The Use of Technological Tools- Movie Maker and Weblogs to Foster Social Interaction in the Classroom

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Abstract

This present work depicts a literature review on how the use of technological tools such as Weblogs and Movie Maker can build social interaction within the classroom; while students implicitly learn English and foster the use of values in the learning process. It also briefly discusses the impact of technology in teaching, and why to use the aforementioned technological tools in class. Examples of tools to create weblogs are provided. Furthermore, this paper suggests two purposeful strategies: Literature Circles and Project Menus that can be used and combined with Weblogs and Movie Maker in order to enhance teachers' instruction, and to make students develop the language skills in an integrated and interactive way.

Keywords: social interaction, technological impact, weblogs, movie maker, literature circles, project menus.

Resumen Ejecutivo

Este trabajo representa una revisión de literatura sobre cómo el uso de herramientas tecnológicas como Weblogs y Movie Maker pueden construir interacción social dentro del aula; mientras los estudiantes aprenden implícitamente inglés y fomentan el uso de valores en el proceso de aprendizaje. También se analiza brevemente el impacto de la tecnología en la enseñanza y por qué utilizar las herramientas tecnológicas antes mencionadas en clase. Se proporcionan ejemplos de herramientas para crear Weblogs. Además, éste artículo sugiere dos estrategias útiles: Círculos de literatura y Menús de proyectos las cuales se pueden usar y combinar con Weblogs y Movie Maker para mejorar la instrucción de los docentes y hacer que los estudiantes desarrollen las habilidades de lenguaje de una manera integrada e interactiva.

Palabras clave: Interacción Social, Impacto Tecnológico, Weblogs, Movie Maker, Círculos de Literatura, Menús de Proyectos.

Introduction

In Ecuador, English teaching in public institutions has been based on the use of textbooks, notebooks, pencils, boards and CD players. This traditionalist teaching plus the lack of technology have made that students do not feel the need or get interested in learning English. Correspondingly, teachers were limited to get into the classroom, teach the academic contents, and send homework to finally assess students.

Traditionalist teaching has had its basis on receptiveness and rote memorization, falling in the wrong assumption that students are boxes to be filled with just mere contents, and where the surroundings of the students were not interactive because the contents were transmitted by their teacher only. "Traditional schoolroom was not a place in which students had experiences (Dewey, 1997, pg. 26)".

Over the past years, we have witnessed how technology has become attractive for young people and that can be verified in the fact that the students learn to use these tools rapidly. Thus, if educators would have the enough knowledge to get also involved in technology they might take advantage of it in their instruction. Educators might captivate their students to develop a better approach to the knowledge of the subject matter and therefore reinforce their learning.

Literature Review

Social Interaction Theory

Creating opportunities for students to socially interact within the classroom is relevant to develop strong social and learning skills. Most students learn to develop accurate social and learning skills by observing how their peers and teachers act in different environments or situations in the school.

Cooter & Reutzel (2004) asserted that the social interaction theory has its basis on how the language acquisition is influenced by the interaction of physical, linguistic, cognitive and social factors. Social interaction theory has been analyzed by several researchers, psychologists and educators, but the two major characters that have contributed to the notion of this theory have been Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner.

Culture and language in human development are vitally important features in Vygostky's theory of social interaction. Vygotsky, Russian psychologist, assured that social learning precedes development because "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, this psychologist proposed two more themes to support his theory, the more knowledgeable other (MKO), and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The MKO refers to anyone who possesses a better knowledge, understanding or higher thinking level than the learner regarding particular tasks or contents, these people can usually be teachers, old adults, peers, etc. In regard to the ZPD, this zone refers to the distance between the student's ability to perform a task with teacher, adult, or peer's collaboration and the student's ability to perform activities independently. Nevertheless, the relationship between teachers and students is reciprocal since the connections between people and the sociocultural context serve as means where people interact and develop higher thinking levels.

On the other hand, Jerome Bruner (1967) precursor of the constructivist learning theory discovered that learning is a method of inquiry-based instruction. He asserted that students learn best by discovering facts and relationships for themselves. He also believed that learners have an innate capacity that helps them make sense of the work and that cognitive abilities are developed through active interaction. Moreover, Bruner claimed that learning takes place in problem solving situations where the student draws on his or her own old experience and existing knowledge to discover facts or new truths to be learned. Thus, students interact with the world by exploring, manipulating objects, contending with questions, generating controversy and performing experiments as well.

