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Abstract

Web@glance is an *Entre Lenguas* section dedicated to share with our readers how teachers have integrated e-resources to the teaching and learning of foreign languages and / or to their own professional development. The review needs to include a brief description of the e-resource (purpose, audience, links, resources and tasks available, among others); how they integrated these e-resources to their language class and, some recommendations for learners and tutors. Web@glance also includes information about online and face to face events related to the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

In this *Entre Lenguas* issue, Web@glance presents a review about the design of e-resources for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (<http://ealmec.org/>), particularly through the use of Web 2.0 tools to promote communication and interaction. This review also describes the pedagogical criteria considered and the procedures followed to design these e-resources. Finally, the technical challenges faced are discussed and some recommendations to teachers interesting in developing similar e-resources are given.

If you would like to contribute to the Web@glance section, please submit your paper to Teadira Pérez at teadira@ula.ve.

E~resources for EFL learners: Integrating Web 2.0 tools to promote communication and interaction

Resumen

Web@glance es una sección de la Revista *EntreLenguas* dedicada a compartir con nuestros lectores y lectoras la forma como los docentes han integrado recursos electrónicos a la enseñanza/aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras y/o a su desarrollo profesional. Su contribución debe incluir una descripción del recurso electrónico (propósito, audiencia, enlaces, recursos, tareas, entre otros); como se integraron al aula de clase y algunas recomendaciones para docentes y estudiantes. Igualmente, Web@glance incluye información sobre los eventos en línea o presenciales relacionados con el uso de las Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación en la enseñanza/aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras.

En este número de *Entre Lenguas*, Web@glance presenta una revisión del diseño de recursos electrónicos para estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (<http://ealmec.org/>), particularmente a través de la integración de herramientas Web 2.0 para promover la comunicación y la interacción. Adicionalmente, se describen los criterios pedagógicos y la metodología empleada para el diseño de los recursos electrónicos y las tareas propuestas. Finalmente, se discuten los retos técnicos enfrentados y algunas recomendaciones para docentes interesados en desarrollar materiales en línea para estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Si desea contribuir con la sección Web@glance, envíe sus aportes a Teadira Pérez a la siguiente dirección electrónica: teadira@ula.ve.

Introduction

The idea of creating EFL resources for EFL learners emerged from a blended project I run, using blogs to promote the four modalities of the language, with my students enrolled in an English- Level II course. This project consisted of four main components: 1) a selection of 15 students were asked to select online news on any topic that had called their attention; 2) they then had to post the URL (Universal Resource Locator) and start sharing and discussing ideas with their e-peers using a class blog; 3) each one of them had to give a short talk in class about their news selection, and finally, 4) they had to write a final essay of 1000 words about it. I found the idea of integrating Web 2.0 tools to an English as a Foreign Language class quite appealing. First, because my students became engaged in authentic and meaningful activities - that allowed them to use the language with a real audience in mind, and secondly, because this social e-tool – blogs – served as an information repository and as an e-discussion forum. This project reflected, in a way, the dream of Tim Berners- Lee (2000), to make the Web into a multidirectional interactive space, in terms of how texts are read and how they can be posted and accessed.

I explored – through surveys and observations- how my students, who were digital native - students for whom digital technologies already existed when they were born, and hence they have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers (Prensky, 2001) - were using this class blog to interact and discuss their news topics and how this e-discussions influenced their oral and written production in class. The results

showed me that my students wanted more from the e-tool we used as part of our e-project, they wanted to communicate and interact more with their e-peers through e-tasks which complemented their face to face classes. Students, as Net Geners, not only demand interaction but also immediate response to their actions (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005).

In this context, I made sound pedagogical decisions to design e-resources for English as a Foreign Language Learners (EFL) that called for communication and interaction and met learners' needs in terms of course content and language use. The focus of this paper, then, is on the pedagogical principles used as the backbone for the development of e-tasks and on the procedures for devising these e-resources through the use of a blog.

