhetorical styles (e.g., argumentative and descriptive) based on purpose and intended audience. In addition, students also practice writing under time constraints and are expected to produce drafts and polished essays in class. Furthermore, students explore the various steps of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, peer reviewing, revising, and editing.

WW is held in a computer lab. All the PIE students have an account under the university's domain name, which is maintained by Google, so it has Gmail features. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher (the first author) opened a document for each student, labeled it according to the student's name, and shared the documents with the enrolled students. Before integrating activities using GD, the teacher organized a 15-minute tutorial to show the purpose of GD for the course and how the WW students would utilize GD for writing purposes. In the PIE, GD is mostly used for the following activities: (1) pre-writing activities (e.g., brainstorming and outlining); (2) fluency writing (e.g., journal writing and free writing); (3) grammar tasks (e.g., editing and proofreading); (4) vocabulary use (e.g., using words in context and

practicing new words via writing); and (5) teacher feedback (e.g., integrating teacher commentary). In the interest of space, only two activities are illustrated below.

Activity 1: Journal Writing (JW)

During this activity, students are asked to write a paragraph for a given prompt. First, they are asked to brainstorm the idea in the prompt, and then they will start writing. A student's output for the JW is illustrated in Figure 1.

JOURNAL WRITING #2
Prompt: What do you want most in a friend - someone who is intelligent, or someone who has a sense of humor, or someone who is reliable? Which **one** of these characteristics is most important to you? Use reasons and specific examples to explain your choice. You have **15 minutes** to finish the task.

I want my friend to be honest for everything in our relationship, because this **quality will** makes **he/she** reliable. I don't need humour or **intelligent** because I can find these characteristics from other thing, like book or some passage. However if we need to trust someone, we need a credible friend. For instance, I have a secret **which I** need to share **to** my friend to reduce my pressure. If **this guy** I can trust **that person**, then I can tell it to **him/her he/she**, the thing still keep secret. If not, the guy is unreliable, maybe next day, my story **my-seeret** will be a joke **in during** others' **conversations mouth**. I have never ever hope this thing will happen, so when I choose someone as my friend, I will take long time to watch his/her activity to me, and pay attention to around his/her friends. **In sum, I value honesty and reliability in my friends.**

Ulugbek Nurm...
5:37 AM Yesterday
Resolve
him/her?

Ulugbek Nurm...
5:38 AM Yesterday
Resolve
intelligent - ADJECTIVE:
intelligence - NOUN

Ulugbek Nurm...
5:38 AM Yesterday
Resolve
share with?

Figure 1. Journal Writing sample and teacher-written feedback

The upper part of Figure 1 includes information about the journal entry (#2), the prompt, and the time allotted for students. The bottom part of the figure illustrates a student's output. Before the class started, the teacher inserted this two-part box in the student's GD, providing the instructions in the upper part (e.g., prompt, time) of the box. The student was encouraged to write a paragraph in the bottom part of the box. The more the student writes, the longer the box gets, so it is very flexible. After the student completed the paragraph in class, the teacher made several comments using various techniques outside of class. Some of these teacher-written electronic feedback techniques are described below.

First, GD enables teachers to provide their students with marginal comments, a feature that is similar to Microsoft Word. As illustrated in Figure 1, the teacher gave three marginal comments directly linked to the paragraph. Upon clicking the marginal comments, the student will be able to see where the

comments belong in the paragraph (the highlighted word or words in the paragraph indicate marginal comments). Second, teachers can use different colors to add words, phrases, and sentences while commenting on students' paragraphs. Teachers can also **bold**, underline, and *italicize* words. For example, bolded words/phrases in Figure 1 mean that the teacher added new words/phrases in the paragraph. Third, in case of hinting a deletion of a word/phrase or a sentence, the instructor can use a strikethrough feature to comment on a student's paper. It is important to point out that not all the student's mistakes were addressed in Figure 1.

Activity 2: Vocabulary Use in Writing

GD can be used to do vocabulary activities as well. Because WW is a supplementary course for the regular reading and writing skills course in the PIE, the WW instructor integrated additional vocabulary activities to support the content in the skills course. Figure 2 illustrates an activity that involves the use of *hedges* in argumentative essays. Hinkel (2004) defines hedging as "the use of linguistic devices to show hesitation or uncertainty, display politeness and indirectness, and defer to the reader's point of view" (p. 313). Several researchers (Hinkel, 2004; Hyland, 1995) point out that L2 writers often have difficulty in producing effective hedges (e.g., *probably*, *possible*, *may*, *sometimes*), thus, they encourage writing instructors to explicitly teach hedges to L2 writers.

HEDGING EXERCISE
<p>Directions: Highlight the appropriate hedged words to improve the paragraph. The first highlight was done for you.</p>
<p>These days, [some / many] students plagiarize their papers by using the Internet. They do not write [some of] their own papers or do [much of] their own homework. Students [can] easily access the [many] companies that sell various course papers via the Internet. These students [can] [usually / essentially] go to a website that sell papers and buy them. [Sometimes / Occasionally] [Some / Many / Most] [Perhaps,] Plagiarized papers [can / may] get excellent grades. In other cases, students [may] get caught and [possibly / potentially] expelled from the university [Some / Many / Most] Educators [usually / may] feel that students need to fulfill their responsibilities in studying, and they say that students [may / possibly] cheat by [actually / apparently] buying their papers.</p>

Figure 2. Hedging activity

In this case, a Reading & Writing teacher (another instructor) started a unit on argumentative writing. After some instruction on this topic, the WW course teacher (the first author) decided to do a unit about hedges in academic writing. The hedging exercise in Figure 2 (adapted from Hinkel, 2004, p. 333) was pasted onto students' GD, and the students were asked to read the paragraph and highlight the most effective hedges to make the paragraph more coherent. The students used the GD tool bar and chose their color in order to highlight the appropriate words for the paragraph. After the students finished the activity, the teacher projected some volunteering students' completed exercises and discussed the meaning of the hedges in the given context.

GOOGLE.DOCS IN UZBEKISTAN

Background

This part of the chapter illustrates how GD was used for collaborative student work followed by teacher feedback to improve a subsequent individual performance. GD was implemented in Personal Development (PD) module for the first-year students of Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), where the medium of instruction is English. The students' proficiencies ranged from upper intermediate to advanced (IELTS scores from 5.5 to 8.0). PD is a core module and the teacher (the second author) meets four groups of 20 to 22 students three times a week. The aim of the PD course is to enhance students' skills that are necessary for academic success. By the end of PD module, the students are expected to be able to prepare reports, present projects, participate in group/individual projects, and to enhance team skills. One of the PD assessment components is an Electronic Portfolio, consisting of four entries: (1) Personal Development Plan; (2) Reflection on the Research Process; (3) Reflection on Performance in Different Modules; and (4) Self Evaluation.

In the 2012–2013 academic year, each lecturer had around 80 students. Because the portfolio assignment encompassed four entries, each lecturer had to comment on about 320 entries during the academic year (80 students X 4 entries = 320). Experience

from the previous years showed that even though lecturers addressed each and every mistake on the students' entries, this was not effective as the majority of students did not follow the teachers' feedback; consequently, draft and final versions of the same entry were not significantly different from each other. Furthermore, almost all the PD lecturers' written comments were similar to each other, which ranged from global (e.g., thesis statement, topic sentences) to local (e.g., grammar, vocabulary) comments. The most popular ones were: "you forgot to answer the fourth question" (content), "we can *do, pursue, carry out research* but not *make research*" (collocation) or "Please, pay attention to the comma usage after words such as *however* and *moreover*" (transition and punctuation).

Due to these recurring issues, PD lecturers had to seek alternative ways to give feedback to 500 newcomers. As a solution, PD team decided to use GD to create an online document so that the students could work collaboratively to produce a draft to which teachers would provide electronic feedback that can be shared and simultaneously seen by all the students. Two guiding activities were conducted (see below) to help students successfully integrate teacher-written feedback into their subsequent individual performance and promote learner autonomy in terms of approaching a writing assignment.

Pre-Google.Docs Activity

To facilitate the session, the students received a copy of a teacher-graded rubric in order to be aware of the criteria on which they are assessed (to access the rubric electronically, find the current chapter at the first author's homepage at <http://ulugbeknur.wix.com/profile#!research/y4qg4> and click on *Supplementary Materials*). Two samples of student essays, one well-written and one poorly-written, from the "braves" (i.e., students who volunteered to send their drafts to the teacher long before the deadline date) were distributed to the students. The students were asked to use the rubric to evaluate the quality of the essays. As a part of the peer-feedback training, the students were asked to assess the content, grammar, and vocabulary problems in the sample essays. The whole class participated in the peer-feedback

discussion, and it was clear that the students felt comfortable expressing their thoughts in terms of strong and weak points of the writing pieces. The task objective was met: the students understood how to write the entry.

Google.Docs Implementation

GD was used to enable students to engage in a collaborative writing task and to provide the students with teacher feedback. The PD lecturers shared three samples of Entry 1 (Personal Development Plan), extracted from Electronic Portfolios of previous-year students, with current students by distributing a link to the Google document. The students were asked to edit the entries in two weeks. *Editing the entries* meant that the students could make *global* changes (e.g., rewriting the problematic parts; moving paragraphs or sentences; improving the logic in an opinion) or *local* ones (e.g., deleting/adding a word). Towards the completion of the task, the students were able to notice an improvement between the initial and the revised drafts thanks to the teacher's feedback. The next step for the students was to produce their own entry using the samples and teacher's commentaries. The same procedure was repeated for all four entries.

Implementing GD was both effective and efficient for a number of reasons. In terms of effectiveness, the students were given an opportunity to collaborate with peers on the assignment, and the PD task requirements and directions were clear. Moreover, students became noticeably more autonomous; this was one of the expected learner outcomes of the module. Students in previous years received individual feedback on each of their entries. After the GD was implemented, students of this cohort were not as dependent on the lecturer, because they first revised the given assignment themselves and then received the lecturer's comments. Afterwards, based on this general feedback (i.e., instead of individual feedback for every student), they wrote their own entry independently. In terms of efficiency, the use of GD minimized the PD lecturers' workload as the PD team provided only 12 pieces of feedback (3 samples per each of 4 entries) instead of 2000 of them (500 students' drafts by 4 entries). All in

all, PD lecturers were able to make successful use of technology in their context and most importantly to meet the course objectives.

TEACHER REFLECTIONS TOWARD LEARNER CHALLENGES

We acknowledge that we have not done an experimental study to investigate the effectiveness of GD on fluency, accuracy, or GD-mediated teacher-written comments on students' writing. Instead, as writing instructors in the two respective contexts, we attempted to implement GD in L2 writing classrooms to support our syllabi and to mediate our course content with the use of technology. While implementing GD in our contexts, we encountered a few challenges. To address the challenges, we reflected critically on our practices pertaining to GD. In this section, we describe some of the challenges that appeared in both contexts and share ideas about how these challenges were or could be addressed.

Reflection 1: Teachers need to seek effective ways to stay organized when they use GD to teach writing. Because teachers have to deal with many GD docs (one doc per student), teachers have to explore effective and efficient ways of keeping GD docs organized. There are many ways to stay organized: for example, the first author organized his GD folders by creating a general folder for the semester (e.g., Fall, 2014_WW) and then creating subfolders for each course (e.g., Section5A_WW) under the general folder for the semester. Then, under each course folder, he created and saved the students' GD documents. Another challenge is related to saving multiple drafts in a single document. Because each student submits multiple assignments in a single document, teachers should also think of how to organize students' written work in a single document. In order to stay organized, the first author created a template for each assignment, and each assignment prompt was posted on a new GD page. For example, the first draft was on the first page of the document while the fourth draft for the same writing assignment was on the fourth page.

Reflection 2: We both realized that training is key to avoid learner challenges with GD application in a writing class. At the

initial stage of GD applications, some students were not able to locate their GD docs. Because the students' GD docs are available via Google Drive, oftentimes the same students in different class sessions would ask the same question: "Teacher, how can I find my Google.Drive?" In retrospect, we should have developed a learned-oriented training materials (e.g., a YouTube tutorial or a handout) and sent the handout or the link to the tutorial to students' email so that they could refer to the video when they forget how to find their GD docs. Another challenge is to keep students attention focused on their Google Drives, not on their mail Gmail inboxes. Although we had not thought of addressing this issue earlier, we think that teachers can have their students select "Move Tab to New Window" on their browser bar after they open their GD docs and minimize/hide other windows (e.g., email inbox, chat etc.). By doing so, we believe that the students will focus on one document on their computer screen, that is, their GD.

Reflection 3: Marginal comments were sometimes confusing to students. Some complained because one short paragraph had too many marginal comments, encompassing feedback related to organization, content, vocabulary, and grammar. As a result, the students did not know how to approach the marginal comments. This could have happened for the following reasons. First, the students were not yet accustomed to the GD interface at the beginning of the semester, thus marginal comments seemed overwhelming to the students. Second, due to time constraints during the semester, the teachers accepted the students' first-draft classroom work as final drafts; as a result, the teacher had to address all the issues (e.g., content, grammar, and vocabulary) in the students' drafts. In retrospect, teachers could implement a process-based writing approach and provide students with different sets of feedback at different times. For example, teachers can give content and organization feedback on the first draft. After the students address issues related to content and organization, teachers can give language and mechanical feedback (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation). Also, teachers do not have to rely solely on marginal comments: they can use different features (e.g., bold, underline, or highlight) to render different language points (see Figures 1 and 2).

Reflection 4: GD is accessible via the Internet, so when the Internet does not work properly, it might affect the GD's flow. There were a few times at both institutions when the Internet did not work properly for a few minutes, which consequently affected the pacing of classroom activities. When the Internet issue occurred for the first time, the teacher had to go from computer to computer to solve the problem. Because such Internet problems happen for a few minutes in a session, instead of waiting and wasting the class time, an alternative technique can be utilized: a document in Microsoft Word (MS Word). Whenever the Internet slowed down and affected the students' performance, the students were encouraged to open a document using MS Word and work on an assignment. Once GD got back to its normal speed, the students were asked to copy their text from MS Word and paste it into the GD doc. When technological failures occur for a short period of time due to the Internet speed, teachers can make use of the MS Word as a short-term replacement for GD.

Still, some technological glitches could occur. During these times, teachers have to listen to their students in order to address a reported GD issue. From the student reflections on the implementation of GD in their L2 writing classes, we now know that "gathering constant feedback from students and keeping their perception in check can prove to be much more helpful than expected" (Kim, 2009, p. 176). Some teachers might pose the following question: "How do you know that the use of pen and pencil is less effective than technology?" We do not know an answer for the abovementioned question yet. To address this question, teachers could, in the form of small-scale informal action research, find out themselves whether GD works in their instructional context or not.

CONCLUSION

There are several considerations that teachers need to keep in mind before and during the use of GD in writing classrooms. First, teachers need to identify avenues to use GD. As noted in the previous section, teachers should not just use GD because it

involves technology and it is new (i.e., a novelty factor). Instead, it needs to be linked with second language learning theories, research, or foundational practices. Teachers should integrate GD as a part of a curriculum so that classroom activities can be implemented with the use of this tool whether inside or outside of the classroom. In our respective contexts, GD was applied to support our existing syllabus by facilitating teacher-written feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and paragraph-level issues over students' writing and organizing a peer-review activity.

Second, both teachers and students need to be trained to use this tool because there is always a learning curve when technologies are involved in L2 writing (Bloch, 2013). Learner training is particularly important to implement new technology in classrooms because the process of training learners aims "at the construction of a knowledge and skill base that enables language learners to use technology more efficiently and effectively in support of language learning objectives" (Hubbard, 2013, p. 164). Although GD has a user-friendly interface, students often find it challenging to use new software effectively. To avoid this challenge, teachers first should experience GD themselves and then introduce the technology to their course by providing students with a short informative tutorial (e.g., <https://sites.google.com/site/docsforesl/tutorials> website). If students are asked to use GD as a peer-review tool, they need to be trained as well. Similarly, students need to understand how to incorporate GD-assisted electronic teacher comments while revising their drafts. It is recommended to be patient with the students at the earlier stages of the GD implementation in writing classrooms.

Finally, students should have access to computers in a classroom, and a teacher should preferably have a projector device available to display students' GD writings. Luckily, we have been supplied with computer labs in both our institutions, but we understand that not every teacher who wants to use GD will be so fortunate. Nevertheless, we hope that those who have the appropriate institutional setting and infrastructure will consider exploring the potential of Google.Docs, bearing in mind the challenges and solutions we have outlined here.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ulugbek Nurmukhamedov is an assistant professor in the TESOL program at Northeastern Illinois University. His current research interests include second language vocabulary, second language writing, and computer-assisted language learning. Email: unurmuk2@illinois.edu

Irina Kerimova is a lecturer at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) in Uzbekistan. She is a Personal Development Module leader at WIUT and also teaches Business in it environment. Her research interests include gender differences, formative assessment, teacher-written feedback, and student counseling. Email: ikerimova@wiut.uz

HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY TO FOSTER LEARNER AUTONOMY VIA REFLECTION

Lizzie Pinard, University of Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of a computer-mediated communication tool as a means of helping learners become more autonomous in their language learning. Evidence for the effectiveness of a sociocultural perspective (Oxford, 2003) and a “strong” methodology (Smith, 2003) is offered through examination of a project that was undertaken over a duration of eight months in a private language school in Sicily. It is concluded that teacher intervention is valuable, but that such mediation needs to be founded on a process of planning, implementation, evaluation and reflection, and that learners, themselves, need to be at the centre of this process.

INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy has become a buzz-phrase in the world of English language teaching, and learning in general. It is a complex issue, but nevertheless few would deny the potential value of out-of-class learning and target language use for the development of language skills and promotion of language acquisition. It is also true that fast-developing technological innovation has opened up a multitude of language learning possibilities to 21st century

language learners. However, “such forms of learning may *require* the exercise of autonomy but ... do not necessarily *develop* it” (Smith, 2008, p. 396). Thus it can be argued that to enable learners to benefit fully from what technology could contribute to their language learning, principled and systematic teacher intervention may be invaluable.

Focusing on use of the computer-mediated communication tool *Edmodo*, this chapter explores how teachers can help learners to develop their language skills autonomously through reflection on an eight-month project. In addition to highlighting the pitfalls encountered, suggestions for overcoming these are put forward, as is a clear demonstration of the use of a continual process of planning, implementation, reflection and evaluation, in order to maximise the potential benefits brought to language education through use of technological tools.

BACKGROUND

The project discussed in this article took place between October 2013 and May 2014 at a small private language school in Sicily. Here, classes are available for learners of all ages and abilities. However, this study focuses on adult learners from pre-intermediate to upper intermediate levels, the youngest of whom are sixteen years old, the eldest retired and the majority young adults in their 20s to 40s.

Each course requires ten hours of *guided study* to be completed by learners over its duration. *Guided study* in this case refers to any language-learning activities completed out of class, which are not set by the teacher as homework. The goal of this course component is to encourage learners to take a more active role in their learning and to enable them to benefit more from the twice-weekly or, infrequently, thrice-weekly lessons taken at the school. The starting point for this project was a list of ideas which emerged as a result of reflecting on this requirement, brainstormed in a notebook, followed by a list of desired outcomes for the implementation of these ideas. The ideas ranged from activities to encourage learner independence to approaches for encouraging

autonomous development *in* the classroom. Learner autonomy is most often associated with what happens *outside* the classroom, but there is a growing body of literature (e.g. Benson, 2011; Smith, 2003) pointing towards the importance of bringing autonomy *into* the classroom and involving the teacher. The desired outcomes included:

- learners' regular use of English outside class (versus leaving "guided study" for frantic completion during the final weeks of the course);
- increased motivation/enthusiasm for use of English, with use coming from learners rather than being solely teacher-directed;
- better understanding of the benefits/possibilities of out-of-class learning;
- effective integration of "guided study" and any technological tools into the course programme;
- better rapport between students, as well as between students and teacher.