Garton (1995) pointed out that social interaction is the fundamental mean for the dynamic transmission of cultural and historical knowledge. Additionally, she indicated that the social or cultural origins of cognitive and linguistic knowledge prove an examination of the environmental or contextual conditions that ease the development process. Social interaction thus frames the involvement of participants who bring different experiences to interchange in varied contexts and gain knowledge.

How technology impacts in the classroom

The technological era has forced teachers to be updated and also engaged with the new technologies to support their instruction. Thus, technological devices have become very diverse in the ways they are being used inside the classrooms.

Motteram (2013) manifested that teachers have had to change their teaching resources in the last years due to the evolution of technology. A time ago teachers were used to manage textbooks, tape recorders, and whiteboards only, whereas these days they have had to get adapted at using different technological tools to enhance their professional practice and engage students in their learning. This author also asserted that digital tools are a new feature of world education and have become established and recognized in the field of computer assisted language learning (CALL) and the core of English language teaching (ELT).

Jung and Hyun (2011) pointed out that recently most CALL empirical studies have focused on the

effectiveness of this method since technology has become to be considered as "a magical pill" in regard to language learning. Additionally, they manifested that some studies that address students' interactions through CALL have been limited in data analysis and interpretation due to the interplay of classroom environment, tools, lessons and teachers; however, other studies have shown an increase in students' participation based on three measures: (1) percentage of student talk versus teacher talk, (2) directional focus of student talk toward his or her peers or toward the teacher, and (3) equality of students participation.

Pim & Motteram (2013) recognized CALL as a self-paced learning way that allows teachers to assess students through language games and drilled activities. This effective type of learning is a sample of 'visible learning' since teachers are able to observe the students' outcomes, provide feedback and make that students advance in learning. In language acquisition, technology provides a broad variety of learning activities to develop the four skills of the language: listening, speaking, reading and writing in an integrated way.

Accordingly, IES (2014) claimed that the use of technology in the classroom helps students to communicate with each other in an active way. Students feel free to actively make their own choices about how to generate, obtain, manage or display information as well. Using technology in the classroom makes that teachers are no longer the center of attention or the unique dispensers of information; on the contrary, it makes that teachers become facilitators who provide their students with a variety of technological resources in order to scaffold more knowledge. Seeing this from a different perspective, the traditional education or teacher centered has transformed into progressive education- student centered where the student is the generator of his or her own learning.

In addition, Varda, Haxton & Kuenzi (2012) asserted that educators are searching for alternative methods to teaching in the classroom. One of the common methods these days are "high-tech classrooms". High-tech classrooms allow students to work online, take online course or even access to social media to interact and succeed in the learning process.

Richardson (2010) explained that today's schools are challenged to face a difficult dilemma, and it is that students have grown up immersed in the world technology, while teachers are not accustomed to use trend tools to support their instruction. In other words, students regardless their ages are further ahead their teachers in computer literacy. Thus, according to Prensky (2004) the online life is a whole lot bigger than just the internet. This online life has become a fully strategy for how to live, survive, and thrive in the twenty-first century where cyberspace becomes a part of everyday life.

Therefore, for the progressing technological era, teachers also realize the necessity of getting immersed into it to use the technology in the classroom and create new literacy environments where students can succeed in learning. There are many tools to be applied according to the cognitive level of the students, their age, the content area of study and learning needs. However, this work is focused on the use of Weblogs and Movie Maker in schooling.

What are weblogs?

Richardson (2010), described weblogs as "an easily created, easily updatable Web site that allows an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet from any Internet connection" (Richardson, 2010, p.17). For UserLand Software (2014) a weblog is a personal website which allows users to easily publish a broad variety of content to the Web. The content that is published may include written essays, annotated links, Word, PDF, PowerPoint documents and multimedia. Computer Hope (2014) described weblogs as "listings of text, images, or other objects that are arranged in chronological order. Blogs are often maintained and run by a single individual, updated daily, or contain random personal remarks about a topic, a personal ramble, an update on the person's life or their current feelings." Weblogs allow users all over the world to give a look into different personal journals or diaries and consequently learn about a wide variety of topics.

Why to use weblogs in the classroom?

Weblogs or blogs can be used in the classroom because they can be normally aligned to the curriculum. There is not impediment to apply blogs at any subject. Therefore, they can be used in Math, Language and Literature, English, Arts and so forth. Crie (2006) mentioned that educational blogs are advantageous for the benefits they offer to both teachers and students. Teachers for example, can post different resources, lessons, assignments and share ideas with their colleagues.