Thus, this pedagogical e-resources design used the computer-assisted language learning approaches (Kern & Warschauer, 2000), the criteria for materials development (Tomlinson, 2003), and the e-activities model (Salmon, 2002). In an attempt to integrate the principles derived from the main issues raised by these authors, a number of criteria emerged in terms of creating e-tasks for EFL learners:

1. Enough comprehensible input needs to be provided through authentic and meaningful e-resources.
2. Learners need to be motivated to participate in e-discussions and encouraged to communicate and interact with their e-peers.
3. E-tasks need to be meaning-focused and derived from oral or written e-resources.

4. Learners need to have a variety of choices in order to make their own decisions on tasks selection.
5. E-tasks need to be contextualised and integrated to class activities.
6. Learners need to be encouraged to work collaboratively to construct knowledge.
7. Learners need to be offered access and motivation in order to make them feel at ease to subscribe to the e-tool, start participating and feel they are part of a community of learners.
8. Learners need to be offered a space for socialising and sharing information in order to make them feel confident and part of the blog – authors sharing with a real audience.
9. Learners need to use E-tasks that encourage higher levels of critical thinking (Churches, 2007) in order to develop and construct knowledge through collaborative tasks.

These pedagogical principles informed the procedures/stages followed to create EFL e-resources – from analyzing what learners needed in terms of material provision to piloting the e-resources with a group of learners to evaluate how communication and interaction is provided through e-tasks.

Procedures/Stages followed in this project to design EFL e-resources in order to promote communication and interaction

1. Applying a needs survey - a survey to explore learners' needs in terms of

materials provision, e-tools and the nature of e-tasks, was administered to students.

2. Analyzing the survey – results were considered in order to determine e-resources design, focusing on authentic listening and reading e-resources and providing learners with opportunities for communicating and interacting through collaborative tasks.
3. Designing e-resources – analyzing the textbook's (Headway Intermediate) content and making decisions on the web 2.0 tool in order to meet learners' needs for communication and interaction. Activities and topics were adapted following Gabrielatos' principles for materials adaptation.
4. Selecting the Web 2.0 tool – a blog was created to upload the material, and to create e-tasks that were connected to the textbook content and the English – Level II programme and that allowed learners to share and interact with their teacher and e-peers.
5. Concentrating topics into four categories: emotions, actions, stories and facts, so as to generate topic-based e-tasks.
6. Providing learners with opportunities to get easy access to the blog motivating them to start participating and socializing from the very initial stages.
7. Offering learners enough e-input through authentic e-resources (videos, podcast, slidecast, among others) in order to get learners to share information and resources. There are also other social e-tools

such as twitter and facebook available in the blog.

8. Creating spaces for discussion through e-tasks that promote knowledge construction.
9. Piloting e-resources with the learners and evaluating their feedback to redesign or introduce new tasks.

Description of the e-tasks: what do they offer?

E-tasks were topic and text-based, authentic and encouraged learners to make connections to real life (Nunan, 1989). The goal of e-tasks was communicative based offering enough learning input through a

variety of e-resources (Nunan, 1989 & Willis, 1996). E-tasks were designed following the pre-task (task preparation), task realization and post-task stages (Willis, 1996) in order to encourage learners to create meaningful production and put into play more than one language skill (Ellis, 2003). E-tasks stimulate learners' cognitive processes by promoting operations such as selection, classification, evaluation, problem solving, and e-discussions, but most importantly, through collaborative work (Salmon, 2002; Churches, 2007). The following table is an example of how these e-tasks are presented in the blog – the Web 2.0 tool selected to allocate e-resources for EFL learners in this particular case:

Table 1. E-tasks design

E-task
Purpose: to explain learners the main purpose of the e-task
Instructions: to give learners clear instructions about the e-tasks (access stage)
Pre-task: to prepare learners for the topic (motivation – online socialization stages - activation and consolidation of previous knowledge through hypermedia- audio, video, text - resources)
Task: to understand authentic e-resources – (information exchange and knowledge construction - podcasts, images, videos, reading)
Post-task: to create meaningful texts and interact with other e-peers (knowledge construction and development - e-discussions, communicating and interacting)
Integration: to involve learners in problem solution tasks related to their own socio-cultural community (knowledge integration - collaborative e-work)
Additional Resources – to provide learners with more e-resources related to the topic (videos, podcasts, and others)
Vocabulary: to offer learners with opportunities of enriching their vocabulary related to the topic
Grammar: to provide learners with grammar explanations