I elected to use *Edmodo* with classes in the pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate range and a class blog with advanced learners. For the purposes of this article, the focus will be only on my use of *Edmodo*. This narrow focus will better enable provision of a more in-depth exploration given the space limitations of this book. *Edmodo* is a computer-mediated collaboration tool (see also Legge and Odell, this volume). Essentially a user-friendly online platform akin to a Facebook group but closed to the public, Edmodo can be used by teacher and students for virtual communication and content sharing in a secure environment. Registration is quick and straightforward, requiring only a code supplied by the teacher, to which learners attach their user-name and password. (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZHB6FfRjnQ> for a fuller description). In terms of the three categories of use of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) software identified by Garrett (2009, p. 719), *Edmodo* falls firmly into that of 'communication' but additionally, depending on the use made of it, into that of 'engagement with authentic

materials'. As will be seen in this paper, while *Edmodo* has great potential as a tool for enabling independent learning, it remains important to avoid underestimating the necessity of nurturing students' development of the expertise and attitude that are essential for fruitful independent learning (Godwin-Jones, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Approaches to fostering learner autonomy, with or without the use of technology, are many and varied. The approach taken may depend on the perspective of learner autonomy that is adopted. There are many such perspectives: Benson (1997) identifies three versions (technical, psychological and political), each of which can be traced to a different view of knowledge and learning, and Oxford (2003) adds a further two sociocultural theories, both focusing on mediated learning but differing in terms of learner motivation. For the purposes of this project, I adopted Oxford's socio-cultural 1 perspective of autonomy, in which the motivation is linked with individual self-regulation, following reflection on my beliefs about language and learning, as well as my context, where learners are accustomed to discussion and collaboration playing a key role in their language learning.

In terms of approach, I have combined two methodologies. Firstly, Smith's (2003) 'strong' methodology, which is described by Smith as a "becoming appropriate" methodology (p. 138). Rather than being limited towards transferal of a set of skills, this methodology is directed towards collaboration between learners, a consequence of which is the development of individual and collective capacities for independent learning. Secondly, Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) metacognitive approach, which foregrounds the importance of learners' planning, monitoring and evaluating strategies used, and the role of reflection and reflective discussion within this. While their work focuses on the use of a metacognitive approach for developing in-class and autonomous listening skills, I have found that the underlying principles are widely applicable in language learning as a whole, including fostering learner autonomy. Indeed, as early as 1995 Wenden

suggests that metacognitive knowledge is fundamentally important in the development of learner autonomy (cited in Benson, 2009).

Stage 1 – Introducing the Technology

Having identified outcomes and decided on my approach, the first stage in the implementation of my project was the introduction of the technology to the learners. This took place a few weeks into the course, where some classroom time was dedicated to demonstrating the software and encouraging learners to generate ideas for different uses to which it could be put. Following this, I made notes regarding student response, in terms of initial reactions in class and then the number of students in each class who then registered on *Edmodo*. Learners seemed skeptical yet appreciative that they were being offered something in addition to the standard course content. It took just under three weeks for all the learners to sign up, which is something which subsequent reflection on time efficiency costs and benefits led me to address in the second phase of the project (see *Discussion* below). I also kept a log of learners' use of *Edmodo*, noticing that it was all directed use only, and reflected further on how to move the use from this solely directed use to include autonomous use as well.

During the stage discussed above, I returned to the literature repeatedly, particularly to studies relating to the use of computer-mediated communication tools with learners (e.g. Pinkman, 2005) but also research relating to motivation and learner autonomy (e.g. Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013). Pinkman recommends that teachers use blogs to "provide students with a forum to express themselves, reflect on what had been covered in class, recycle language, engage in critical thinking and express opinions" (Pinkman, 2005, p. 15), while Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013, kindle loc 1400) quote Williams and Burden (1997, p. 121, *emphasis mine*) with regards to the importance of emphasizing that "motivation is more than simply arousing interest. It also involves *sustaining interest* and investing time and energy into putting the necessary effort to achieve certain goals", as well as indicating that motivation is always in flux, rather than being a static factor. Following reflection on both these ideas and my classroom observations, the steps explored below were taken.

Stage 2 – The Reading Project and Experimenting with English Project

While the activities suggested by Pinkman (2005), outlined above, seemed inherently sound, the missing link in practice was the motivation necessary for these to become self-directed rather than teacher-set activities. This gave rise to the question of how to bridge that gap. Two sub-projects emerged as a result of reflection on this issue. The first was the Reading Project, which used metacognitive discussion questions to raise learners' awareness of the value of extensive reading in language learning, leading to learners' selection of a book to read out of class and regular in-class discussions related to this reading. To sustain motivation, I encouraged learners to set goals relating to their reading, which of course required some use of class-time for discussion of different goal types and related benefits. One thread of this project was related to learning and recording vocabulary: using a course book extract devoted to this skill as both scaffolding and springboard, I encouraged learners to apply the skill to their extensive reading and use *Edmodo* to record what they had learnt. This worked well at first, with learners using *Edmodo* autonomously as hoped, but motivation then dipped: the frequency of self-directed learner posts on *Edmodo* dropped and classroom discussion stagnated. Thus, I returned to my original list of ideas, reflecting on the possibility of introducing these to learners in such a way as to provide all-important scaffolding but also foster independent use and increased awareness of related benefits.

This led to the second project, *Experimenting with English*. The above-mentioned reflections led me to create a handout for learners, providing a selection of activities, categorized by skill (reading, listening, writing, speaking) as well as space for reflective comments and students' own ideas (see Figure 1). Many of the activities required the use of *Edmodo*. Some of the activities mirrored tasks that I had previously set learners to do as homework, emphasizing the fact that the learners could do these activities without waiting to be directed by their teacher, while others were new. However, not all of the activities required use of *Edmodo*, as doing out-of-class study not involving the use of

Edmodo is, of course, perfectly valid. Indeed, the goal was not for Edmodo to *dominate* but for it to *enhance* and *support* learning.

I deployed this handout using a metacognitive approach: this required a process of

- independent task selection linked with awareness-raising discussions and goal-setting, and
- self-monitoring and regular evaluation, through regular discussions and use of the reflective comments space on the handout.

Recorded observations of these discussions included instances of learners:

- trouble-shooting for each other (the more technologically able scaffolding the less technologically able),
- inspiring each other, by sharing positive experiences of tasks tried (consequently giving other learners who up until that point had not tried a given activity the desire to do so),
- consoling each other when goals had not been met (when motivation might be low), and
- celebrating together when goals *had* been met.

Experimenting with English: Ways of using English outside the classroom

Use the "speller" mode on www.quizlet.com to see if you can aurally recognize the words you are learning.		
Find a short clip in English, that interests you, on www.youtube.com and make some questions to go with it. Post the link and questions on Edmodo for your classmates to watch/listen and answer.		
(Your ideas)		

Writing:

What?	When?	Thoughts?
Find an interesting magazine/newspaper article, read it, post a link to it on Edmodo and discuss it with your classmates.		
Write a recipe for your favourite dish and share it on Edmodo. Try and cook your friends' recipes! Tell them what you think of their recipes; find out what they think about yours...		
Start a blog in English (Try www.wordpress.com) Read and		

Figure 1. Sample page from "Experimenting with English" handout

These observations also led me to believe that additional guidance could further enhance the discussions, leading to the introduction of sets of discussion questions, which changed on a weekly basis. These weekly discussions were not demanding in terms of class time used but had the combined benefits of motivating and encouraging learners, minimizing isolation and encouraging reflection. The regularity of the discussions, meanwhile, meant that the handout, and out-of-class learning would not be forgotten – a potential pitfall of this kind of resource.

Stage Three – Evaluation

As well as regularly recording observations of learner behaviour, together with my own reflections, ideas and references to relevant literature, I was aware of the need for some more formal evaluation. At the mid-course stage, therefore, I styled my evaluation on Hedge's (2000) student-chaired meeting concept, in which students discuss and collate feedback without the teacher being present. Thus, while I did institutionally required individual

tutorials, the learners had a set of questions to discuss and large pieces of paper on which to record the feedback that resulted. This was a valuable undertaking, as learners had space to say how they thought using *Edmodo* could be improved, including various ideas for what could be done with it. This was, of course, welcomed whole-heartedly as it was a step towards one of my initially identified outcomes, the use of English – and technology – coming from the learners rather than being teacher-directed. Following this evaluation session, we went on to implement learners' ideas during the second part of the course. For example, one class decided to take turns, weekly, to share an article link on *Edmodo* for all to read independently, with the goal of a subsequent brief discussion in class. Another class took turns to summarize classroom-based learning each week. This meant that learners were more invested in their use of the technology and their out-of-class learning, which I believe helped them to maintain their motivation levels.

At the end of the course, a two-pronged approach to evaluation was implemented. Firstly, I collected feedback via anonymous questionnaires, which combined quantitative and qualitative question types. In the first semester, learners took these home to complete and brought them to the following lesson, whereas in the second semester learners were given time to complete them in class, in order to address the issue of questionnaires getting lost or forgotten. Secondly, learners were asked to write a reflection on their experience of the course and post it on *Edmodo*, thus creating additional qualitative data. The quantitative data, which used a combination of Likert scale questions and yes/no questions, was useful in terms of gaining an overview of student reaction to the projects implemented, and also in terms of making myself accountable to my director of studies. The qualitative data enabled a fuller understanding of that quantitative data. I was then able to use all the feedback in planning and re-implementation of these projects during the second semester courses.

RESULTS

In this section, the results for this project will be shared. I have extracted those pertaining to the most relevant questions, in order to conserve space and to maintain specific focus. The data for the other questions in the end-of-semester evaluation questionnaire are available on request.

Quantitative Data

Question 1: *Did the course “extras” (Edmodo, the reading project, the experimentation with English project, the discussions) help? Choose a number from 1–6. (6=very useful).*

Semester 1

Level 3 (Pre-Intermediate): n=7; mean – 5.43; median – 5; not submitted – 4

Level 7 (Upper-Intermediate) n=9; mean – 5.14; median – 5; not submitted – 1

Semester 2

Level 3 (2 classes): n=19; mean – 4.66; median 5; absent – 4

Level 7: n=12; mean – 5.11; median – 5; absent – 3

Question 2: *Did these “extras” help you with your guided study hours?*

Semester 1

Level 3: yes – 7/11 not submitted – 4/11

Level 7: yes – 8/9; not submitted – 1/9

Semester 2

Level 3 (two classes): yes – 14/19; no – 1/19; absent – 4/19

Level 7: yes – 8/12; no – 1/12; absent – 3/12

Question 3: Do you understand more about how to learn now?
(1= nothing more, 6= a lot more)

Semester 1

Level 3: n=11; mean – 4.71, median 5, not submitted 4

Level 7: n=9; mean – 4.62; median – 5, not submitted 1

Semester 2

Level 3: n=19; mean – 4.93; median – 5

Level 7: n=12; mean – 4.83; median – 5

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data reinforced the quantitative results, with students detailing different ways in which they had found *Edmodo*, the two sub-projects and the related class discussions useful and beneficial (Q1), explaining that the guided study would have been more difficult to complete without this extra guidance (Q2). The two students who had not found this extra input helpful attributed it to their already existent capability to complete guided study hours without it. In terms of the themes that emerged, in both sets of feedback were comments relating to benefits in terms of stimulation and interest. For example, *"It was very helpful start to read a book in English and the activity and the discuss on Edmodo were really interested"* (Q1). Learners also recognized that they had learnt more about *how* to learn (Q3), which, of course, is of great importance for independent learning. This can be seen in comments such as *"I think I am more able to learn by myself now"* and *"With this course I knew a lot of resources about how to learn English. So now if I want to improve my English I can use a lot of them. Now for me it's easier to improve my English."* Learners in both semesters particularly liked the two sub-projects: the reading project and the experimenting with English project.

In terms of the reading project, learners who had never read in English before expressed motivation to continue doing so and delight in the success already enjoyed. With regards to experimenting with English, learners referred to the handout as

"an inspiration" and "a new and interesting way to learn English, not only by reading New Headway". Learners also demonstrated motivation to continue learning, which can be seen in comments such as "The guide paper full of activity to do is really interesting, there are lots of activities that I couldn't imagine to do. It was an inspiration for me and my future summer practicing" and "Now I'm trying to do at least one hour to improve my English every day."

DISCUSSION

Within a sociocultural 1 perspective of learner autonomy, Oxford (2003, p. 86) explains that the educator must "start by accepting learners where they are but must also motivate and guide them to greater competence". This viewpoint is clearly echoed in Smith's (2003) "strong" methodology, where emphasis is placed on "co-creating with students optimal conditions for the exercise of their own autonomy, engaging them in reflection on the experience, and in this manner ... developing their capacities" (p. 131). The methodology described by Smith (2003), then, enables a teacher to implement development of learner autonomy within the sociocultural 1 perspective put forward by Oxford (2003). The importance of taking the learners as a starting point, rather than a given list of behaviours thought to be commensurate with learner autonomy, cannot be overstated.

Through carrying out and reflecting on this project, I have also found that there is a critical balance between using what is learnt with one group of learners at a given level to influence what is done with the next group of learners at that level, and being responsive to the particular group of learners sitting in front of me with their own individual starting points. In the first semester, the project unfolded as a series of initiatives that were followed in response to students' own responses to various uses of a technological tool, Edmodo. In the second semester, the initiatives developed through the afore-mentioned process were systematically introduced with a new set of classes.

For example, let us return to the issue of the length of time taken for all students to sign up to *Edmodo*, alluded to in the

Methodology section of this paper. In the second semester, rather than demonstrating the software and leaving learners to register outside class, I allocated class time to registration, so that all learners were registered from class two of their course. It could be argued that registration on *Edmodo* changed from a choice learners made to a teacher-led decision, thereby moving away from exercise of autonomy. However, this did enable me to ensure that nobody had technological issues or psychological issues (such as feeling daunted by the new software, something which might affect the less technologically able e.g. older learners) with registration. This gave all learners an equal starting point for the use of the technology in question and also sped up the process. Additionally, there were plenty of further opportunities to exercise autonomy in the use (or indeed non-use) of the tool: despite systematisation of the initiatives, learners retained control through their choice of tasks from the experimentation handout, (which acted as a scaffold for their out-of-class learning and related use of Edmodo) their choice of reading matter for the reading project, and their goals for both elements. Learners also retained the opportunity to exercise control over their use of *Edmodo* through the mid-course evaluation exercise, which, as discussed, led to the generation of ideas which learners carried out in subsequent weeks. A recurring issue in the project, however, was that of the benefit for the learners who felt they already learnt independently and therefore felt no need for the scaffolding offered. It could be the case that the reasoning behind this scaffolding needed to be made more explicit and these learners helped to identify how they could benefit from it despite greater experience levels than their peers. Overall, though, the results demonstrate that the majority of the learners benefited from the perspective adopted and methodologies used. This is evidenced by greater awareness of how to regulate their learning and what resources to use to support it, as well as the motivation to continue this beyond the end of the course.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

With a new semester approaching, and having spent a summer learning Italian independently, I look forward to developing the *Experimentation with English* handout by adding a variety of new activities for learners to try, using a range of different technologies, while integrating *Edmodo* as a means of offering an over-arching coherence to this. What this means is that *Edmodo* will act as the centre-point around which all of the experimentation will take place and through which the benefits of this will be shared. In terms of the reading project, I anticipate making more use of the small-group function in *Edmodo* to enable small groups of learners to work with the same book. *Edmodo* would become a means of sharing activities done in relation to the book, discussing it and perhaps also creating their own activities based on it. This could turn extensive reading into a more holistic, less lonely process for the learners, as well as enable them to maintain motivation more readily, which, as has been seen, is central to independent learning. These uses of *Edmodo* would extend rather than replace what the in-class discussions offered last year. The possibilities for integrating technology into language teaching are endless, but the benefits are greatest when they are implemented in a reflective, principled manner.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has outlined an approach to using technology, specifically *Edmodo*, as a means of helping learners become more autonomous in their learning, demonstrating that teacher intervention is beneficial in this development. It is important, though, that this mediation takes the learners and their current abilities, needs, and ideas as a starting point for the creation of suitable scaffolding, helping learners develop those abilities rather than focusing on the transfer of a set of pre-determined behaviours. Metacognitive, reflective discussion has been shown to be key to this development, and, within this, the regular setting of learning goals. Finally, it must be noted that as an approach that

places the learner at the centre of the decision-making process, the results obtained would not automatically transfer to a different context. However, the process of planning, implementation, observation, reflection and evaluation *is* one that is both readily transferable and valuable, with potential for yielding some interesting results based on the diverse paths that might be forged in different contexts.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Pinard recently completed her M.A. in English Language Teaching with integrated DELTA at Leeds Metropolitan (now Leeds Beckett) University and is now working at the University of Sheffield. As well as teaching and experimenting in the classroom, she enjoys developing learning materials, doing classroom research, writing (blog posts, book reviews, articles etc.) and presenting at conferences. Her current area of research is the complex relationships between learner autonomy, motivation and technology. Email: lizzie.pinard@gmail.com

REFLECTIONS ON THE VIRTUAL BOARDROOM: BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS IN THE HOLODECK

Abraham Reshad, Ohio University, USA

Jessy Hendrickx, Kent State University, USA

Aaron Schwartz Ohio University

Greg Kessler, Ohio University

ABSTRACT

In support of a preparation course for international business majors, faculty members at an intensive English Program developed an innovative learning experience making use of “Holodeck” technology, where digital projectors are used to create an immersive environment in which a student can interact. For this simulation experience, students prepared analyses of various companies and oral presentations accompanied by digital slides. The students presented in front of a virtual audience of chief executive officers (CEOs), rather than their teacher and classmates. This chapter describes teacher reflections and student reactions to two implementations of the virtual CEOs project to inform others attempting similar projects.

INTRODUCTION

Simulation has a long and integral history in the field of foreign language education. Teachers have recognized the value in

creating opportunities for students to practice language in contexts that mimic target language situations. With the advent of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), many quickly recognized the vast potential for creating more dynamic and immersive experiences. Crookall and Oxford (1990) document an early and diverse range of computer based simulations, including guidelines for designing, implementing and evaluating simulations. Simulation in language learning could include virtually any language task in any environment, yet there are some contexts and language activities that are more obviously aligned. Some have explored the potential of SIMS Sim Copter (Coleman, 2002). Others have investigated the potential of interacting within virtual worlds such as Second Life (Hundsberger, 2009), Croquelandia (Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne, 2008), Langland (Coleman, 2004), and OpenSim (Coleman and Yamazaki, this volume). The evolution of technology-enhanced simulation has moved toward more compelling and convincing immersion. We have been experimenting with a variety of immersive environments in order to explore their potential. This development began with off-the-shelf virtual worlds, but we quickly moved toward a classroom-based environment that did not have the bandwidth limitations of programs such as Second Life. Further, by designing this environment ourselves, we felt that we could create a more realistic and customized experience for our learners. Toward this goal we set up what we are referring to as the Holodeck (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodeck> for the derivation). This consists of a 20-foot by 20-foot room with three projectors that are all being displayed from a single computer. This allows the display to stretch across all three surrounding walls, thus encompassing a student's forward and peripheral vision, resulting in the ability to visually immerse students in any number of real life and imaginary contexts. With auditory stimulus included, the experience can be very convincing.