On the other hand, blogs keep students highly motivated in their learning since they can participate in forums or discussions. These tools also provide opportunities for students to read and write and enable scaffolding learning. Furthermore, the use of blogs in the classroom permit students and teachers write blog posts from the comfort of their house or from their smartphones at any time. Additionally, students who are shy or struggle with verbal skills may feel confident and secure to express their ideas or thoughts behind the screen, which enables students to enhance their social and communicative skills and accordingly to build social interaction in the classroom. Moreover, blogs provide students the opportunity to proofread, self-edit and rewrite their posts to empower their learning process (AssortedStuff, 2014).

Tools to create Weblogs

"Blogs may be great educational tools and they give students complete freedom to publish content on the web, but if you do not know how to effectively implement them in the classroom, they are only as good as wadded up balls of paper in the trash" (Pappas, 2013).

There are many platforms to create educational blogs that could serve as complementary activities in which students can develop their reading and writing skills as they interact with their peers and teachers inside and outside the classroom. There are many Weblogs Platforms but among the most popular ones are: Edublogs.org, WordPress.org, and Blogger.com.

Edublogs.org is the world's most popular education blog service. It is a free tool that allows educators and students use powerful learning tools by having a friendly community in the school. www.edublogs.org

WordPress.org is an open-source and free Web publishing application. It allows teachers and public in general to build dynamic websites and blogs that may be updated, customized and managed according to user's needs. www.WordPress.org

Blogger.com is a Google's free tool to create blogs and share topics of interest, images or photos as well as to discuss about opinions or beliefs regarding educational, political, or social issues. It is a free tool which allows its users to create their personal stylish profile and get connected worldwide. www.blogger.com

Richardson (2010) suggested the use of blogs to create and use strategies for the classroom such as: Class Portals, Online Filing Cabinet, E-Portfolio and Collaborative Space. *Class Portals* provide teachers the opportunity to publish the course curriculum, syllabus, class schedule, homework assignments, rubrics, activity sheets and general announcements about the subject. *Class Portals* are eco-friendly and save time, students can access the information as many times as they need and thus they become responsible of their own learning process. *Online Filing Cabinets and E-Portfolios* are a recompilation of students' assignments, with them; teachers can keep track of the students' performance and students can keep their work in an organized and secure way. The students can look back over their work and reflect about their progress. In another way, *Collaborative Space* is the space where students learn from their peers or other professional who are also involved in the digital space. These spaces foster social interaction with all the participants in the Web as they also learn cooperatively.

Literature Circles by using Blogs

One of way to encourage students to read and write is by using Literature Circles and why not to use them in Blogs? "Literature circles as small groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of Literature in depth" (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009). Literature circle is a complex, and well-structured strategy especially for the roles each student has to play in the circle. Peralta-Nash and Dutch (2000)

suggested five different roles in Literature Circles such as literary laminator, connector, word finder, discussion director, and illustrator. The purpose of this useful strategy in instruction is that it allows student to develop and discuss their own questions and answers as they build meaningful ways to expand and develop critical thinking.

In addition, literature circles are student centered. Students work by themselves and assume responsibility for the construction of their own knowledge, while the teacher monitors and supports the process. Thus, literature circles are supremely relevant because they not only foster active and thoughtful attitude toward reading, but also build conversational skills and social interactions.

On the other hand, literature circles strategy needs to be applied in ways that reflect the students' individual needs. Despite the teachers present the sets of books in the class, which obviously have to be aligned to the curriculum; the students have the final decision to choose what they really want to read, so they feel motivated and challenged to do their best with their assigned role. Additionally, as they work as a whole group, literature circles also promote the use of values, for example, they respect turns to speak, are tolerant to accept their peers' opinions or beliefs and develop a sense of fellowship as well.

There is not any recipe to use this strategy accompanied by technology. However, the use of Blogs in Literature Circles maximizes students' responses and discussions around texts. Using Blogs challenges students to give their best of themselves when publishing their comments or thoughts of a specific piece of reading since they are aware that not only their teacher but their peers are also participating in the task. In contrast, teachers are able to publish open-ended questions "essential questions" to push students in high-order thinking.

Decades ago traditional English language teaching was based on the use of flashcards or just the images provided by the students' books. Students were limited to extend their knowledge further than their teacher's lessons. Nonetheless, presently and thanks to technology teachers have a broad variety of web tools to enhance their professional practice and make that learning English is fun in class.