Technical challenges for designing EFL e-resources that promote communication and interaction

Designing e-resources for EFL learners was a challenging task – making decisions and trying to integrate not only theoretical principles that also worked in practice was always a controversial issue. However, technical hitches hindered the process of design – creating a dilemma between what worked technically and what I needed pedagogically. I faced three main technical challenges, two of them were closely connected: the external ones. The first one, the way in which institutional servers were constantly collapsing due to regional power failures and, the second one, the institutional network security – that made uploading certain e-resources or documents an ordeal since I was not allowed to do them without going through an administrative process to ask for authorization. The other technical challenge was related to the selected Web 2.0 tool restrictions, at least the version I was using, where creating a network of learners was not allowed. One of them was that learners' interaction was determined mainly by the nature of the tasks, but nevertheless, I managed to install a plug-in that allowed discussions, although just with one topic at a time – so the blog needs to be updated regularly depending on learners' contributions to discussions.

Recommendations for e-resources developers

Based on this experience, I would recommend **e-resources developers** to:

- a) explore learners' needs and then make sound pedagogical decisions;
- b) evaluate the Web 2.0 tool you are

going to use, to look at the potential it offers for your educational context – more than one web 2.0 tool will always be needed, depending on what you want to accomplish, for example, for synchronous communication you need either to install a plug-in that allows you to do so or use instant messaging;

- c) pilot the Web 2.0 tool for, at least, one semester, and get learners' view on the nature of the tasks and opportunities for communication and interaction;
- d) design long-term and team projects that allow other teachers and learners to use the e-resources;
- e) make e-resources dynamic in order to be able to adapt and reuse them.

To sum up, this process of designing e-resources for EFL learners provided me an insight –most importantly, into the understanding of the theoretical principles and of the procedures – never fixed to e-resources development, we need to bear in mind, and finally, into the technical challenges we have to face when devising these specific e-tasks. Technology, particularly Web 2.0 tools, offers teachers and learners opportunities for interaction, communication and knowledge construction in collaborative spaces. However, there are sometimes external factors that hinder the process of integrating Web 2.0 tools into the language classroom. The evaluation of physical, digital, human and social resources, as indicated by Warschauer (2002), is involved in this process of integration: physical resources (access to computers and telecommunications: computer labs, cyber

and/or home); digital resources (relevant content: video, podcasts, tasks, discussions); human resources (Literacy practices required for computer access and online communication); and, social resources (Institutional and community support).

Developing e-resources is a learning process and needs to be informed by pedagogy and supported by technology. Teachers, then, need to articulate CALL knowledge and skill with pedagogy – understanding how computers work and being able to use this expertise in their teaching practice, making decisions on materials, content, tasks and assess results (Hubbard & Levy, 2006).

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COMING EVENTS IN 2011:

January, 27-28

E-Learning symposium 2011

Contact: llas@soton.ac.uk

<http://www.llas.ac.uk/events/6196>

April, 15-19

45th IATEFL Annual Conference and Exhibition

Brighton Centre, Brighton, UK

Contact: Alison Wallis
(awallis@iatefl.org)

<http://www.iatefl.org/events/iatefl-annual-conference-and-exhibition>

March, 17-19

Examining the “E” in TESOL

Electronic Village Special Events:

EV Fairs, Hardware & Mobile Technology Fair, Mini-Workshops, Developers' Showcase, Mobile Apps for Education

Contact: Aiden Yeh
(aidenyeh@yahoo.com)

<http://www.call-is.org/info/>

August, 31

EUROCALL 2011 Conference, University of Nottingham

Contact: Margaret Gammell
(Margaret.Gammell@ul.ie)

<http://www.eurocall-languages.org/confs/index.html>