This project was situated in the Ohio Program of Intensive English (OPIE), an intensive English program (IEP) founded in 1967 and affiliated with the Department of Linguistics at Ohio University (OU). As an IEP, OPIE specializes in the instruction of students in preparation for academic coursework in the English language.

Some academic colleges and departments accept successful completion of OPIE's full time program as equivalent to acceptable standardized test scores for partial or full admission to their respective academic programs. Working in cooperation with OPIE and the Modern Languages Department, the Language Resource Center (LRC) at Ohio University provides multimedia resources, computer labs, and hand held mobile devices in order to augment language instruction. Much of the LRC's role has been training in CALL and encouraging collaboration and innovation among language instructors at OU.

The College of Business (COB) at Ohio University approached OPIE to collaborate and establish an English for specific purposes class that would better prepare students for the rigors of the COB. As a result, the goals and objectives of OPIE's bridge program were altered to include a focus on collaboration and oral presentation skills. In fact, many of the main projects involved business presentations as the primary grade. One in particular is based on a written SWOT analysis of a company describing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). After writing these essays individually, students would present their findings in small groups.

As a way of marking student completion of this specialized program, the Dean of the College of Business and other key university administrators were invited as an audience for the presentations. While the original intent of this invitation was to foster unity between OPIE and COB, this audience of professionals rather than peers often seen in IEP classrooms served to motivate students and thereby increase the quality of their presentations. Students dressed in business attire and took on the role of the "Executive". At the end of these presentations, teachers could clearly see the difference an authentic audience made on student preparation and motivation, which begged the question, "What if this experience could be generated for every presentation?"

FROM IMMERSION TO SIMULATION

At this point, the LRC's Holodeck had only been used to provide immersive backgrounds to augment classroom activities. For

role-play activities designed to be set in a cafe or cocktail party, the Holodeck was configured with the necessary background and ambient noise. For presentations in which students introduced their hometowns, Google Earth was used and the class followed along using target structures while taking a stroll in a different part of the world. Teachers immediately noticed during student performances and in a post activity debriefing that the immersive context served as a key motivator in the activities. Some teachers observed that the element of play and experimentation became present in a way not seen before. Students commented that visiting LRC's experimental language lab was like going on a field trip. It became clear that the Holodeck is able to provide a convincing immersive context, but to what degree? Could it be used to simulate person-to-person interaction?

A simulated audience seemed to be the first logical step to answering this question. Also, if students find it convincing and helpful, any number of courses with the goal of developing public speaking would benefit from it. A number of audience simulations presented themselves, but the "CEO Board Room" simulation seemed to be the most simple to produce because it required only a few actors to serve as CEOs. However, this small-scale simulation presented its own challenges.

Building the Boardroom Simulation

For this simulation we envisioned a small conference room with 4–6 CEO actors in business attire playing the role of extremely busy and distracted CEOs. The actors would make occasional eye contact with the presenters, but they would also check email/texts, whisper to each other, fidget, clear their throats, and one or two would walk in late. At the end of the 15 minute SWOT presentation, the CEOs would ask a couple of general questions that would apply to all of the presenters.

Most importantly, the simulation featured an audience whose attention needed to be earned. This aspect in particular seemed to be characteristic of the cutthroat business culture the students were preparing for.

Step 1: Create the CEO Boardroom

Six faculty members (including the IEP program director) were recruited and a boardroom was reserved for the background. The actors did not require much coaching as everyone had their own Hollywood projection of how a CEO would act. In line with the cost effective design of the Holodeck, we used technology on hand to record for a three-screened background. Three inexpensive digital cameras were stacked on phonebooks to provide the proper perspective in the recording. The reason for three video recorders was to get the correct aspect ratio for the Holodeck. With three screens to fill with media, instructors simply could not stretch one video across 3 screens and maintain a life-like CEO experience. The CEOs were all men over 30. Most wore ties and jackets but they were also instructed to bring phones and computers. Our program director, who is known to the student body and carries some gravitas, was sitting amongst the assembled executives taking notes on a yellow pad.

Step 2: Video Editing

Using iMovie software, a CALL materials developer was able to edit the audio and video for the three files needed so that they would start and stop at the exact same moment. Without precise synchronization, sound or dialogue would echo across the recordings. This may have been the most difficult aspect of this entire project. During this phase, it became clear that refining aspects of the recording process would simplify the editing of the files. For example, the lack of synchronization in the files was directly related to the lack of synchronization in the recording process. In future instances of this project, a materials developer may be able to circumvent this problem by using three web cameras along with open source security software allowing one to start and stop the recording process with one button instead of three.

Step 3: Teacher Interface

For this first iteration, QuickTime was used to play the videos, but unfortunately this program (like most video formats) does not

support the simultaneous start of three video files. As a result, the teacher or lab aid had to press the three play buttons separately and as quickly as possible. This method resulted in a slight echo between the three videos, but this did not seem to detract from the CEO simulation.

Step 4: Classroom Set up

While the simulation was designed to be the audience for the presenters, instructors arranged the class so that the students would be an indirect audience to the SWOT analysis. By utilizing the Airplay feature of Apple OS X and Airserver, a third party program that turns any Apple or Windows machine into an Airplay recipient, SWOT presentations were projected on two screens simultaneously. In all, the classroom had five projectors for this iteration of the project: three for the simulation, one for the students giving the SWOT analysis, one more so students could see the slides of the presentation being given.

Below, we describe the first simulation and show how by reflecting on some of the problems there and devising solutions, we were able to have a smoother and more user-friendly second version.

THE FIRST SIMULATION

Two researchers conducted the simulation. One, the instructor, sat with the digital audience rating presenters while the other, the technical assistant, worked in the background, playing and restarting the simulation before and after each 15-minute presentation. As seen in Figure 1, the presenters on the right face the digital audience set in three projected images while the instructor on the left is sitting among the CEOs rating the presenters. The rest of the students (not shown) observed the simulation as well as the content of the digital slides displayed on another wall.

Each presentation went well, but with all of the configuration and buttons required to get things started, it seemed that there was potential for a wide margin of error. Desiring that this activity

be accessible to any teacher, the researchers agreed that the controls needed to be simplified to one button to start all three videos. Considering this issue, we decided to update the interface in time for the second iteration.



Figure 1. A view of the Holodeck during the activity

Student Response to Simulation: The First Iteration

The first class that experienced the Holodeck presentation simulation had a wide range of reactions. Beforehand the students were given an introduction to Ohio University's Holodeck through a video interview created by a campus newspaper. Despite having already seen a brief demo, students were impressed and surprised upon sight of the simulated effect. Students seemed almost nervous and wondered if the IEP director was really there; however, after further explanation about how the Holodeck worked, they were less surprised. During their presentations students found they could focus on one individual in the simulated audience and that helped them overcome nervousness and concentrate on their presentations. Other students reacted nervously to their initial exposure to the boardroom experience, but continued their presentations anyway. In the middle of the

presentations they would hear the sound effects from the virtual audience members and students would obviously notice the sound effects, as they appeared to be slightly distracted from what they were saying, but they would keep on with their presentation.

THE SECOND SIMULATION

In order to synchronize the video files in the business simulation, an html interface was designed that made use of the <video> tag (a feature of the recent html5 conventions). This new interface allowed a teacher to start all three videos playing simultaneously within a web browser. The interface, as seen in Figure 2, made use of freely available CSS style sheets that simulated the control panels from the starship Enterprise in the science fiction television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. At the same time, other small “programs” consisting of photographs, videos and audio files were compiled and included to demonstrate additional uses of the Holodeck interface.

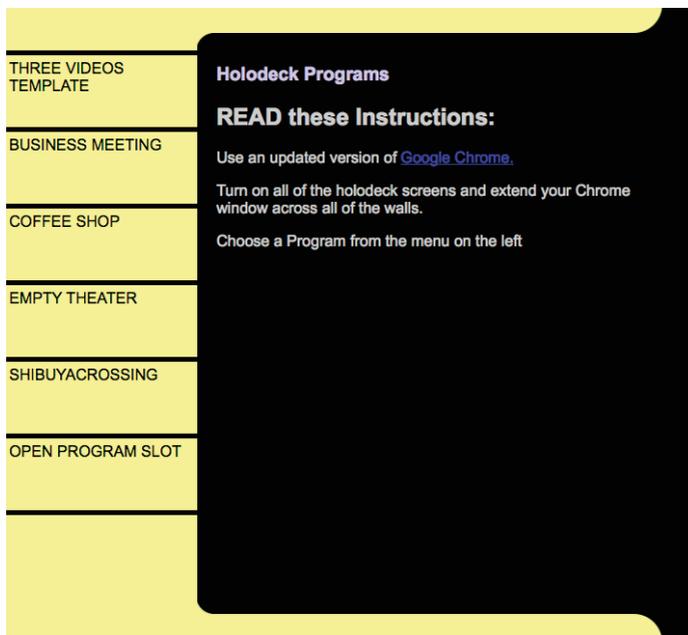


Figure 2. Simplified Holodeck Interface

Classroom Setup

During the second iteration of the project, the class was set up almost identically except for the number of projectors. Cutting down on the amount of technology to set up, four projectors were used instead of five. A 22-inch monitor served as the screen facing the digital CEOs and this also allowed for better tech support because previously, the fifth projector had obstructed one researcher's line of sight to the Holodeck simulation.

Running the Second Boardroom Simulation

Again, the simulation took place with two faculty members. While the end goal is to create a system which can be run independently by one teacher, it seemed necessary to continue having one teacher to focus on and evaluate student presentations and one to serve as a lab assistant to support the operation of the simulation. The html5 interface greatly simplified the system, but it became apparent that the wrong videos files linked in the interface because the simulation would only run for 5 minutes instead of the original 15-minute video. The instructor compensated by refreshing the web interface every 2–3 minutes to keep the video going. At least one student took notice and made note of it in the survey results discussed below. While this complicated the simulation, it did not seem to detract from the overall experience from the presenter's perspective.

The instructor made note of student reactions due to the sound effects on the Holodeck. The CEO boardroom had sound effects of cell phones ringing, and other board members coming late, whispering and pens tapping during the recording. The students seemed to notice the sound effects while they were presenting and even though they were not prepared for this, they continued with their presentations. They did not stop speaking, but it was obvious that they noticed the distractions. While it seemed clear that students could present through the distractions from the CEO's, researchers thought that incorporating a more responsive digital audience that moves from disinterest to focus might seem more authentic. This would serve to reward presenters for focusing on the message in spite of the obstacles.

Student Response to Simulation: The Second Iteration

After each student experienced the Holodeck, they completed a survey about their experience. The second class had both positive and negative reactions to the Holodeck. Some said the experience did not affect their presentations while other said it did. Overall, most students favored the experience and said it helped them with their presentation skills.

The survey, which was distributed to students via email, consisted of four questions regarding their experience and whether or not they felt the Holodeck influenced their perception of their own presentation skills. In the first question, the students were able to rank their perceptions of how realistic the experience was in comparison to the typical classroom audience on a Likert scale of one to five, one being not at all more realistic than the classroom and five being more realistic. The second question asked to what extent students believe it would be helpful to incorporate activities like this in their business English classes. The students were able to choose from one to five, one being not helpful and five being very helpful. Table 1 includes survey results for these two questions.

Table 1. Survey Results

Question 1: To what extent do you believe it was more realistic to present to digital CEOs than it would have been to present in front of your classmates in a classroom?

Rank	Frequency
5 (more realistic)	4 (57%)
4	1 (14%)
3	2 (29%)
2	0
1 (not realistic)	0

Question 2: To what extent do you believe that it would be helpful to incorporate activities like this in your Business English classes?

Rank	Frequency
5 (very helpful)	4 (57%)
4	2 (29%)
3	1 (14%)
2	0
1 (not helpful)	0

Responses to both questions reflected the enthusiasm present

during the simulation. As we can see there was a generally positive perception of both the realism and helpfulness of the experience. Question 1's average of 4.3 and question 2's average of 4.4 definitely point to a student buy-in with this particular sample. This definitely merits the use and perhaps refinement of this simulation.

The remaining questions on the survey were qualitative in nature, asking for specific details about what aspects were interesting and helpful (Question 3) and how the simulation could be improved (Question 4). The responses to these questions are as follows:

Question 3: What aspects of this experience were interesting and helpful to creating a business atmosphere?

Student comments.

Six of the seven students were positive in their open ended responses with general comments such as "I personally think that this is a good active [sic] for us." Some also commented on the benefits of the less stressful simulated experience, including comments such as "This video of the CEOs is interesting, and make me feel more seriously." However, one student felt that the experience was not real and therefore wrote, "I do not feel nervous at all and I do not take this serious." These results remind us that it is always challenging to achieve an optimal level of challenge vs. comfort.

Question 4: What do you believe would make this a better and more useful experience?

Student comments.

Four out of five students believed that more similar activities would be helpful, but one student indicated that if more experiences like this were used, "It would be better if the video was longer." In other short answer questions, students commented that they did not know if it could be changed to be more useful and one commented that the exercise was not helpful. As educators we should keep in mind that not all students will benefit from this

experience. While the use of role-play and simulation is accepted as an effective approach to language teaching, there are some students that find it difficult to suspend the reality of the classroom and act as if they are in a “real” context. This type of student would benefit from a variety of audiences rather than being restricted to this simulated experience. Also, brief interviews with students might elicit more insights into whether or not this experience is helpful to students.

Interpretation of Survey Results

The first time the students were surveyed, seven students responded. In Table 1.1, the results show that 57% of students favored the Holodeck experience, while 29% were neutral about the experience. In Table 1.2, 57% of students thought the Holodeck should be incorporated into future business classes, while 29% were neutral. While student responses were largely favorable to the Holodeck, some class characteristics must be considered. Attitudes towards English studies in general were not considered in the questions. Also, the first class that experienced the Holodeck was better prepared for it. The instructor showed a promotional video of the Holodeck and described it to the students before they presented. The second class was just informed about the presentation and they did not see a promotional video. Students’ prior knowledge of the activity could be a factor in their perception of its effectiveness. For example, viewing the Holodeck video before the presentation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z06WZse-AOo>) might have served to generate excitement for the Boardroom Simulation, which could have increased the time and energy invested in the presentation and not viewing it may have added to the novelty of the experience.

Moreover, these data do not show the final grades of the presentations so the researchers cannot ascertain if students actually improved due to their experience with the Holodeck. In the future, students’ scores must be considered to show a more accurate result of student improvement. Another point to mention is that this experiment did not have a control group. For example, there was no indication whether student grades on this particular assignment improved with the use of the Holodeck

compared with previous presentations given by same students in a traditional manner. If this project continues, researchers may want to measure student motivation and self-efficacy when the immersive environment is present as opposed to presenting in an environment not influenced by such technology. Reflecting on their experiences, the researchers believe that student motivation increases in a simulated, immersive environment.

CONCLUSION

The first two iterations of this project showed great potential in the use of immersive simulation in language learning. In this limited sample, students on the whole preferred the simulation over the traditional classroom audience. While the survey did not focus on the student attitude toward the presentation in light of the digital audience, focus groups revealed that students took the project more seriously in response to presenting in the CEO boardroom scenario. We suspect that this has led to increased self-efficacy, but further study is required to confirm this suspicion.

Implications for Future Use

For our current implementation of the Holodeck, more work needs to be done to simplify the user interface so that any instructor could potentially run this simulation without any assistance. This may allow for widespread use in the business English classes and most likely an increased variety of simulations, potentially including pre-recorded questions from a digital audience.

Others may attempt live video conferencing in which the digital audience interacts with the presenters. At the time of submission, a third iteration is currently underway under the guidance of a different instructor who had observed the previous instructor's use of the Holodeck with her students. In this latest iteration, the instructor, in consultation with his students, has decided to place the live audience members inside the Holodeck space during the presentation. The potential collaboration with students and added interactivity seems to strengthen the learner's engagement within the Boardroom Simulation.

As more teachers and students experience the Holodeck, simulations and immersive backgrounds may move beyond the public speaking genre to include immersive cultural contexts like purchasing groceries, visiting a bank, or seeing a doctor. Another possibility would be to mobilize the Holodeck and allow teachers to take it to any classroom on campus. This would make the use of the Holodeck more widespread not only for Business English instructors but teachers of other language skill areas as well.

As a result of showcasing the LRC's Holodeck in a variety of international conferences like CALICO and TESOL, more university programs around the world have been exposed to the idea and may take advantage of the inexpensive nature of the Holodeck design to build their own. This would most likely lead to an even greater variety of simulations catered to diverse subjects and sociocultural contexts around the world. The Holodeck itself may also take on a variety of builds based on the space available. LRC's version utilizes three projectors with three surrounding walls, but a similar experience could be created with two projectors with two walls, or even one projector and one wall.

For the future, the Holodeck could be used to measure different characteristics of student learning. For example, we could measure how students' self-efficacy changed due to the immersive environment of the Holodeck. In this experiment researchers could also look to see if students' motivation to improve their presentation skills increased due to the immersive, simulated environment. Moreover, we would like it to be available to all educators so in the future, our goal is to make the interface more user-friendly and with a more extensive set of immersive environments to choose from. Perhaps a virtual reality version of this simulation through using a VR Headset like Microsoft's Hololens, Oculus Rift or Google Cardboard might serve as a more convenient and convincing experience for students. As a follow-up to this study, we have been exploring the potential of these others forms of immersion.

Looking back at this project with its narrow scope, the co-authors agree that there are improvements that could be made to the overall implementation of the project. Eliciting student collaboration in improving the Holodeck programs

and interface can lead to increased student ownership in the simulated experience, and more novel approaches geared toward the participatory culture in which our students are immersed (Cardenas-Claros & Gruba, 2010). By discussing and demonstrating this project with students and other teachers, the hope is that more materials will be developed to make this unique lab space more valuable in a variety of contexts. Of course future versions of this project may take different forms and we may find other uses for the Holodeck technology, but the benefit of this project comes not from the specific technologies used, but the scrutiny given to the place of these technologies in our students' learning environment.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Abraham Reshad serves as a Lecturer & database/CALL coordinator in the Ohio Program of Intensive English (OPIE) at Ohio University. For three years, he has utilized mobile media to augment classroom instruction in terms of reading and vocabulary. Now, he focuses on augmented reality mobile applications and Ohio University's Holodeck. Email: reshada@ohio.edu

Jessy Hendrickx is a Lecturer for the Kent State University English Department's ESL Center. She worked previously at Ohio University as a Listening, Speaking Skill Area Coordinator as well. She hopes to do more research in the area of second language learning in computer-simulated environments. Email: jahendri@kent.edu

Aaron Schwartz is a Lecturer and CALL Coordinator at the Ohio Program of Intensive English (OPIE) at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio and the 2014 Chair of the TESOL CALL-IS. He has taught in Japan, China, and California. Currently, he promotes and supports innovative use of CALL in OPIE's courses. Email: schwara1@ohio.edu

Greg Kessler is Director of the Language Resource Center and Associate Professor of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). His research addresses the convergence of language, digital environments, language learning and human behavior. He has published and spoken widely in the area of CALL. Email: kessler@ohio.edu

A TECH-CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING: USING A FILM PROJECT APPLICATION AS PROOF OF LEARNING

Christine Sabieh, Notre Dame University, Lebanon

ABSTRACT

In this study with a group of EFL teacher trainees, information processing theory, specifically the phases of encoding and retrieval, was used as a strategy to enhance the students' learning and understanding of language and learning theory application in the classroom. Combining the use of senses and projecting the main learning theories in classroom processes, the 25 trainees created short films using *Microsoft Windows Movie Maker*. The purpose of the project was to have the students show understanding of the theories by integrating how information in the environment gets coded and used. The outcome of the project is reflected upon and discussed, implications made, and recommendations suggested.