Another interesting tool that complements instruction and help students develop the four English language skills is Movie Maker.

What is Movie Maker?

Movie Maker is free software manufactured by Microsoft Windows. Movie Maker is "a feature of Windows Vista that enables you to create home movies and slide shows on your computer, complete with professional-looking titles, transitions, effects, music, and even narration" (Microsoft, 2014). Thus, Movie Maker becomes one of the funniest ways for students to create their own videos and share in their class.

Why to use Movie Maker in the classroom?

Using any kind of technology in the classroom is one of the longed-for expectations in education. Although, some teachers are not involved in the technological trend yet, the use of technological tools is becoming a meaningful support in the curriculum and school. About.com (2014) asserted that Movie Maker enables teachers to create their own lesson plans in an interactive and funny way for their instruction. Newingham, B. (2010). assured that some of the benefits Movie Maker has is that teachers and students work together, and that students display their knowledge in a creative way. Using Movie Maker in the classroom permits students to understand, reinforce, and review different contents that are aligned to the curriculum and by doing this students also extend their learning. Children and young people spend their free time watching TV, movies or listening to music, but at the same time they are learning something from them. (Microsoft, 2009) suggested teachers to use this tool in order to make their lesson plans more attractive, funny and interesting in order to grab students' attention and keep them engaged in learning.

In regards to EFL students the use of videos and multimedia in their instruction is pivotal since they feel challenged by their teacher to use their imagination to create videos. For example, Gromik (2008) assured that modern classroom demands the use of authentic audiovisual resources from the internet. He suggested that before integrating filmmaking into instruction, teachers have to bear

in mind four steps to succeed when using Movie Maker. First, teachers should get acquainted with the software in order to provide any help for students who are learning or experiencing the use of video tools. Second, teachers should have access to equipment such as cameras, tripods, or digital videotapes to facilitate the production of videos. Third, teachers should be concerned and aware of how much access to technology the students have outside the classroom. Fourth, teachers should finally establish a pilot task to allow students get familiarized with Movie Maker, the filming process and the practice of their linguistic skills as well.

Project Menus by using Movie Maker

Taking into account the diversity that each student brings into the classroom, teachers need to be creative and look for means that support their instruction and consequently help in the students' development.

A purposeful strategy that can be used and combined with Movie Maker is Project Menus. "A project menu is a numbered list of tiered assignments that can be used for a variety of purposes in the classroom" (Heacox, 2012, pg. 111).

When teachers offer project menus in the classroom, students become autonomous learners since they are allowed to choose the project they would like to work or feel more comfortable with. Firstly, teachers have to be aware that to apply this strategy it is important to consider certain factors to attain optimal results. Project menus have to be aligned to the curricular unit of study. Furthermore, teachers have to keep in mind Bloom's taxonomy to set clear objectives and fulfill their expectations and similarly Gardner's Multiple Intelligences in order to group the students regarding their potential.

Once teachers have already designed the project menus and showed to the students, they will be challenged to work in the project of their preference by using Movie Maker.

Implications and limitations in Ecuador

The implications of incorporating the above mentioned tools in the Ecuadorian Public universities are focused on the following aspects:

Lack of resources or budget to count with the basic technological tools such as computers, internet service, and projectors in the university or at home.

Lack of some teachers' technological knowledge to implement the tools as well as the strategies within their professional practice.

Issues to control the internet access in both the university and at home.

The family economic situation. In some cases, the students do not even have a computer at their home. They have to look for cyber places and pay for renting a machine, and rarely those cyber places are far from home.

Each English teacher works with five or six classes and each one has between thirty to forty students per class.

If the five percent of the students do not have computers or internet access, they might not be able to do their activities.

The infrastructure also hinders the process. The classroom size is too small to the number of students.

The teachers' reluctance to implement the tools and strategies in their instruction.

Conclusion

Taken together, technology has created considerable changes in the development of different areas of human being's activity and education cannot be left apart. Nevertheless, the public universities in Ecuador have not been affected by technology due to the lack of human and economic resources. In spite of this, the technology can start an in-depth change in the learning process if the implications of the Ecuadorian context could be surpassed. Hence, to start incorporating technology in our classrooms, the government needs to invest more in education and the educators must have the willingness to get involved with technology and the commitment to contribute to the empowerment of education in order to compete in this globalized world.

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