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher and teacher educator, I encourage students to think "outside the box" and develop critical thinking skills (James & Brookfield, 2014). I believe such an approach is essential for confidence building and reflectivity. It is constructivism that

enables me to get the EFL teacher trainees to think reflectively outside the box; technology, as a partner, empowers me to put my quest for student creativity to the test. Let me share with you an example of how I have linked the two.

First, in the approach I use, student learning is in the hands of the instructor. The instructor plans the learning, the teaching, the reflecting, and the constructing of knowledge; the students carry out the activities the instructor has developed to support the intended learning (Kauchak & Eggen, 2011). The instructor facilitates the reinforcement of knowledge, even in its primitive stage of acquisition. The instructor guides throughout the process. The guidance should ensure that the students can indeed apply the acquired content naturally. The students should feel ownership of the content information they are acquiring, assimilating and accommodating in the repertoire of stored knowledge that is ready to be retrieved at any moment the need for its use arises.

Second, promoting a learner-centered set up in the teaching/ learning environment is required (Kauchak & Eggen, 2011). Students need to be active learners and critical thinkers (Brookfield, 2011; Suh, 2010). Students feel the responsibility to learn and to account, to themselves, the value this has. Active learning happens in a language setting because the students partake in their learning endeavor (Ormrod, 2014). The students must be able to use the knowledge they are acquiring in any EFL setup or in any learning activity to get their message across to an audience. The students need to be able to construct and manipulate the acquired content to process it in an English message.

To assess the learning of the 25 teacher trainees I was working with, I required them to map out their own learning journey as they experienced it. A constructivist approach was used in the teaching/ learning process. The outcome was to have the students show, through a film they were to create, the meaning of their learning; that film would demonstrate their understanding of how learning in any educational setting could take place. The students were exposed to various learning theories and conditions. Thus, the outcome as proof of language communication accountability showed the gathering of information that aimed to evaluate their academic performance (Coombe, Davidson, O'Sullivan, & Stoyloff, 2012).

The teacher trainees need to be able to show mastery of this material: as their instructor, I want them to take the learning theories they acquire and use them in their long term settings; to promote higher order learning and critical thinking. I want them to be able to perform successfully under any circumstance—in any EFL setting—when given activities that call on them to use recall, reproduction or production (Slavin, 2011).

WHAT DID I WANT TO DO?

The purpose of the project was threefold: first, to use Anderson's (2000) information processing theory, specifically the encoding and the retrieval phases, as strategies to enhance the students' learning and understanding of learning theory application in the classroom; second, to combine the use of the senses to project understanding of the main learning theories in classroom processes; third, to build self-efficacy and confidence in the students' learning endeavor and future instructional methodology.

In turn, the students were to focus on three points to carry out the project: First, they needed to focus on the way information is processed. Second, they needed to focus on how the processing of information leads to a response, and, third, they needed to focus on how to encode the content information for long term storage.

So the planned learning activity was to have the students create a project in which they would show understanding of the learning theories they were being taught by having them integrate how information, that is taken in from the environment around them, gets coded and used.

THE WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

The basis of the teaching/learning setting was rooted in applying the learning theories and conditions in the classroom. From Fetsco & McClure (2005), the students were to be taught the five main learning theories and the conditions to promote motivation. The aim was to facilitate the students' understanding of each

theory and/or condition and guide them in their ability to use the information effectively.

Drawing from these main learning theories and conditions, I embedded ten assumptions into the intended project:

- Learning is an active goal-directed process (Information Processing theory; Cognitive Learning Theory)
- Stimulus leads to responses; reinforcement shapes learning (Behavioral Theories)
- Cognition plays a role in learners' learning (Social Learning Theory)
- Meaningful learning happens when the new information is linked to the knowledge that already exists (Cognitive Learning Theory; Cognitive Developmental Theories)
- Performance goals are needed if teachers want student learning to increase understanding or skill mastery (Motivation)
- Learners build self-confidence with learning exposure and accountability measures (Motivation)
- Triangulating personality, environment, and learning behavior with the behavior itself results in reciprocal learning. The learning is determined by the cause prediction (Social Learning Theory)
- Self-efficacy is the result of students engaging in behaviors that they believe are implemented successfully (Social Learning Theory)
- Learners self-regulate their own learning process; that is, they select what behavior is appropriate at any particular moment (Social Learning Theory)
- Learners increase self-efficacy when they develop judgment through self-reflection (Social Learning Theory)

A GLIMPSE AT THE OVERALL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND ITS INTENTION

The course content included teaching the EFL teacher trainees various learning theories and conditions. The learning theories and conditions included: Cognitive learning theory, information processing theory, cognitive developmental theories, behavioral theories, social learning theory, learning conditions and motivation, and developmental theories – moral, psychosexual, and social. The classroom instruction time facilitated the students' learning process and assisted in the students' understanding of the learning theories. Specifically, it helped the students, through the instruction, activities, and class discussions, to understand that the encoding and the retrieval phases were central to enhance the learning and understanding of the content material. The students learnt and practiced the strategies needed to enhance encoding information through perception. Theoretically, the students were taught the difference between short term and long term memory, stressing the use of the five senses, of meaning, and of meaningful connections. The importance of imagery, sensory impressions, elaboration, organization, and mnemonics were other strategies taught to enhance the encoding phase. Moreover, as instructor I facilitated the understanding of constructive memory, constructive perception, construction, and reconstruction. As future teachers, they would know the importance of encoding, rehearsing, recalling, reproducing, producing, and creating schemas to communicate the message in English.

To teach encoding, students engaged in significant amounts of in-class practice. In line with Bandura's social learning theory, specifically the model of self-efficacy building, students also worked on self-regulating and self-monitoring their knowledge (see Fetsco & McClure, 2005). The three ways to self-regulate were: 1) to set challenging but achievable goals; thus, the students were working on intention and forethought; 2) to select and use effective strategies to achieve a goal, thus, once again, having the students work on retention and forethought; and 3) to employ self-regulation strategies, so that the students observe, judge, and self-administer consequences to motivate and guide. Thus, the

students were practicing self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. In choosing activities that they believed they would succeed in, the students made the effort to stay on task, persisting as long as the positive outcome was attainable. With practice and determination, the exercise helped the students to build confidence.

Technology was going to help the students master their learning process. Specifically, my plan was that, through the use of technology, the students were going to demonstrate their way of thinking about the theories creatively. They would use the technology as the means to help them extend their theoretical understanding (Broda & Broda, 2008).

THE PROJECT

Using information processing theory, specifically the encoding and retrieval phases, I created my research methodology based on the three intended purposes. The participants were native speakers of Arabic; however, the schooling they had received in Lebanon was either in English or in French. The university's language of instruction was English. The students in my class were either taking English as the first or the second foreign language.

In total, I had 25 EFL teacher trainees from a variety of different groups in class. Students were working on fulfilling their BA degrees in English Language & Literature or in Education, their Teaching Diplomas or Certificates, or their MA degrees in Language or Education. Thus, having the EFL pre- and post-teacher development component in our active classroom complemented the sharing of examples. Some of the students were already working in the EFL field. Thus, the examples, on many occasions, were richer and demonstrated authentic context since real life experiences from their own classrooms in the school they taught in were brought into the class discussions. The learning environment was alive. Through the class discussions, not only did the experienced students learn, but so did the students who had never experienced classroom teaching as teachers. During class discussions, the students shared their ideas of what learning meant and how it could be promoted in the teaching/learning setting.

However, they worked on content mastery, individually. The students competed with each other and wanted the instructor to see their individual input as an outcome measure of their 45-hour course learning endeavor.

The qualitative research design was a case study. As mentioned previously, the course I was teaching was preparing the EFL teacher trainees to become practitioners who would assess the needs of the learning setting and diagnose it to integrate and use the language theories and learning theories to enhance their own EFL teaching/learning environments. The project was designed for the students to demonstrate, through the use of the sense, how their knowledge is acquired (Susono, Ikawa, & Kagami, 2011).

Microsoft Live Movie Maker was the tool used by the students to use to create the films to reflect their learning. The course learning outcomes were 1) to develop the capacity to understand and contextualize the learning theories and conditions and 2) to show application of theoretical knowledge in discussion, projects and papers. The plan was to assess the students' learning through the projects they created (Coombe, Folse, Hubley, 2007)

Microsoft Windows Live Movie Maker is a software application that enabled video/film production through editing. The students were to use *Movie Maker* to create short films to portray their understanding of how learning happens according to the theories and conditions they were exposed to. An example of a study that used problem based learning and *Movie Maker* was Ouyang and Warner (2008), where they had pre-and in-service teachers contextualize a problem in a meaningful way to show recalling of the learnt formation in an authentic way.

There were seven steps the students needed to consider to complete their films.

1. Identify all the key aspects of each learning theory. The students were to use their resource readings and notes to help organize their work.
2. Think "outside the box" as to how to portray the theories and conditions through the use of senses or images. The purpose of that reflective step was to have the students create ways to use

the senses to have viewers perceive meaning of images without being told what they were seeing or what meaning they had to accommodate. I knew that step number two was a difficult step to carry out, but, it was that step that showed the learning reflection. This learning reflection was the measure as to whether or not the students understood the theories and could find ways, through imagery, to show proof of that. The idea of images that depict the use of senses will reflect meaning into practice: the power of imagery strongly links the individual's ability to focus, encode, retrieve and produce. The images created by the students would be an indication that learning had happened. One important guideline related to the project was that the students were allowed to use their senses in creating film, but they were not allowed, in the film, to verbally communicate, explain or interpret what the images they used were revealing to the audience.

3. Become familiar with *Movie Maker*. To ensure that the students would not panic or become anxious and lose focus of the assignment, I showed them how to use the tool in class. I assured them that the film production could be primitive, even just basic shots put together. The aim of the film-making endeavor was not to assess the students' professional film making skills or attempt. Rather, it was to have students indulge in using the senses creatively to communicate messages related to how learning happens. I went over the steps to create a film and told the students to practice the technique. I also told them that the web offered step by step tutorials that they could use if they felt they needed more assistance.
4. Plan the film. The students were to either select location(s) to take video footage or camera shots for the storyboard on *Movie Maker* or to find appropriate websites to provide visuals to use. I also suggested they look at *YouTube* for ideas. The intention of step number four was for the students to actually start planning what they wanted to include in their film, given their understanding of the theories. They were to reveal their learning while using the technology as the tool to show their understanding of how learning happens in different contexts (Broda & Broda, 2008).

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5. Import the images, drag and drop the needed images, video or camera shots, in the appropriate storyboard or timeline frames to complete the visual narration on *Movie Maker*.
 6. Add the needed effects, music, transitions, and/or titles/credits to produce visual narrations on *Movie Maker*.
 7. Edit the work completely before saving or publishing the narration on *Movie Maker*.

Throughout the steps, the students were able to share and show their intended plans for constructive feedback or technical knowhow with their peers. Moreover, they were informed that they could share *Movie Maker* problems with me. I did not want the students to feel that the tool to showcase their work was the problem that would not enable them to show testimony of their learning. I wanted to account for any frustration, anxiety, challenge, or tech-illiteracy they might face by counteracting it with guidance or assistance to facilitate the endeavor.

THE RESULTS

Knowing that I was there for them and that the professional quality of the film was not a measure of cognitive course knowledge application, most of the students did not seek out my assistance. Some students shared their overall plan of the film with me; however, most shared their creations or plans with their peers and received constructive feedback from them. The students facilitated their own work in their own ways; they judged for themselves and produced the films. They created the films--some were basic and simple while others were quite creative—but the films all proved to be viable testimonies of successful learning endeavors. The students actively partook in the creation, using higher-order thinking. The result of viewing the films was the witness to that.

The tech-documentaries were developed through visual and acoustic creativity and did not include verbal communication. The students' testimonies were real. The films showed that the students had understood the course content, and they were able to creatively "communicate" the fundamental issues in the

theories. Though the films differed in production mastery, they were far from deficient in confidence of knowledge possession. The films differed in narration creativity due to personality and individual differences, differed in context selection where students used ready-made images or created their own images, and differed in the storyboard and/or timeline frame creativity and effects. However, the films were all unique examples of projects well done, depicting their understanding of the learning theories they had been exposed to.

When I asked students to comment on the experience of the project, they unanimously claimed that it was a very positive learning experience on two levels: the course content and the use of the tool. However, 90 percent of the students confessed that they found the activity difficult. They pointed that the difficulty they felt was not in relation to the task of using senses and imagery to depict understanding; the difficulty they felt was the fear of the idea of creating a film.

The majority of students not being tech-savvy felt that the use of technology to express their understanding was both a fear and a challenge. The fear was of not being able to get the message across to the assessor (me), and the challenge was of overcoming the fear or the technology and actually communicating the message effectively through the film. In short, they thought that they would not be able to create a film since they were not majoring in communication. I worked with whoever wanted my assistance and helped them become familiar with the tool.

Three students asked me if they could be given another assignment that did not utilize the use of technology since they believed they were computer illiterate. I said they could not; they needed to try and utilize the technology and complete the task. Five students asked if they could create a *Microsoft PowerPoint* slide show instead of a film. I said I would like them to attempt to create the film using *Movie Maker*; moreover, I said that the effort and time they would use to create a slide show using the templates would be similar to the time and effort they would use to create the film using the storyboard prompts provided in *Movie Maker*. Seven students said that they would prefer to sit for a written exam to measure content acquisition. I said to the seven

students that a written exam was not an option. Of the twenty-five students, fifteen students shared said they felt they were up to the challenge and were willing to try to use the tool, but they wanted assurance from me that I was not going to grade their *Movie Maker* skills or technical production. I assured the whole group that the focus of the project was not on their technical skills; the focus was on their ability to get the message across to an audience (me and the students) that they understood how learning happened; they needed to using sense (sight & sound) reflection portrayals of learning theories. I encouraged the students to use imagery to be creative in their storyboard slides. I encouraged them to share with me their storyboards to enable me to facilitate or help guide them on technicalities but not on their message planning or building.

In short, I continuously gave the 25 students my assurance and help, reminding them that mastering the use of the tool was not a part of determining what their course knowledge acquisition. The tool needed to be perceived as an excellent medium to embed the students' creative work as a means to showcase the learning theories through the use of the senses. By asking the students to explore how topics were addressed on You Tube, and by showing them how to create a film on *Movie Maker*, all the students felt motivated to step-up to the challenging project.

Students created the film depicting their understanding of the learning theories as each understood them. I have five example films available for viewing: each film is of a different level of technical expertise, but all of these films communicated the message effectively, showing reflection and creativity. (Note: Some of these films are available in Dropbox—please contact the author at sabieh@hotmail.com for access if interested).

THE OBSERVATION

The EFL teacher trainees created the films, showing through those films that they had grasped the course content. The students' choice of image, audio, effects, and titles clearly revealed how they had processed the information and how they had used the tool *Movie Maker* to depict this. Some of the films were simple

and others were complex, using the tool to meet the level of challenge they managed to master and feel comfortable with. The interaction, outlined by Bandura's determinism, was seen in all the films (Fetsco & McClure, 2005). The students' command of their knowledge was mapped out, personalized, and mixed in with their acquired technical skills to create the storyboard. I was able to witness the students understanding of the theories. They had found ways to apply the understanding and generated self-efficacy in the movie making process. Confident in their product expertise, the students were delighted with the production as they each showcased the final production in class. The students had followed Bandura's steps to acquire self-efficacy and were able to use the technology to show their content mastery. I had listened to what they intended to do with the technology, and I guided them in using the tool as they planned their digital storyboard, seeing their enjoyment of manipulating the tool as they became more familiar with it. The students became deeply involved as they explored ways to communicate their message. The students deepened their understanding by selecting the content of how the learning theories were to be portrayed, and, then, applied the information into a context, appealing to the use of senses to perceive the message. They became mental advocates for their own thinking.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My supposition in the project was that if the teacher candidates were able to come up with ways to engage the use of senses to report learning, to me that was strong evidence, indeed measurable, that they had understood the theories enough to use the senses to reconstruct and implement meaning. Accountability of the knowledge they had acquired was measured through the content used in making the films. I saw that the students were able to think "outside the box", and that the teaching/ learning environment was indeed reflective and learner-centered, cushioning the students' journeys as they explored and acquired the course material to use in their films. Motivated, they each became more active learners, critical thinkers, and creators of their own knowledge repertoires. They walked away from the course

with knowledge that would be used not only in their films but also in their future classroom settings. They became more self-confident and were able to reflect and produce outcomes to show successful mastery of the course material.

What did I learn through the project? I watched the students in their journey of learning. I witnessed how they transformed the knowledge they had acquired into a reflection of how they perceived learning happens (see a similar example by Susono, Ikawa, & Kagami, 2011). I observed them become reflective critical thinkers (James & Brookfield, 2014).

My observations led to three implications. First, using technology as part of application work, especially hands-on, in any education setting cannot be dismissed. It is a powerful strategy to ensure encoding with the use of senses and meaning happens. Second, teaching students to self-regulate their learning process enhances their self-efficacy to better plan their learning acquisition mastery. Observing, judging, deciding, constructing, and producing help them acquire a sense of material ownership. The knowledge becomes their own to use when they feel the need to use it. Third, activities must be clearly outlined by the teacher and must always be perceived as goal-directed, motivating, and meaningful. The challenge needs to be viewed as attainable for it to remain motivating enough for the students to address it and accomplish the desired outcome.

The students were EFL teacher trainee students who needed to be able to not only master the course content but be able to communicate it in English. The planning, executing, and showing of such a confidence building hands-on technology exercise proved to be rewarding for use in the learning quests. I recommend the use of *Movie Maker* as a means to cross check the integration of course material, to assist the students in their information processing endeavor, and to help students self-regulate the meaning of their learning. Additionally, creating such video projects requires trainees who are themselves EFL learners to use and improve their command of English in both their thinking and communication processes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An advocate of CAL and a Certified On-Line Instructor/Trainer, Dr. Christine Sabieh is a Professor at Notre Dame University. She has played a key role in the development of ASIACALL, where she has served as President and Vice President of the Association, and Editor-in-Chief of the *ASIACALL Online Journal*. She is an active contributor to TESOL Arabia activities and is a member of TESOL International, recently serving on its CALL-IS Steering Committee. Email: sabieh@hotmail.com

DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS AN EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING TASK

Vicky Saumell, Argentina

ABSTRACT

Digital storytelling has become a realistic option for many teachers who wish to develop integrative language learning tasks using new technologies meaningfully. This paper aims at defining digital storytelling, briefly reviewing the existing research, describing a process of implementation of digital storytelling in a school setting with teenagers (16–18 year-olds), and providing a detailed account of the perceived benefits and challenges met in the process. The focus of this paper is on students' involvement in content creation and many of its related aspects.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has been used in EFL both for students' reception of stories by storytellers and students' production of their own stories to tell either in written or oral form. Digital storytelling has enhanced the process of story production in relation to language learning thus becoming an effective strategy for student-centered language learning practices. Digital storytelling has been reviewed in academic literature since 2002 (Banaszewski, 2002), and over the years many studies have been carried out to research different aspects of digital storytelling and its results in education in general and in English language learning in particular.

This paper will focus on students' involvement with content creation through digital storytelling projects. These projects have been carried out at Instituto San Francisco de Asis, a secondary school in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with 11th and 12th graders (16–18 year-olds) taking compulsory EFL lessons twice a week for 80 minutes.

This experience has given me a better understanding of the affordances of digital storytelling in technical, linguistic, and wider educational aspects as well as the obstacles or challenges a teacher may find in implementing such a project.

WHAT IS DIGITAL STORYTELLING?

Digital storytelling can be broadly defined as the combination of text, images, audio, and video to tell a story. Robin (2006) defines it as combining the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio and video. He says all digital stories bring together some mixture of digital graphics, text, recorded audio narration, video, and music to present information about a topic. Ohler (2005) defines digital storytelling as a creative process in which a traditional story is combined with personal digital technology.

Regarding the technical aspect, there are many different possible pieces of hardware and software that can be used. In terms of hardware, PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones can be the support technology to produce the stories. Digital cameras or the built-in cameras in mobile phones can be used by students to create their own images or digitize paper images. Microphones, either standing or built-in, are needed to record the audio narration. In terms of software or applications, there are many options and increasing every day. Simple tools like Microsoft PowerPoint, Windows Live Movie Maker, iMovie and Audacity are only a few. Others can be researched and used as needed. It is not the focus of this paper to provide an extensive description of tools. However, a list of useful tools can be found here <http://web.stanford.edu/~efs/LTSIG-Book/saumell.pdf>.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Several authors have described the steps or stages in the digital storytelling process though not necessarily in second or foreign language learning contexts. Kearney (2009) details the following process for a learning design sequence: a) Pre-production stage: development of ideas through mind maps, creation of storyboard and script, and preparation of media; b) Production stage: audio recording and editing using video-editing software; c) Post-production stage: small group viewing; d) Distribution stage: internal presentation and wider dissemination. Churchill (2008) divides the process into three steps: a) Planning: research, consideration of target audience, and development of a story map, and construction of storyboard, b) Production: collection and editing of media required for integration, testing the story, and exporting to video format, c) Presentation: delivery of stories in the classroom and via the Internet.

As mentioned in the introduction, the following implementation process, which is specific for second or foreign language learning, has emerged from a number of experiences carried out at the Instituto San Francisco de Asis with six classes of 11th and 12th graders over the period of four years. Different storytelling projects were presented to the students, but they all shared a similar process, which differs a little from the processes described by Churchill (2008) and Kearney (2009). These projects were as follows: Art Stories, where students chose 10 images for works of art and then created a story based on them; Walls Talking, where students explored and took pictures of graffiti in their city and collaboratively created a video about their ideal graffiti; A Midsummer Night's Dream, where some students recreated a part of the story in digital form; and Book Trailers, where students took film trailers as a model and created book trailers for a book they had read.

Process

1. Planning the story. The story can be fictional or non-fictional and prompted by an image or topic or completely free.

Creating a story map or a mind map is an effective first step to get learners thinking about story elements, the kind of story they want to create, the main events, characters, and setting. Ohler (2005) suggests using of the Visual Portrait of a Story, which he adapted from Brett Dillingham's original idea in Stanley and Dillingham (2005), but other graphic organisers can be used instead to fit particular digital storytelling projects. I have used my own graphic, which can be seen in Figure 1.

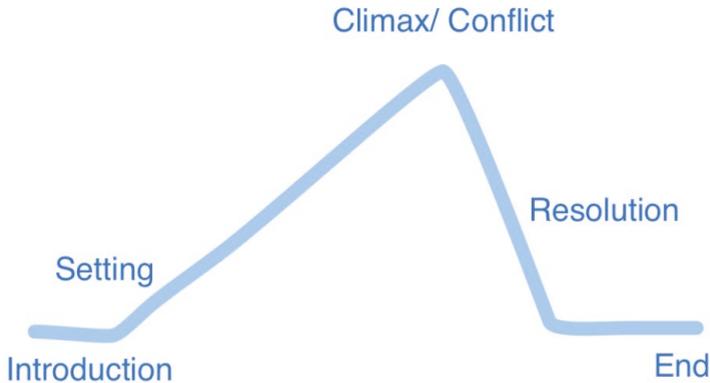


Figure 1: A visual representation of story elements for fictional stories

2. Writing the story on paper. This is the transformation for the story map or mind map into the full script. A process writing approach is suggested to get the students to improve their texts and produce their best possible work. Discussing elements of good story writing is advantageous at this stage. Even with second or foreign language learners there are some strategies that they can apply: the use of descriptive language, specifically the use of adjectives and adverbs; the use of dialogue to portray characters; the appropriate use of verb tenses and structures; the use of connectors.
3. Finding images to fit the story. The images can be original drawings digitalized, original pictures taken by the students or ready-made images found online. The issue of image use, namely copyright issues, Creative Commons Licenses, and fair educational use, will be addressed in detail later in the paper. However, it needs to be discussed with learners at this stage or before.

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4. Editing and sequencing the images. Here students can create the storyboard to start transforming their written story into a multimedia one. They will start seeing their story in a visual way and make adjustments.
 5. Recording the narration. They can use mobile phones or computer software like Audacity. This process can be repeated until the students are satisfied with the result, and this is particularly beneficial for language learning as learners can focus on oral language aspects, such as pronunciation, intonation, and connected speech, and re-record as many times as deemed necessary by themselves. If learners record audio files with their mobile phones, these might need converting into .mp3 format, which can be done using free online file converters, such as Zamzar.
 6. Choosing background music for the story. This is the right moment to teach learners about copyright free music and where to find it. (See <http://web.stanford.edu/~efs/LTSIG-Book/saumell.pdf>.)
 7. Editing. Uploading the images to video-editing software like Windows Live Movie Maker. Adding the narration audio and the music.
 8. Testing that the combination of media works as planned. Making adjustments.
 9. Exporting to digital video format so that it is ready to present or upload to an online space.
 10. Viewing in class and uploading to online spaces to share with a wider audience.

Some of these steps can be done in a different order or skipped altogether. In some projects, students can look for the images first and then use them as prompts to write the story. In other projects, students can choose not to add music and focus on the narration. As mentioned before this is only an example to guide teachers who are new to digital storytelling, but each project's process will heavily depend on the educational aims and the particular context.

In some schools, students may do all the work at school, where the equipment is available. In others, some of the steps in the process may be assigned to be done at home. The teacher role in this kind of learner-centered task needs to shift too. Providing the necessary scaffolding throughout the process and addressing digital literacy issues are essential aspects of the teacher's responsibilities.

BENEFITS

There are multiple benefits associated with digital storytelling. All of these benefits have been identified during my digital storytelling experiences, and they have also been reviewed by academics in different studies and papers. For the sake of organisation I will present the benefits divided into three categories: language learning-related, social, and technical or technology-related. I will also include personal explanations and examples connecting these points with my own experience over these years.

Language learning benefits

- Learners improve their language in multiple aspects: pronunciation (Kim, 2014; Ramirez Verdugo & Alonso Belmonte, 2007), writing and speaking skills (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Nelson, 2006; Ramirez Verdugo & Alonso Belmonte, 2007; Yuksel, Robin & McNeil 2010), vocabulary (Kim, 2014; Ramirez Verdugo & Alonso Belmonte, 2007) and sentence structure (Kim, 2014; Ramirez Verdugo & Alonso Belmonte, 2007). This is the most evident reason for teachers to use digital storytelling. It is a rich linguistic task. Regarding writing skills, a process writing approach can provide multiple instances of learning by reviewing the text and improving it with the appropriate scaffolding support from the teacher. In terms of speaking skills, the audio recording stage provides an opportunity for focused oral language practice and development.
- Learners develop other skills, such as research, organization, technology, presentation and interpersonal skills (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Robin 2006; Yuksel et al., 2010). Although these

skills are not specific to language learning, they are desirable transferable skills for many other domains, which will be useful in the learners' lives.

- Digital storytelling promotes student-centered practices (Barrett, 2006; Kearney, 2009; Kim, 2014; Nelson, 2006). Barrett (2006) identifies digital storytelling as the convergence among four student-centered learning strategies: student engagement, reflection for deep learning, technology integration and project-based learning. It seems student-centered practices have been favoured over teacher-centered practices lately (Benson, 1997; Kayi-Aydar, 2013; Tam & Bahrani, 2012), and I am personally in favour of making students more active participants in their own learning processes in order to promote deeper engagement and learning and more prospective autonomous practices. However, student-centered practices demand a clear understanding of the shift in the teacher role necessary for their effectiveness. As students create their own learning pathways at their own pace, a significant degree of flexibility is required from the teacher (Kearney, 2009).
- It enhances learning because it is integrative, developmental and reflective (Barrett, 2006). Although a particular digital storytelling task may focus on one topic in particular, these tasks require an integrative use of language, they promote ongoing development and they allow learners to reflect on their work and make adjustments. It also allows learners to work at their own pace and level, thus becoming an effective task for mixed-ability or multi-level classes.
- It is flexible (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Gregori-Signes, 2008b; Yuksel, 2010) as it can be adapted to multiple contexts, language-ability levels and age groups. I have used digital storytelling projects with mixed-ability classes and by scaffolding students' needs individually, they have been able to improve their productions in their own areas of difficulty. The same project can be used with different age groups by simplifying instructions and/or adapting the topic or tools to be used. Yuksel (2010) identified a variety of uses of digital

storytelling around the world. The limit is a teacher's context and imagination.

Social benefits

- Digital storytelling increases student engagement (Barrett, 2006; Robin, 2006) and motivation (Barrett, 2006; Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Kim, 2014; Robin, 2006; Yuksel, 2010). Students who were reluctant to write have been much more engaged and motivated to create a video and have taken the writing as a necessary step towards the final video production. Figure 2 shows an example of a final text from a pair of students, who, after four re-writings, improved their use of narrative tenses, added dialogue and included more descriptive language, such as adjectives and adverbs.
- It adds the personal dimension to language learning (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Kearney, 2009). Kearney (2009) emphasizes the importance of choice in enhancing student ownership of the project, including choice of content, roles and genre. Digital storytelling can easily provide this opportunity to add a personal dimension to a language learning task, thus creating an affective link to the task.

The Ice Murderer by Lucas B. and Daniel C.

The night of 21st of August a meteor shower was lightning the entire town, making it a special night that no one would ever forget, but not everything was good that night. A scream had been heard by every men, women and child in the zone, but who screamed in that way? The police could only find an ID with the name "John". With this single clue, the only thing that the police could do was call the best Private Investigator in town, Detective Adrian. This detective was famous because of his intelligence, skill and tenacity.

- Detective Adrian, good night, we require your services again on a special case.

- What is it this time? Another boring murder by poisoning or the stealing of a family jewel?

- A strange murder. A man was stabbed in the heart; all that we could find at the crime scene was his ID and it was so damaged that we could only recognize the name, it was John.

- But you don't see what I can see; lead me to the crime scene.

The officer took Detective Adrian to the crime scene. When Adrian arrived, he immediately saw something that the police obviously hadn't noticed.

- There is a puddle of water here. No glass of water and it hasn't rained tonight, and his injury is strangely cold for a hot night like this. This murderer... he truly is a clever criminal.

The next day, Adrian was thinking at his office. He thought of many ways of killing a man and not leaving more clues than a puddle of water. He served himself a glass of whisky and some ice. After a while he fell asleep. When he woke up the next day he saw his glass and immediately realized how the murderer had killed John, it was so obvious when he finally realized it, the only thing left was to find who and why.

Adrian called the police and told them to meet at the crime scene.

As soon as everyone had arrived there, Adrian started his argument.

-Gentlemen, tonight I will explain the simplicity of this murder. There is only one explanation to a puddle of cold water coming out of his injury... A knife made of ice, which disappeared soon after its use in such a hot night. And there is only one person with the technology to transport such a thing and the skill to design it. The ice sculptor, George Mel.

The police ran to George's house and arrested him, the mystery was finally over.

Figure 2. An example of a text from a pair of students.

- It promotes creativity (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Kim, 2014; Robin, 2006; Yuksel, 2010). Digital storytelling can help create the right atmosphere to tap into learners' creative selves. A possibility of exploring other worlds and of becoming somebody else can be a great liberating force that allows learners to go beyond the usual scope of writing.

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- It can break down classroom walls, allowing learners to reach a wider audience (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Robin, 2006). The learners' audience has traditionally been their classmates and teacher. This is somewhat demotivating as there is no real communication purpose. By uploading digital stories to an open online space, whether a blog, wiki, or video gallery, like YouTube, the once limited audience is now open to whoever comes across the digital stories online. This change in target audience generates a few changes in the learners' commitment to the stories being produced. An awareness of the fact that the stories will be seen by anybody results in the learners working much harder to create the best possible product: multiple revisions of their writing and countless repetitions of the oral narration before recording account for extra practice that might not happen otherwise. I have seen learners rewrite their pieces multiple times and re-record their narrations over and over to improve pronunciation and fluency. However, posting digital stories online does not automatically guarantee an audience that will engage with the learners' work. The use of social media is an effective way to find and encourage an audience to comment on their work. Setting up twin classes doing similar projects can also be a rewarding experience. In any case, learners need to understand the concept of reciprocity and engage in commenting on others' work too.
 - It promotes collaboration within the class and among classes in the same school or other schools (Robin, 2006). If these schools are in different countries, it promotes intercultural communication. (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Robin, 2006). As mentioned before, setting up twin class projects can result in motivating collaboration efforts and intercultural communication. Again, social media can be a great ally. I use my own network of teachers, but others will find online project mediators useful, such as ePals (<http://www.epals.com/>) and Skype in the Classroom (<https://education.skype.com/>).

Benefits related to technology

- Digital storytelling can be easily implemented because of its minimal technical requirements (Churchill, 2008; Gregori-Signes, 2008a). This can allow teachers to focus on pedagogical issues rather than the technical ones. As little equipment as an Internet-connected PC and a microphone is enough to set up a digital storytelling project. Alternatively, apps on the learners' own mobile phones can be used to take advantage of their increased functionality.
- It is cost-effective as it can be implemented with free tools or applications. (Gregori-Signes, 2008a). Digital storytelling can be set up with a video-editing software like Windows Live Movie Maker and audio recording software like Audacity, which are both free.
- It helps to build digital literacy (Barrett, 2006; Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Robin, 2006). Digital literacy encompasses concepts such as digital citizenship, e-safety, effective search techniques, critical analysis of information found, among others. Digital storytelling specifically provides the opportunity of dealing with copyright, intellectual property and educational fair use of images and music. The distinction among copyright-free, Creative Commons Licenses and fair educational use needs to be addressed in detail. The concept of attribution is also a key issue to be discussed in class. You can find a list of useful resources for music and images attribution at <http://web.stanford.edu/~efs/LTSIG-Book/saumell.pdf>.
- It can be used to create e-portfolio artifacts (Gregori-Signes, 2008a; Yuksel et al., 2010) to document learning processes. The possibility of saving and archiving learners' work is a significant improvement in terms of assessment issues. Firstly, each piece of work represents the learners' ability captured at a point in time. It integrates both the written and oral aspects. It can be assessed and then revisited to monitor the learners' progress.

CHALLENGES

There are also a few challenges associated with digital storytelling. I share personal impressions arising from my experience related to these challenges below.

- A limited digital literacy of the teacher can be a hindrance to such a project (Churchill, 2008) as teachers may not appreciate the importance of digital literacy in the curriculum. The importance of teacher training opportunities related not only to digital tools, but also to other issues, such as digital literacy, must be taken into account when deciding to use digital storytelling. I read about and even took courses to be ready to tackle issues such as e-safety, netiquette, cyberbullying, the ability to find and select information, and the ability to critically evaluate online information.
- A lack of respect for copyright and fair use (Kearney, 2009; Robin, 2006) may result in poor educational practices. Again, the teachers' awareness of the different types of licenses and where to find suitable images and music must be formally addressed.
- The existence of school lab internet filters (Robin, 2006) may work against the students finding the images or music they need. Depending on how strict the school policies are, the filters can be changed by allowing access to particular websites where learners can find the files they need for this kind of project. Such a list of websites is to be provided by the teacher. If the filters cannot be changed, then the learners might be able to do this search at home and save the files on a pen drive for later use at school. I have faced such challenges with my school lab internet filters, and I managed to get the filters cleared for specific websites I needed during specific class hours. We still experienced some frustration, but it was definitely a situation which could be worked around by doing the search at home or by using my computer, which was filter-free.
- A lack of student-centered practices (Churchill, 2008; Kearney, 2009) or class management strategies for student-centered

practices may result in inability to cope with a project like this. Having students working at their own pace requires a significant shift in the teacher's role to be able to monitor and scaffold individual work and problem areas. I have found it challenging to move from a teacher-centered attitude and a whole-class, lockstep kind of work to individual, student-centered work. One problem is that although learners will all start at the same time and with the same objective, they will face different difficulties, and some will take longer than others to work around the projects and their own difficulties. Clearly presenting the project process steps on the board at the beginning of the class and then walking around helping learners solve their problem areas in order to move to the next step has been an effective routine. After a few classes, learners will be progressing at different rates and working on different steps of the process. Faster learners will have more reviewing opportunities as you set a deadline. Slower learners can be assigned certain tasks for homework to compensate for this. Working in a computer lab will present specific challenges, which are different from working in a classroom. Also the use of mobile phones in a classroom requires a different set of strategies from the teacher to be able to manage the class more effectively. The computer lab's distribution and seating arrangement can be more or less helpful. If all students are seating facing the same direction, as in my school's computer lab, being able to see all the screens at once makes it simpler to monitor work and distraction. In the case of mobile phones, asking learners to place the phones on the desk and seeing what they are doing usually prevents them from accessing other apps or websites.

- A lack of appropriate assessment strategies for multimodal texts (Churchill, 2008; Kearney, 2009) can result in the teacher's emphasis on the words above everything else. The creation of rubrics to assess specific projects can help the teacher focus on all the aspects of digital storytelling, not only the written story or the oral performance. Some aspects that can be included in the rubric are vocabulary use, language use, pronunciation and intonation, image selection, creativity, collaborative work, class work, and deadlines, among others. The choice of aspects

to be assessed is up to the teachers and should reflect what they consider important in such a project. Teachers can even create two different rubrics, one for the process and one for the product. You can see a rubric example here: <http://web.stanford.edu/~efs/LTSIG-Book/saumell.pdf>.

- The need for permission (Gregori-Signes, 2008a) to upload stories to an online space may be an administrative hindrance in some schools with very strict regulations. Make sure you have parents' permissions signed before uploading the stories. Choosing more private settings to display the stories may be a solution but will work against the possibility of sharing them with a wider audience. This is the media release form we use (<http://web.stanford.edu/~efs/LTSIG-Book/saumell.pdf>). Readers can find other more complex ones online.
- Digital storytelling is a time consuming task (Robin, 2006) and teachers with few contact hours may prefer to choose other less time consuming tasks. Although this is a valid drawback, I consider the benefits far outnumber the time issue. Honing the process over time has allowed me to make it more efficient. Some aspects that contributed to this were using tools the students were already familiar with; anticipating problems, both technical and linguistic, and dealing with them as a whole class; keeping track of students' progress and scaffolding their work with appropriate help and extra practice, usually set for homework.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Digital storytelling has been shown to have multiple benefits as well as a few drawbacks. In my experience, the benefits are much more important from a language learning perspective than the drawbacks. The learners are genuinely engaged to produce quality work, which also taps into their creativity. The final product is the result of complex linguistic work, which is carried out by integrating multiple aspects of language use as well as an opportunity to address digital literacy issues through the use of

digital technologies. Most of the challenges can be overcome by careful planning and teacher training sessions prior to the implementation of school-wide digital storytelling projects. I have sought self-training opportunities myself before embarking on digital storytelling but have also given training sessions for teachers at my school. For self-training, I recommend reading about digital literacy, consulting Google's effective search techniques resources (<http://www.google.com/insidesearch/searcheducation/>), watching online tutorials for the tools you intend to use, and experimenting! All in all, it is a sound language learning task, which uses technology meaningfully and makes use of cost-effective resources so that it can be applied in multiple contexts, including low-tech ones.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vicky Saumell holds a degree in Literary and Technical Translation and a Diploma in the Theory and Methodology of TESOL. She is co-author of *Teacher Development Interactive: Preparation for the TKT* and series consultant for *English in Common*, for Pearson. She has written online training courses and digital materials for *Eyes Open* and *Uncover*, for CUP. She teaches *New Learning Environments* for the Master's in ELT at Universidad de La Sabana, Colombia. She is the coordinator of the EFL department at Instituto San Francisco de Asís in Argentina. Email: vicky.s@umell.com.ar

ENHANCING SPEAKING FLUENCY IN THE SECONDARY LANGUAGE CLASSROOM WITH DIGITAL GAMES

Graham Stanley, British Council

ABSTRACT

In support of the notion that digital games have the potential to be powerful language learning tools, this chapter presents a case study examining the application of one digital game used to enhance speaking fluency in the secondary English language classroom. Asking the question, “Can digital game-based learning engage secondary learners to produce more spoken language?”, a digital game was chosen and a task carefully designed with oral fluency in mind. The results were largely positive, and lessons were learned about how best to approach the introduction of digital games in the secondary classroom to encourage learners to speak as much and as well as they can.

INTRODUCTION

Digital games are now played by a wide and varied demographic and have become a multi-billion-dollar industry. Digital games also have the potential to be powerful learning tools, particularly (but not only) for children and teenagers as these games offer ‘new worlds – worlds more compelling’ than the worlds they usually see at school (Gee, 2004: 3). The recent popularity of digital game-based learning (DGBL) can be traced back to the interest shown

in studies published by educators such as Prensky (2001) and Gee (2003), and more recently, there has been a growing interest in DGBL for language learning, with specialised publications now being dedicated to the subject by practitioners (Mawer & Stanley, 2011) and researchers (Reinders, 2012) and case studies being a prominent feature of collections on DGBL (Baek & Whitton, 2013). This chapter is a case study examining the application of a digital game chosen in particular to enhance speaking fluency in the English language classroom.

The research question that guided the study was “Can digital game-based learning engage secondary learners to produce more spoken language?” Care was taken to choose a digital game that both facilitated the intended language learning aims and which was known to be fun. The task was written to maximise language practice in the classroom without reducing the fun of playing the game. The game was played by the classes of four different teachers (including the author), and both the students and teachers were interviewed after class. Recordings were also made during the lessons. Results were positive overall, with the students clearly engaged and trying hard to speak during the lesson.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The case study took place at the British Council Young Learner Centre (YLC) in Barcelona, Spain. The British Council is an English language-learning organisation with teaching centres in over 100 countries. The YLC in Barcelona caters to over 900 learners *onsite* (with a similar number *offsite*, where teachers teach language lessons in Primary and Secondary schools at lunchtimes or after the normal school day finishes).

At the British Council YLC, the class size is small (maximum 15 learners) and there is more of an emphasis on oral production than is usually found in secondary schools in Spain. All of the learners at the YLC are aged from 5 to 18, and are divided into three different departments: *Primary* (5–9), *Junior* (10–13) and *Senior* (14–18).

Although in theory, *Junior* learners can range from *Junior 1* (total beginners) to *Junior 6* (B2+) learners, most of the Junior

classes range from *Junior 4* and *Junior 5* with one or two *Junior 3* and *Junior 6* classes.

Learner sample

The sample consisted of four Junior classes of 12–15 teenage learners each, aged from 12–13 years old (total 48 learners) whose mother tongue was Catalan and/or Spanish. All of the classes were of an intermediate level of English and one of the areas that was perceived as being most difficult for the learners to do was speaking for extended periods (i.e. longer than a minute) in pairs or on their own. This was established during a meeting of teachers with the same level near the beginning of term. I suggested that the teachers (myself included) could examine whether digital game-based learning could help the students with this and the other three teachers agreed to try this out as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Until recently, digital games were alleged to have negative effects on people's health, but Shaffer believes that video games can help children 'learn in ways that are deeply authentic and fulfilling and powerful and motivating, and above all, relevant' (Shaffer, 2006, p. 10).

As far back as 1991, Hubbard predicted that digital game-based language learning could become "an integral part of modern language teaching methodology" (p. 221). Since then, the number of researchers who believe that digital games can be used to enhance language acquisition has increased, claiming that "current thinking in the field of language acquisition ties in very well with simulation and gaming" (Garcia-Carbonell, Rising, Montero & Watts, 2001, p. 488).

Despite this, however, as late as 2005, researchers were still saying that "Using video games to educate has long been a much thought about, yet rarely achieved goal" (deHaan, 2005, p. 229) and deHaan later speculated that 'balancing playing a video game and learning its language may be too difficult for some player's cognitive abilities.'

Over the past decade, though, the interest in using computer games “for the purpose of learning or teaching a second or foreign language...has significantly expanded” (Cornillie, Thorne, and Desmet, 2012).

One of the major challenges for educators interested in exploiting original games for language learning and teaching is how to integrate these games into classroom practice “so that games stand alone as fun and engaging while still meeting the intended learning outcomes of the activity” (Baek & Whitton, 2013, p. xxiii). One way to do this is through designing *tasks* for the game that exploit the language.

This definition of *task* refers to an activity that is carried out using language, especially those which engage the learners in authentic communication, such as finding a solution to a puzzle or reading a set of instructions. This emphasis on authentic communicative tasks is underlined by Ellis (2003, p. ix), who believes that “if learners are to develop the competence they need to use a second language easily and effectively in the kinds of situations they meet outside the classroom[,] they need to experience how language is used as a tool for communication inside it.”

Some researchers have identified that “with an increasing focus in language learning on authentic task-based learning... digital games provide ample opportunity to explore learners’ skills and engage them more effectively in learning” (Thomas, 2012, p. 18). However, the danger when designing tasks to exploit digital games in language learning is taking away the element of fun, especially as research on digital games has indicated that ‘play’ is an important part of the learning process.

It is worthwhile noting that “play” in a digital game doesn’t just come from the game itself, but also ‘from the way that players interact with the game in order to play it. Fun is the most cited reason why people play games, but oddly enough, as Pereira (2013) mentions, “it is precisely the element of ‘fun’ that is missing in every definition of *game*.’ This is also mentioned by Koster, who adds that ‘none of the definitions tend to assume that fun is a requirement” (2005, p. 12). This is not surprising, as fun is difficult to pin down.

Fun, Michael and Chen say “is not an ingredient or something you put in” but rather “a result...essentially a positive feedback mechanism to get us to repeat the activity over and over” Michael & Chen (2005, p. 20).

There are also ‘many ways we find fun in games’ (Koster, 2005). Games designer Nicole Lazzaro has outlined four different types of fun (Lazzaro, 2004):

- *Hard fun*, when a player is trying to win a competition.
- *Easy fun*, when a player is engaged in exploration.
- *Altered state fun*, when a game changes the way a player feels.
- *Social fun*, when a player engages with other players.

The type of games used is very important too. Sylvén & Sundqvist (2012, p. 302) presented “empirical evidence that L2 English proficiency correlates with the frequency of gaming and types of games played” and their research among learners aged 15–16 and 11–12 has shown positive correlations between playing digital games and L2 proficiency, especially with certain games when “learners get ample opportunities for L2 input and scaffolded interaction in the L2” (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 302).

Lessons can also be learned from game design without ever playing a digital game with learners. Some researchers believe that rather than playing games in class, design elements can be extracted from games and applied to the classroom and learning. Reinhardt & Sykes, for instance (2012, pp. 33–34), believe that “it is game-informed insights...which have the strongest potential to transform” second language learning pedagogy.

HOW GAME IMPLEMENTATION WAS DESIGNED: ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS

For reasons of authenticity and fun, which are elaborated in Mawer & Stanley (2011, pp. 14–15), an online game not specifically written with language learning in mind was chosen for the digital game-based lesson. Considerable time was also taken to choose a task that would be able to encourage learner speaking fluency.

Thornbury's suggestion of what a good task should be was taken into account, namely that "good tasks should stretch learners, pushing them beyond their immediate 'comfort zone', while at the same time providing them with sufficient support so as not to induce anxiety" (Thornbury, 2013). It has also been argued by Swain (1985, p. 249) that the learner needs to produce language, to be "pushed towards the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed precisely, coherently and appropriately."

The extra push in the materials in this context was required to encourage the learners to speak more, and if they could be encouraged to repeat the task to the best of their ability, while having fun, then this would be ideal, especially as "research suggests that performance generally improves when learners repeat a speaking task," especially if they are asked to "raise the bar" (Thornbury, 2013). Thornbury also states that public performance (i.e. performing the task to the whole class) 'adds an element of formality that often encourages greater attention to accuracy'

The game that was chosen was called *Droppy* (<http://www.pencilkids.com/the-vault/droppy-flash-game>). This game was selected because it is made up of a number of short puzzle stages that players need to work solutions out to. The shortness of each stage meant that the activity could be easily adapted to the abilities of the students in each class. The teachers involved could also adapt the task to the time available and play as many or as few of the stages as they felt was necessary in each class.

The task required students to spend a short time (20 seconds per image) observing a series of screenshots from up to 10 stages of the game. When they had seen the last of the images, they would have the opportunity to write down everything they remembered and then compare notes with their partner. After this, the teacher would ask a pair of learners to volunteer to describe as much as they could of the first image. These students would be rewarded with points for this. At first, all 10 stages of the game were prepared, but after the first time the activity was used in class, it was decided that this was too much and the lesson plan subsequently used just the first six stages of the game.

The teacher would then ask the class if a different pair of students could improve on the description. These students would then have to try to better describe the image. They would be encouraged to start their description from the beginning, not simply give additional information that the first pair of learners had missed. If they managed to do this, they would be given extra points. Another pair of volunteers would be called for until the learners were not able to improve upon the description. In this way, the students would be pushed to speak at the best of their ability. The teacher would not interrupt the students to correct them at this point, but instead would take notes of language errors to address at a later moment during the class.

When designing the task, it was important not to lose the game element, and although screen-shots were used, the spirit of the game was adhered to. After describing the initial stage images, the learners would then be shown these images again and the teacher would focus on form and write unknown vocabulary on the interactive whiteboard (IWB), going through each image in turn.

This would be followed by displaying a screenshot taken at the end of each stage (i.e. when the stage of the game had been solved) and the learners would be asked to answer the question “What has happened?” or (alternatively) to say what the differences were.

Finally, now equipped with “Before” and “After” images, the students were encouraged to come to the IWB in pairs and play a stage of the game. The IWB timer facility was used to limit the amount of time available to the learners to solve the stage of the game. One minute was recommended. The other students would watch the pair at the board. Alternatively, the teacher could ask the learners to tell her how to solve the stages of the game, if she felt this was a better use of class time.

RESULTS AND TEACHER REFLECTIONS

Audio recordings were made of the lessons to capture the language used by the learners during the lessons. From these recordings, it was clear that learners were often pushed to speak

at the limit of their ability, and were generally motivated to speak in an open classroom setting. This was achieved through encouraging the learners to improve on their classmates' descriptions as seen in the excerpts from class transcriptions below.

Class 1: June 2013

15 students, aged 11–12 Junior 4 (intermediate)

Student 1: Droppy and his horse are in the desert and in the desert...er...are sand and a cactus and a pyramides..?

Teacher: pyramids.

Student 1: ...pyramids and rocks on the floor.

Teacher: OK. Does anybody think they have a better description?

Student 2: Next to the Droppy, there are...er...a cactus and in the landscape is...there are pyramids and Droppy is on a horse and er...in front of the cactus. And next to Droppy there is a rock. And in the landscape there are...er...a sand and he is in the desert.

Teacher: OK. That's a little bit better than the other description I think. Does anyone have a better description? Come on, let's try.

Student 3: Droppy...and the sun was shining. It's so hot. Er...are a cactus, er...a pyramids...and Droppy is sad because he is very hot.

Class 2: June 2013

14 students, aged 11–12 Junior 5 (Intermediate+)

Student 1: There's a boy next to a boat and there is water.

Teacher: OK, that's good, but can any of you do better?

Student 2: Yes...It's day and the sun is shining. There is a boat and Droppy is sad because he wants to be in the boat.

Teacher: OK. I think that's a better description. Does anyone else want to try?

Student 3: Droppy is next to a boat and next to him is a lake and...er... the sky is red and the sun is shining. He's sad, because he wants to be in the boat.

Teacher: Good. I think this is the best one so far...

The activity itself was structured as a game and points were awarded to students for the best descriptions. This also encouraged the learners to try to improve on what their classmates had said. The recordings of the lessons showed, however, that the success of this relied on the teacher being able to facilitate this and not accept when the learners only added information to that provided by their classmates.

The teacher comments (from the interviews held directly afterwards) were generally positive:

"I think it went very well. It's the kind of lesson you can make last a bit longer, or cut it short ...to your needs. I thought it was very good the way the lesson was structured. In terms of classroom management, it was very easy to keep on top of the class because they were engaged not just by the game itself, but by the first part too. It also encouraged lots of language from the students."

"It's very good for getting them to produce language. There's definitely a frustration in communicating which drives the activity so that they are very much there."

"I think using the game with the interactive whiteboard encouraged a lot more spoken language than I'd usually be able to get from these students."

"The lead up with the IWB was good and because they were asked to repeat the language that the others said, it was easy."

The teachers were generally very enthusiastic about the activity and believed it was a good way of promoting speaking fluency in class. The reaction of the learners was also very positive, and teachers noted that the learners did not want the activity to end when it came to the end of class or break-time and the students were due to leave.

Teachers were asked if they would do anything differently, if they were to do the same lesson again. One of the teachers said: "I probably would cut down the amount of pictures that we did. It took up too much time. Ten is a little bit much, but that's very easy to adapt."

As mentioned earlier, after the first time the activity was undertaken in class, the number of images used was changed to six, but this too seemed to be too many images to get through, and most teachers suggested a maximum of four or five would be ideal.

FINAL REMARKS

Adapting a digital game in this way seemed to work well and, according to the teachers involved, increased the amount of oral language production that the learners were able to do compared to other speaking activities usually carried out in class.

It is important when using a digital game for learning not to fall into the trap of the learners spending too much time playing the game, especially if this stage of the lesson has little language input or production. Using images from the before and after stages of this game and displaying them using the projector meant that when it came to solving the puzzles of the game, this was an easy task and the learners did not spend much time on this. The way the task has been designed also means that the actual playing of the game could be done by the learners at home, if time is short or the teacher wants to spend more time on speaking practice.

The task outlined in this chapter can be adapted to be used with a number of different digital games that have puzzles to be solved, especially those that contain a collection of short stages to be played.

Although an activity such as this could be used with other sets of "before and after" pictures that are not screenshots from games, it could be argued that because there are puzzles to solve in a game such as this, producing the materials is easy for the teacher to do and the puzzle factor gives a degree of authenticity to the task and also motivates the learners, especially when the game is

played and they put their theories of how to solve the puzzles to the test. This is one of the major reasons why this type of digital game can be used effectively in the language classroom.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graham Stanley has spent the last twenty years in language education, as a teacher, trainer ICT co-ordinator, and is currently Country Director, British Council, Uruguay. A former co-ordinator of the IATEFL LT SIG, his special interest is in the application of emerging technologies for language learning. He is author of the award-winning teacher handbook 'Language Learning with Technology' (Cambridge University Press, 2013), and co-author of *Digital play: Computer games and language aims* (Delata, 2011) winner of the ELTon (ELT Innovation award) for teacher resources. Email: graham.stanley@britishcouncil.org

LANGUAGE LEARNING WITH MACHINIMA: VIDEO PRODUCTION IN 3D IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Michael Thomas, University of Central Lancashire, UK

Christel Schneider, University of Central Lancashire, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on research arising from a two-year project involving nine European partners entitled, “CreAting Machinima to Empower Live Online language Teaching and learning” (CAMELOT), funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Programme. The project investigates the use of machinima (or recorded videos made in an immersive environment) with a project-based approach. Findings arising from interviews, questionnaires, and observation with teachers and learners, have been used to reflect on the potential of machinima to stimulate learner creativity in authentic immersive environments.

INTRODUCTION

Video is becoming one of the most powerful ways of communicating learning content in the digital age. An increasing number of learners across all educational sectors use digital video as the favoured means of communication (Brooke, 2003). The CAMELOT project, which includes partners from the Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, and the UK,

(see <http://camelotproject.eu/>), derives from a shared interest in the use of a new generation of cost effective digital video tools and applications to support language learning in a European context (Shrosbree, 2008).

One aim of the research project is to raise awareness of the term *machinima* – a portmanteau word that combines *cinema* and *machine* and refers to filming actions, simulations, role-plays and dialogues between 3D virtual characters or avatars within an immersive virtual environment. In the wider context of digital gaming in particular, a search on YouTube reveals how videos from <http://machinima.com> regularly attract hundreds of thousands of viewers. In the context of language learning, learners and instructors can adopt a similar format to engage in a variety of preparation and planning tasks in the target language, such as rehearsing, scripting, and storyboarding (Ohler, 2007). Following this, learners progress to filming and editing their machinima productions in order to construct sophisticated video narratives as part of a project-based approach involving tasks. This process enables learners to develop a range of skills in addition to those targeting traditional linguistic structures, such as intercultural communication and digital literacy.

Compared to language learning conversations recorded with traditional technology, there is a distinct difference in the case of recording in virtual worlds (VWs) such as Second Life, where students can learn foreign languages in simulations of culturally specific locations (e.g., learning English in virtual London or German in a reconstruction of Berlin). In the latter, learners can join online environments and navigate to the virtual site where original machinima were shot and re-enact the conversation with their own avatars. These virtual locations are independent of the real-world classrooms where the learners plan and storyboard their activities. This spontaneous activity underlines why the process can be referred to as “live video production.”

The distinctive foci of the CAMELOT Project are evident in four main development areas:

- Promoting language learning in authentic virtual environments with a project-based approach utilizing tasks;

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- Developing teachers' and learners' skills in real-time animation video production;
 - Field testing machinima across four educational sectors (e.g., schools, higher education, adult education, and vocational education);
 - Producing a teacher training course aimed at educating teachers in the technical and pedagogical skills required to use machinima in language learning.

Machinima can be used to record authentic conversations in situated learning contexts. The technical challenges of producing real-time animated videos in 3D environments are not to be underestimated, however. Traditional film production techniques include recording, camera control, editing, storyboarding, costume design, designing settings and drafting scripts and therefore a pre-requisite is an awareness of 3D environments and their inherent technical challenges (Brewster, 2009). After editing, machinima are uploaded to video sharing sites such as YouTube and can then be played on mobile devices by interested learners.

The chapter analyses data arising from language teachers' and learners' perceptions during the development of machinima and their reflections on the challenges and opportunities presented by this form of video production. Based on data arising from interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation with EU teachers and learners, the chapter aims to contribute to research on the use of machinima in language learning, as well as provide practical guidance to teachers interested in exploring this technology for their own classes.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The use of digital video to support language learning or serve as an inspiring resource in self-directed online learning programmes, blended learning courses and flipped classrooms, has become increasingly popular in recent years. According to Brewster (2009) video is the most popular medium among young learners, and

the so-called “YouTube generation” retain information far more effectively from video-based instruction rather than spoken text.

The CAMELOT Project aims to promote learning in immersive environments, make access easy through simple and visual instructions, and trigger interest in learning and teaching in VWs by demonstrating what can be achieved through learning and teaching with machinima. The objective is that teachers and learners understand the benefits and challenges of learning in 3D worlds and that machinima can be utilised as a tool for reflection, assessment and feedback. Furthermore, we anticipate that the research will showcase how the process of creating machinima collaboratively in a virtual learning space can motivate learners to interact and learn autonomously, while improving their language skills.

Prior to the field testing phase of the project, each of the partners provided machinima that were evaluated by the consortium before being implemented in the real or virtual classroom. The testing groups recruited by partners of the project consortium included military staff from the National Defence University in Poland, Erasmus students, university students, school children, and learners in vocational education studying in Polish, Turkish, Czech, English, and German. The field testing groups used machinima in their language lessons, regardless of whether the teaching took place in VWs, 2D environments, or physical classrooms. Even though the field testing was originally meant to take place in VWs, it was evident as a result of needs analysis, that some language teachers might not have had experience with teaching in VWs or creating machinima. In this case the machinima were provided by professional machinimatographers in accordance with their lesson plans and course curriculum. Some technical challenges were also to be expected depending on location, equipment, and bandwidth.

A mixed methods approach was used to collect data. Questionnaires completed by teachers and learners prior to and after the course provided evidence of the effectiveness of the machinima tested in terms of student engagement and motivation. Qualitative data in the form of interviews and focus groups elicited learners’ and teachers’ experiences with machinima and explored

what they learned and how this differed from other forms of learning. The combination of research methods proved effective in eliciting a wide range of data and the results of the field tests formed the basis for guidelines for the teacher training course.

REFLECTING ON TEACHERS’ USE OF MACHINIMA

In one of the interviews undertaken for the research, Meyers (CAMELOT Project, 2014a), for example, indicated that teenage students can use machinima to practice listening skills and that machinima-based resources provide opportunities for learners to engage with authentic language learning environments. Experienced teachers suggested that one of the potential advantages of machinima is that they can be created quickly and easily when needed, especially if resources are not available for a specific purpose, or when teachers are looking for an *ad hoc* illustration of a grammar point, a particular set of instructions or a specific situation (Schneider & Rainbow, 2014). As Meyers (CAMELOT Project, 2014a) explained further in her interview, building on a visual approach to learning, machinima can be used to demonstrate a particular point rather than to merely rely on spoken words to explain it. Teachers who used ready-made machinima, as well as those creating their own personalized videos in response to particular learning contexts, indicated that they used them to focus on a specific language area such as topic based vocabulary, words in context, grammar, listening or writing skills, or as an introduction to a new topic (CAMELOT Project, 2015b, 2015c). On the other hand, creating their own machinima was considered to be quite demanding for those teachers who either did not have the necessary IT skills and equipment (CAMELOT Project, 2015c) or were not supported by their school or institution. Some teachers argued that a wide range of good quality machinima could already be found on the web, so they did not see the need to create new ones. Another related finding was that ready-made machinima may be restrictive when a variety of different teaching and learning styles are being used. Nevertheless, teachers who produced their own machinima were eager to apply

them in their own teaching contexts, indicating that it gave them more control, as well as the ability to adapt them to the personal context of their learners (CAMELOT Project, 2015b).

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all possible uses of ready-made machinima in the classroom, one example entitled, "Cultural Collision in Cairo", created by teachers at the MachinEVO Workshop in 2014, has been chosen to illustrate how the use of machinima can provoke controversial views among teachers (CAMELOT Project (2014c). Introduced to a group of teachers in a workshop, the machinima triggered controversial discussions about its suitability for teaching, the language level it could be used for, and multicultural learning environments, as well as the appropriate amount of background information required by learners to contextualise the machinima. However, for others the lack of background information was regarded as an effective learning point as learners would have to apply their problem-solving skills to discover what the problem was and what the background might have been. Such an approach could be used to encourage learners to reflect on their own culture as well as those of the target language. While the lack of facial expressions and natural gestures was seen as one limitation associated with the avatars used in the machinima, it was considered an interesting experiment to produce a video with the same content by filming people in real life and find out what difference this would make with regard to the flow of discussion and people's perception of the process. Those teachers involved in the production of the video reported that their students enjoyed watching them and that the discussion resulted in an interesting discussion about their own experience with different cultures and stereotypes.

Other teachers who dealt with the topic in their face-to-face teaching reported similarly encouraging results. The use of machinima to engage teachers and learners in reflections about cultural difference and personal attitudes was thus one positive outcome of the use of digital video in these authentic cultural contexts.

GETTING THE LEARNERS INVOLVED IN FILMING

Teachers involved in the CAMELOT Project reported that their learners engaged more in task-based scenarios when they were fully involved in the process (CAMELOT Project, 2015a; Schneider, 2014a, 2014b). Working towards a final product by creating a machinima collaboratively helped learners to practice their language skills and improve their interpersonal skills. Teachers identified how learners used machinima to engage in a range of activities to:

- report on a place they had visited in an immersive environment;
- give a presentation by using pictures or screen capture video;
- show short video clips taken during an immersive visit and describe places or events;
- set up an exhibition in a virtual environment and film the event;
- make a machinima of something they had built in-world;
- conduct interviews with people they had met and record them for later viewing;
- create scenarios or role-plays in the target language and record them.

The recorded activities were analyzed by students and the teacher facilitating the lesson and specific elements were re-filmed or re-visited, thus providing opportunities for reflection, error correction and language revision (Barrett, 2006). In this respect, the production progress was perceived as potentially more valuable than the product. Making machinima provided evidence to the students of their language learning activities and skills and led to reflections which could be integrated as part of the course evaluation.

Meyers' interview (CAMELOT Project, 2014a) described a special technique for engaging her students in filming in which her students produced part of a film in front of a green screen in a physical classroom before using a background from virtual

learning environments to give the videos a more professional touch (Schools Media, n.d.). As Meyers explained, not all students like to be filmed and appear in front of a public audience; however, in order to avoid developing anxiety, learners were able to choose the role they would like to play, whether they wished to be filmed as a real person, or use an avatar or mask. She commented further that some students preferred to stay in the background, move the camera or play an object, while others sought to pose in real life. Hence there was a role for everyone and as a consequence all students became engaged with the role they had chosen. Meyers considered the production process a significant achievement for the learners as they were immersed in the target language throughout, engaged in creative collaboration with each other, practiced reading, writing, and speaking skills, and most importantly, perceived the experience as enjoyable (Schneider, 2014a, 2014b).

USING MACHINIMA IN THE CLASSROOM

Having discussed reflections based on data from expert interviewees and a needs analysis questionnaire with teachers, in this section we turn to considering observation data arising from a language class involving an international group of language learners.

The observation was carried out by the author and instructor of the language course. The data were collected prior to, during, and after the course, including students' feedback.

The language level of the group ranged from beginners (A2) to intermediate (B1) according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and six participants from Germany, France, Spain, Korea, the UK, and Portugal from 23 to 50 years old were observed. The virtual world of Second Life (<http://www.secondlife.com>) provided the learning environment for a series of three ninety-minute synchronous learning sessions.

In order to prepare for their synchronous sessions in-world, discuss suggestions for possible dialogues to perform, and agree on characters and roles, a variety of media were used between

the sessions. This included a specifically designed hotel website, which contained not only hotel information, but also ideas and suggestions for typical phrases used in the context of booking a room, checking in, asking for information, and making complaints. The website was designed to serve both teachers and students in order to share ideas about roles, characters and activities, and included suggestions for assessment (see www.waldschloessen.jimdo.de). Furthermore, in order to interact between the live sessions, learners used Facebook, Google Docs and IM messages within Second Life. Notecards with tasks and dialogues were also exchanged in Second Life, which formed the basis of the virtual real-time sessions.

The course followed a broadly project-based approach involving a definition of “task” in which meaning was primary. The tasks sought to engage learners by enabling them to choose their own topics of interest, and there was a clear goal. The scenario chosen for this specific task involved checking-in at a hotel, and as this was widely-understood, it enabled the instructor to find the appropriate language level in the context of a heterogeneous group of mixed abilities (see Figure 1).



Front Desk

Figure 1. Checking-in at the hotel

The three sessions involved a series of interrelated tasks: booking a hotel room, checking-in, asking for specific information (for example, availability, costs, tourist attractions, could pets stay in the rooms, etc.), writing emails, taking notes and making complaints. Students at the beginner level needed specific support in terms of vocabulary and phrases before getting started with the role-play task, while more advanced students required more basic information about the scenario and characters in order to prepare their roles.

In this scenario, the participants created a dialogue about a couple arriving at a romantic hotel for their honeymoon, where they discovered rats running about in the hall and in some of the rooms. Some of the preparation for the role-play took place outside Second Life as learners were asked to search for appropriate information from the hotel website, prepare relevant dialogues and share them via notecards in the virtual world or on Google Drive. After vocabulary and sentence structures had been discussed and understood by everyone, the scene was rehearsed (see Figure 2). Before the role-play started, one of the learners, who was already familiar with the hotel, guided the group through the various rooms. The tour included the bar, some hotel rooms, the blood stained attic with rats running around, a shelf full of skulls, a ghost floating through the walls, and outdoor toilets and showers.

Afterwards the learners discussed their experience of the tour. After familiarizing themselves with the scenario the learners decided their roles and carried out the role-play which was recorded. The recording was then sent to all participants after the session with the request to provide feedback on language-related issues and episodes (e.g., pronunciation, intonation, etc.).



Figure 2. Avatars interacting in a dialogue

Learners sent feedback about the machinima and their performance prior to the follow-up session and also shared their experience on the group's Facebook page. In order to update those students who missed the session, the machinima were watched together in a relaxed atmosphere around a campfire in Second Life to encourage learner reflection and collaboration. Learners were asked to reflect on their performance and experience and first impressions were collected and discussed. It was notable that the students reflected on their performance in the video rather than on their language performance, a finding supporting Falconer (CAMELOT Project, 2014b), who considered machinima as a powerful way to visualize learner experiences and to stimulate feedback on the process of creation. The power of these reflections was demonstrated by one of the participants who pointed out that some scenes evoked childhood memories of her grandmother's home when she was a child, a point illustrating both the situational and interactive authenticity of the virtual world and the imaginative stimulus it can provide in a language learning context.

Reading a dialogue from a script was considered less challenging than speaking without notes, as one learner commented that this even gave the impression of being fluent

in the language in the video. Just one participant indicated that he would need more time to practice his pronunciation and intonation. Nevertheless, participants admired each other's performance and praised each other for their acting skills. Everyone enjoyed the experience and commented very positively on the activity in spite of the technical quality of some of the machinima created. Although some learners were not involved in the filming, they felt highly involved in the process and enjoyed their roles as actors. The follow-up tasks involved writing an email to the hotel manager complaining about the rats, the outdoor toilet and other unpleasant findings. During the sessions the teacher observed some weaknesses in communication and provided those participants who were less eloquent in the target language with mix and match phrases to practice and create simple dialogues to scaffold their attempts at communication. Moreover, the teacher added captions to the 3D video recording with the correct phrases as well as some audio explanations and pronunciation for difficult words at the end of the video. This was considered as very useful as the participants could listen to the recording as often as they wished comparing their speech and that of others with the speech bubbles. The follow-up activity where students performed the same dialogue clearly demonstrated improvements in their oral performance. The students were then motivated for further challenges and tried ad hoc dialogues according to their language levels.

A positive outcome of the sessions was that the students were able to communicate in the target language, understand each other, practice their communication skills, and learn to use the appropriate phrases to check in at a hotel — all of which collectively motivated them for further studies.

MACHINIMA AS A TOOL FOR REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

Based on observation, it was clear that some learners felt more comfortable analysing their performance in a virtual learning environment where they could hide behind their avatars and assume a different identity in their L2. The use of machinima videos

was therefore an ideal tool for giving and receiving feedback. Watching the recordings of their activities helped learners to review and analyse their performance in the target language and to reflect on their own as well as other learners' performance from a distance. After this reflection phase, some learners decided to re-shoot a specific activity or role-play in order to improve their performance, an activity which was encouraged by the teacher. Another option for re-enacting productions is to provide the learners with a recording of a role-play containing speech bubbles indicating the correct language of the dialogue performed. This helps the students to compare their performance with correct phrases and gives them the opportunity to switch off the sound and reproduce the dialogue until they feel satisfied with the result. The students can then decide to re-shoot their role-play and analyse their performance with the tutor comparing their progress. Based on learners' performance, documented in the machinima, the facilitator can select language areas to be practiced, and add captions with explanations and links to further activities. In groups learners could then write a blog or wiki about their experiences and post new words and target language structures for peer review. A good indicator of an effective learning outcome is when learners engage in completing tasks by interacting and collaborating in the target language. Learners in this example clearly suggested that these skills were achievable by building upon previous knowledge and demonstrating engagement with this holistic learning experience.

CONCLUSION

The most effective and rewarding machinima videos are those that involve learners in the process of content creation. While this does not necessarily imply that learners make machinima themselves, it is likely that they are at least involved in the production process, either as part of the production team, or as an actor or extra. Although the final product is important for the learners, it is the process that is more important from the pedagogical point of view. For teachers who are not familiar with immersive environments and teach in a physical classroom, making machinima can be very

time-consuming and problematic, especially if there is a lack of technical support. Audio problems or lack of bandwidth are issues often reported as challenges in terms of creating machinima for the first time. In low-technology contexts, the use and adaptation of ready-made machinima may be the best solution. Examples of resources and of machinima ready for use can be found on the CAMELOT Website (<http://camelotproject.eu/machinima-list/>) and the CAMELOT Project YouTube Channel. Where technical support can alleviate the potential problems, learning with and through machinima may be highly motivating. In addition to the many uses of ready-made machinima videos in the classroom, an ideal way of using machinima is to enable learners to review the experience, provide peer feedback, and analyse and reflect on the learning process. Given the affordances of learning a language in 3D immersive environments, learners are able to practice situations or simulations which are not possible in a physical classroom and which offer new perspectives on learning.

As data from the project's on-going evaluation of these activities indicates, machinima provide opportunities for revisiting a shared experience and enable learners to discuss and reflect on the process. Such reflective machinima do not have to be professionally produced in order to serve this purpose. Although learner-generated content may be of lower quality it can be very valuable in engaging learners in a wide range of communicative and digital literacy skills. Professionally produced machinima involving an experienced film team would incur much higher costs, and the experience may leave language learners feeling more inhibited about their own performance.

Through machinima, error correction can be dealt with in different ways. One way involves learners viewing the dialogue and listening to it as often as they wish to and reflecting on the way the language was used. Another possibility is that the facilitator integrates feedback into the machinima by adding captions or spoken and written comments, highlighting specific areas of language, pronunciation and intonation. It is easier to deal with errors in a virtual learning environment, as learners often do not identify with them and claim that it is their avatar or character that makes the mistake and not them. Hence, learners may be

empowered by acquiring more distance from their classroom-bound L2 identities and this may position them more effectively in terms of producing and reflecting on the communication they engage in.

In summary, it is apparent that machinima can be used in three main ways in the language classroom.

- 1) Teachers can use ready-made machinima uploaded from YouTube or videos that accompany their course books.
- 2) Teachers can create their own machinima.
- 3) Learners can be involved in the production of machinima.

Reflecting on their experience using machinima with their students, language teachers from the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Turkey and the UK, identified the following benefits of using machinima.

- It presents opportunities for discussion and reflection.
- It can be used in the physical classroom as well as in a virtual learning environment.
- It can stimulate further activities (e.g., writing dialogues, role-plays, and simulations).
- It provides a wide range of genres for learners to practice (e.g., poetry, idioms, grammar, sketches, story-telling, information, and instruction).
- It provides opportunities for situational and interactional authentic language use and development.
- It can serve as a model for spoken language and offer opportunities to practice listening skills.

Further research on teacher and learner perceptions vis-à-vis integrating machinima in language activities continued until the end of the CAMELOT project in November 2015, and our final report will be made available as a result of our commitment to open access resources and materials via our website (<http://www.camelotproject.eu>). The project actively encourages reflection by

welcoming teachers and institutions as network partners, both during and after the lifetime of its funded activities.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michael Thomas is an Associate Professor at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. He has previously taught at universities in Germany and Japan and authored or edited 14 books. He is lead editor of the book series *Digital Education and Learning*

(Palgrave) and *Advances in Digital Language Learning and Teaching* (Bloomsbury). Email: mthomas4@uclan.ac.uk

Christel Schneider is founder and managing director of CSiTrain. Prior to this she was managing director for an international language association (ICC) and a visiting lecturer at Hamburg University. She is a qualified online trainer and since May 2014 has been working as a Research Assistant for the CAMELOT Project at the University of Central Lancashire. Email: chris.schneider@csitrain.net

REFLECTIONS ON USING E-ZINES IN ENHANCING EFL STUDENTS' CREATIVITY AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Aiden Yeh, Ph.D., Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at a teacher's reflections on the effectiveness of an electronic magazine (E-zine) project in enhancing students' creativity and language ability. Despite the challenges the students faced, this project, which simulates the process involved in digital publishing, has reinforced their teamwork skills which enabled them to carry out the task. Evidence from student blog posts suggests that for some at least this task has also heightened their creativity in writing and producing visually-aesthetic front-to-back page layouts. The insights gained from this experience validated much of the teacher's work but also brought awareness of some changes needed in her teaching practice.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Mass Media offered to third-year English-major college students at a private university in southern Taiwan broadly covered lessons on journalism, broadcasting, and advertising. By the end of the course, the students were expected to exhibit skills such as writing magazine/newspaper articles, planning and producing radio and TV shows, and writing media campaigns, photo journals, and blogs. Learning how to creatively

use digital tools was necessary to successfully complete an activity. The lessons were designed to prepare students to tackle tasks from simple to complex exercises; the level of difficulty gradually increased as their skills improved with time.

The class met for three hours once a week for 18 weeks and was conducted in a computer laboratory where each student (n=38) was allocated a computer. This kind of classroom environment made it easy to blend online technology into the curriculum. Together with the e-learning platform that the university provided for this course, a class wiki, students' individual blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube, other tools and websites such as Pixton and Issuu, and mobile devices that students already possessed were also added to the mix to create a more robust blended learning environment (Gruba & Hinkelman, 2012). Students could quickly catch up with whatever they had missed by checking the class wiki—they could conveniently find the resources needed or find where we were in the course (Teehan, 2010). The project-based learning and teaching (PBLT) approach was used as a framework in carrying out all task-based activities where each task provides scaffolding for the next one, thus leading to the accomplishment of the final goal (Fried-Booth, 1997). For example, in the e-zine project, the students worked in stages, from brainstorming to writing and editing, layouting and design to publishing.

This chapter describes my reflections on an e-zine project that was given to simulate the process involved in digital publishing. I review the effectiveness of the activity in stimulating and enhancing students' creativity and language skills, the challenges and difficulties involved, and the overall value of doing it.

THE PROJECT

I introduced the e-zine project after covering lessons on the different forms of print media which included writing for newspapers/magazines, photo journalism, banners and posters. The project took four weeks to finish. Lectures and group

discussions were held in the first week. During the second week, a hands-on workshop on using Publisher in designing front covers and inside page lay-outs was carried out; students also started working on their first drafts. By the third week, they conducted peer-reviews and revisions on drafts, compiled articles for inclusion in the e-zine, photoshoot, and designed final page lay-outs. In-class presentations were held during the fourth week where students showcased the contents of their e-zines. They were asked to write post-task reflections on their blogs; students also shared details of their e-zine production planning and group communications on Facebook.

I began by getting students to familiarize themselves with the contents of a magazine. We looked at the elements that make good front covers—the use of mastheads¹, catchy coverlines, dateline, main image (models), selling lines, bar codes, etc. I gave students an in-class exercise working on coverlines where they had to publish their studies on their blog. Coverlines are great to enhance the use of word play (rhymes & alliterations) and descriptive words that will appeal to readers, so they have to be catchy and interesting. Another in-class exercise was the brainstorming of magazine titles:² students had to come up with studies for a specific market niche. This can be a fun time to create outrageous titles.

Many students were already familiar with using Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Microsoft Paint since these software programs were regularly used in their academic life. Microsoft Publisher was also freely available and installed on all the desktop computers. I spent one class meeting to show them how to use Publisher for print layouts and designs. The other software programs such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, etc., were given as optional tools. There were computer graphic courses available in our institution that students could sign up for. Because some students had already taken these courses, they were knowledgeable and possessed the technical skills needed.

1 The masthead is the title/name of the magazine displayed in a specific typeface placed prominently on the front cover.

2 Magazine names and titles of articles are available at http://massmedia2013.pbworks.com/w/page/70654531/Students_Ezines.

I gave students another two to three weeks for the production stage which includes writing/editing articles, photoshoot, and layouting. The oral presentation, where they showcased their final projects, was done in the fourth week (mid-term week). Due to the difficulty and complexity of the task, it was given as a midterm exam project.

The project was collaborative in nature because the students had to work in groups. They were required to design and create an e-zine, which should include the following items:

1. The Front Cover
 - A. Name/title of the e-zine
 - B. Logo
 - C. Brief titles of featured articles
 - D. A picture that encapsulates the theme of the e-zine
2. Table of Contents
 - A. Titles of featured articles with paginations
 - B. Graphics/pictures consistent with the theme
3. Featured articles
 - A. Title
 - B. Article
 - C. Name of author, and other acknowledgements
 - D. Photos for featured articles must be relevant to the story. A signed consent form from people in the photos must be obtained prior to publication.
 - E. Each article must contain at least 4–5 paragraphs, and it must include a clear focus/message of the paper (what is the article about), body paragraphs which clearly support (expand, discuss, provide examples) the main point given in the introduction, concluding paragraph should summarize the story.
 - F. Each member must produce at least one essay to be contributed to the e-zine.
 - G. Peer-editing is highly advised before submitting the draft to the instructor for final review. Googledocs or MeetingWords, in addition to emails, can be used for easy access to the documents

-
- H. Layouts must be visually attractive
 - I. Role and responsibilities can be but not limited to the following:
 - Writers, layout artists (front page, logo, pages for featured articles), photographers, editors

Oral Presentation

20 minutes were allocated for each group to present/showcase their work. They discussed the rationale for their choice of theme and title, articles, photos included for final publication, and logo design. Each member talked about his/her role and contributions to the group task. Final e-zines, published on Issuu.com¹, were exhibited during their presentation and showed a myriad of original articles, photos and illustrations. Students were informed about the importance of observing copyright laws. Web links of the published e-zine were shared via tweets and blog posts, which were also included in their post-task reflections.

Writing and Editing the Manuscript

The writing and editing of articles were given as an assignment due to the length and number of papers to be reviewed. Because these were longish papers, I reckoned that students would write better at their own time and pace. Unlike paragraph-writing exercises which can be done in the classroom, timing their article writing would only inhibit their creativity. It would have been impossible for me to give individual feedback on everybody's paper on the spot. So, I asked my students to email their work or the link to their document where I could edit it online. This gave me the time to read their articles and provide constructive feedback. Unfortunately, I did not foresee the amount of editing involved and the difficulties students went through. The next time I do this project, I would focus on responding to students' written work more efficiently. I would use symbols or error codes (abbreviations) which correspond to language features. I would create a page on

1 Issuu.com is a free digital publishing platform and includes publications from all parts of the globe, covering topics in fashion, lifestyle, art, sports and global affairs, see <http://issuu.com>.

the class wiki for error codes; students should be able to check the meaning at their own time and space. Although, identifying mechanical errors is important, I would give general, content-related feedback instead of sentence-level corrections. I would also ask students to use their blogs and the class wiki to give me a continuous update throughout the project cycle that would reflect any issues or changes that need immediate attention.

All feature articles had at least four to five paragraphs each, which included 1) an introductory paragraph which gives a synopsis of what the article is about, 2) body paragraphs where they expand, discuss, and provide examples to support the main points, and 3) a concluding paragraph where they recap their ideas in a clear, summarizing manner, and tie together and integrate the various issues (points) raised in the paper. Students wrote original articles for this project because of the specific theme they were working on. I also suggested that they use Word documents and email for sharing or an online word/text editor such as MeetingWords.com, which they were introduced to in the photostory activity¹. Some of the students used this tool, but the majority relied on the traditional Word document and email when submitting their work for teacher feedback. I gather students tend to have preferences for choosing the familiar; this resonates with Salomon's study which suggests that students "will always be inclined to prefer the one in which they learned" (cited in Healy, 1998, p. 234).

I advised students to peer-edit their articles before submitting them to me for review. This does not guarantee that peer-edited articles would be foolproof, but the number of mistakes would be less (Keh, 1990). An example of a student's first draft that did not go through the peer review process (see Figure 1, Example 1) shows multiple writing errors. Example 2, on the other hand, was read and corrected by a classmate, thus containing fewer errors. However, it is important to note that the quality of peer feedback depends on the reviewer's English language proficiency and his/her ability to provide corrections. Thus, students in peer review groups would still need guidance from their instructors; nonetheless, the opinion of peers may be less intimidating (Craig, 2013).

1 Examples of students' drafts on a task using MeetingWords.com are available at http://massmedia2013.pbworks.com/w/page/69636919/Photostory_assignment.

Long-distance Relationship

1

I am a girl who sinks into love deeply. Naturally, I share things that happened between me and my boyfriend with my friends very often. However, when they learned that he doesn't-Isn't studying in Kaohsiung but in Hsinchu, they always-reveal-in-were shocked faces. Then it comes several following questions like "Don't Aren't you worried your boyfriend will have another-a love affair?", "How can you stand not to seeing each other for a long time?" When ever I answered them, they reveal-in-were surprised faces again. To me, long-distance relationship is not a problem with-us. The only important thing is to trust and remain committed to each other.

2

India is a country in South Asia. It is the seventh-largest country by area, the second-most populous country with over 1.2 billion people. This summer vacation I attended (joined) a school association (club?) called Aiesec, so I got the opportunity to go to Hyderabad (a city of India) for one and a half months as a volunteer. I went to the countryside to teach the children English; it is- was an unforgettable experience.

Figure 1. Screenshot of students' common language errors

Some students had expressed in their post-reflection blog posts that for group communications they favored using Facebook (FB) over e-mail. Although using FB was not a requirement, they exchanged documents (Word files and location shoot photos) and made comments on each other's work via messages or on a private FB page specifically created for this project. The students took screenshots of their FB posts sent during the peer-review week and willingly shared them with me on the day of their presentation as evidence that they had read and corrected each other's essays. The messages suggest that many of them had revised their drafts at least two to three times; minor grammatical errors were corrected and parts that required further revisions due to poor phrasing or translation of ideas were highlighted. Peer reviewers also made suggestions on how to improve their writing; for example, they recommended adding longer and vivid descriptions of a place, person, or events. The manner and tone of internal communication that took place were polite, friendly, and generally helpful.

Students who were responsible for editing their group's papers experienced the process of responding, assessing and offering helpful comments. Below is an excerpt from a student's blog post reflecting on her role as editor; she remarked on the challenges that she encountered and that this experience made her cognizant of the difficulties involved in editing and publishing.

... It's really a tough work. I had to read carefully and correct the grammar errors and then sometimes re-organize their work. As I did the editing, it's really interesting to read their ideas and know their writing styles. I really learned a lot from the editing... Besides, I learned from my peers' mistakes...By doing this e-zine homework, I realize that publishing a work is never easy. I have to put interesting ideas in my article to attract readers. I have to check again and again to make sure there are no mistakes. Though it was time-consuming, I still enjoyed it. *A student's blog post.*

CREATIVE FREEDOM

Each student was required to contribute at least one article to the ezine. The creation and publication of the ezine, however, required a fair division of labor among group members. As a group they had to discuss and decide who would be responsible for doing a particular job (role and responsibilities). Before the group discussions, I asked them to do a quick self-analysis. This self-assessment is crucial in mapping out their individual strengths (Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999). Understanding what their strengths are could help amplify their skills and contributions in the presence of other team members with complementary talents, which can actually be good for boosting collective intelligence and strengthening group dynamics (Dooly, 2008). Those students with exceptional skills in drawing or using computer graphics could take on the role of visual/layout artists; those with impressive writing/reading skills can be editors; and those who possess a creative eye for photography can be photographers, etc. Below is an excerpt from a student's blog post regarding her role as layout artist¹.

1 Also known as art editor

When we distributed the jobs to everyone, I volunteered to do the lay-out because I have loved to paint and been passionate at design. I also have used Photoshop before. I was happy that I could use these skills in doing this work- though I spent a lot of time finishing the whole e-zine...I enjoyed it because it not only let me learn more but it also inspired my creativity and ability." *A student's blog post*

This project also gave students the chance to bring out their hidden talents and to show their classmates that they can be savvy in other creative outlets. A good example is Alice, who seemed to be very shy and introverted, yet unbeknownst to many she had been to a design school and had participated in a fashion show. The title and theme of Alice's group's e-zine was La Vie, a women's magazine about style/trend news, shopping information, beauty tips, etc. As shown in Figure 2, Alice wrote an essay about her experiences in designing. In this article, she included pictures of her drawings and the dresses that she actually designed and made herself. The pull quote on her page which says, "It brings me not only satisfaction but also confidence," says a lot about Alice and how she feels about fashion design. Although she admitted having difficulty doing this page layout, as she had tried learning several tools before settling for Illustrator, at the end of the day she was pleased that she had persevered. The page she created showcased her clothing designs and her story that nobody knew about.



Figure 2. A Designed Dress E-zine article

Photoshoot

The photoshoot for the images they needed for their pages came soon after the theme and articles had been forwarded in; layouting and designing the overall look was next, and the last step was to double check content and the final touches. The ready-to-publish version was then uploaded¹ to [Issuu.com](https://www.issuu.com) for publication- this is where the magazines took on a different feel and look. The e-zines came to life and the pages look amazingly good in digital format which can be read on computers, tablets, and smart phones.

In the excerpt below, it shows an example of how students planned and coordinated their schedules for photo shoots and how the success of a photography session can vary depending on the weather and other contingent factors.

¹ At least one member should sign up for a free account on Issuu.com to be able to upload files.

During the production period, we made an appointment [sic] to shoot our cover picture. In my opinion this was the most difficult part. Because pursuing the quality of being in nature, getting the right lighting (from the sun) for the background, we changed and had different poses, and did a lot of re-takes doing the same pose(s) again and again under the hot sun... *A student's blog post*

Going out for a location shooting involved more than simply heading out to the place; some had to buy affordable treats that would be featured in the article and actually eat them. Figure 3 is a screenshot of the page written and created by Jill. In this article she described a coffee restaurant frequently visited by students. Located near the university campus, Jill went to this coffee shop and asked permission to shoot and to write a feature story about the place as part of her course assignment. The manager agreed and granted her access to the restaurant. The result is a four-paragraph descriptive essay that describes the shop and its brief history; her piece was a written account of her experience visiting the restaurant and interviewing the manager. Although her work can be considered a novice piece of journalistic writing, she managed to conduct research and gathered information. Her style of reporting can be improved and it was noted during her presentation that she should have mentioned the names of the people (owners and the manager) in her paper. Nonetheless, her article included a number of visually captivating photos that featured the local area, the food and of course, the coffee sold in this shop. Jill admitted that the pie and coffee shown in these pages were later on devoured after the shoot.



Figure 3. A Good Taste E-zine Article

When Opinions Clash

As there are benefits in collaborative tasks, engaging in any form of collaboration may bring about clash of views and diverse opinions, and this, according to Järvenoja & Järvelä (2013) is where “collaboration and task completion is compromised or endangered” (p. 165). However, when a group successfully finds a mutually satisfactory solution, collaborating can increase group productivity. One group in class had a similar experience where some members were pretty headstrong about their views and preferences regarding individual page designs. One member was vocal about a particular group member who designed her page background without considering the overall theme of the e-zine. It resulted in having pages with varied illustrations; some looked professionally done¹, while others were childlike drawings. On her blog post, she wrote that this collaborative task made her ‘recognize and understand other people’s characteristics and preferences’. Difficult as it may seem, working effectively in groups is something that students need to learn. It is very important in today’s work environment.

1 Storytellers Ezine is available at http://issuu.com/467020/docs/storyteller__1__1_

And learning to perform in/with a team is a skill that can be transferred and applied to all contexts and situations, and being adept at it increases the likelihood of personal and professional success. For future projects that require team work, I would spend time discussing with students the nature of collaborative tasks and the many issues associated with them, which can be prevented or at least minimized if students are aware of them. I would identify common problematic areas and provide suggestions on how to resolve them. For instance, it would be better if students develop a shared understanding of the task and the importance of the members' individual contribution to its success. I would provide specific strategies such as establishing an agreed timeline, giving equal opportunities for each member to share ideas and engage in brainstorming, and most importantly, to open the level of communication and ensure that all opinions are valued.

E-zine Rubric

The students were assessed using a self-made rubric¹ which provided a list of benchmarks based on the given task requirements and guidelines. I posted it on the class wiki and on the e-learning course platform. This provided me a means of communicating expectations and listing a set of criteria, which defines the necessary components of the task. In this rubric, the criteria included content (front cover, table of contents, layout, and feature story), editing, roles & responsibilities and presentation. With a weighted score (0–10 points) assigned to each criterion, scoring was made simpler and more objective. However, this rubric can still be improved by adding the different levels of competence (or completion of work) with a score assigned to each level. In other words, the rubric should also show progressions from poor to exemplary exhibition of work. What is missing in this rubric is a description of what constitutes excellent work compared to poor rendition of skills. Having a list of criteria is good, but adding performance descriptors with an assigned proficiency scale would make the task assessment better as it would help students evaluate the quality of their own work (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

¹ The rubric is available online at http://massmedia2013.pbworks.com/w/page/69704794/Ezine_Rubric

REFLECTIONS

As I look back at the overall effectiveness of doing a task-based activity on teaching students about e-zine publications, I believe that despite the difficulties that they faced in the production process it was a positive learning experience. Students got to hone their skills and learned new ones that enriched their knowledge and understanding of the concepts and practice in simulating the world of digital publishing.

This ezine project gave students the chance to write short articles about various thematic issues. Those who did multiple revisions on their articles and layouts experienced the pains and joys of writing and editing. Students who found writing in English difficult had received extra support from their peers through the comments made on their drafts and numerous FB messages. Those whose work did not go through the peer-review process had received more corrections from me compared to those whose work had been peer-reviewed and edited at least twice. Although students had to learn how to write and revise their compositions based on either the peer reviewer's and instructor's feedback, mistakes still occurred. In hindsight, perhaps it would have helped the students if I had allotted more time for verbal feedback (Min, 2006) to foster better understanding of what improvements were needed. On one hand, it would have integrated well with the multiple-draft process, which according to Jahin (2012) should be an integral part of the writing classroom. On the other hand, writing was not strictly the focus of this course. Concentrating too much on the writing process would have caused imbalance on how the course objectives should be aligned and supported by instruction. For a large class such as this one, I concur with Ur (1999) that correcting compositions is time-consuming. However, this, in many ways, is a simulation of what magazine editors do and experience- constantly reviewing materials, checking for clarity and brevity (Rocha, 2001), and yet, it is possible to still miss something and make a mistake (Barrett, 2011).

Another lesson that I learned from this experience is the importance of teamwork. As mentioned previously, it is essential to acknowledge the common problems students face when working with others; awareness of relevant issues can help curb any inherent

dilemma. I have also learned the value of reflection and feedback; these can and should be done not only after the project but throughout the project cycle. A progress report or weekly update on the blog (or a comment posted on the class wiki) should help raise any concerns that need immediate attention. Bringing up a question or a personal concern must be encouraged rather than frowned upon. In this way, students learn how to express their opinions, to listen, and respect others' ideas. It would also be helpful to give students a sample case scenario/study where team conflict occurs and discuss viable solutions. The point is to make them grasp the idea that successful teamwork requires negotiation, compromise, and the ability to clarify misunderstandings. Conflicts can be troublesome but I have learned that by facing them, communicating and brainstorming solutions can encourage open communication and build trust among each other. In a nutshell, despite the challenges, this project fostered individual and collective effort, and in the process students improved their interpersonal skills as they found ways to promote better communication and problem solving strategies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the e-zine project enhanced students' language skills as demonstrated by the catchy titles, informative articles and sometimes personal accounts of events and experiences, and the meaningful blog entries on post-task reflections. The featured articles in their ezines were written in a language that is not their mother tongue, and yet used it as a tool in finding their voice to share their stories. Teachers who are contemplating in adopting this e-zine project should be aware of the importance of allotting time for multiple revisions on drafts and the tribulations of teamwork. Nonetheless, this project has proven to heighten students' creativity as they used their ingenuity and resourcefulness to produce impressive and visually-aesthetic page layouts that added emotional and tactile appeal. It allowed the integration of their multiple intelligences, giving them the chance to explore their own skills and to experience the pleasure (and difficulty) of writing that goes beyond the monochrome print.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Aiden Yeh is an Assistant Professor at Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages in Taiwan, where she teaches creative writing and other ESP courses (Research Writing, Mass Media, and Cross-Cultural Communications). She received her PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Birmingham, UK, and Master's in ELT Management from University of Surrey, UK. Email: aidenyeh@yahoo.com

