

The use of glogs in the English language classroom



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Resumen

El presente estudio se ocupa de los glogs utilizados como una herramienta de instrucción para enseñar inglés a estudiantes de *Inglés como Lengua Extranjera* (EFL) en el nivel C1. Las características de los posters en línea y narrativa digital se examinan en primer lugar, seguidos por los tipos de historias digitales. La última parte del documento se centra en la descripción de un estudio piloto basado en un glog y desarrollado en una clase de *Inglés III*. Los resultados son positivos en cuanto al aprendizaje colaborativo entre estudiantes, la gramática, el vocabulario y la pronunciación. Además, los estudiantes aumentaron su motivación para aprender inglés y mejoraron los temas de sus glogs que se basaban en un libro de texto.

Palabras clave: glog, historia digital, narrativa, imágenes, texto

Resum

El present estudi s'ocupa dels glogs utilitzats com una ferramenta d'instrucció per a ensenyar anglés a estudiants d'Anglés com a Llengua Estrangera (EFL) en el nivell C1. Les característiques dels posters en línia i narrativa digital s'examinen en primer lloc, seguits pels tipus d'històries digitals. L'última part del document se centra en la descripció d'un estudi pilot basat en un glog i desenvolupat en una classe d'Anglés III. Els resultats són positius quant a l'aprenentatge col·laboratiu entre estudiants, la gramàtica, el vocabulari i la pronunciació. A més, els estudiants van augmentar la seua motivació per a aprendre anglés i milloraren els temes dels seus glogs que estaven basats en un llibre de text.

Paraules clau: glog, història digital, narrativa, imatges, text

Abstract

The present study deals with glogs used as an instructional tool to teach *English to English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) students at the C1 level. The characteristics of online posters and digital storytelling are first examined, followed by the types of digital stories. The final part of the paper focuses on the description of a glog-based pilot study undertaken in an *English III* classroom. The results indicate that the students presented positive findings for collaborative learning, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Also, the students boosted their motivation to learn English and made gains in their textbook-based topics for their glogs.

Key words: glog, digital story, storytelling, images, text

1. Introduction

Web 2.0 or second generation World Wide Web has brought about changes in the use of Web sites. Unlike Web 1.0, which was mainly content-based, Web 2.0 allows for more interactive collaboration from Internet users, who can now generate, link, evaluate, transform and share online content through blogs, wikis, and social networking sites. In the field of teaching and learning Web 2.0 tools offer enormous potential for teachers and students, as they can make an impact on students' learning by transforming and enriching content. The key to such transformation is engagement (Ormiston 2011: 3), which goes alongside teachers' work to stimulate their students, together with technology used as a tool to "facilitate learning in new, active, engaging and collaborative ways" (2011: 39).

With the advent of technology there have been many attempts to use technological tools in ways that help students to reflect on and interact with content. Lack of student engagement has been largely acknowledged in today's classrooms. Much of this problem is due to the use of little engaging content. As Ormiston states:

Many educators are content to just dust off the same activities they have always employed and do only what it takes to get by. Some staff members attend workshops on new initiatives but never implement them. There is little urgency for engaging students, little urgency for change (2011: 14).

A concomitant problem is the lack of motivation on the part of students. One solution to such lack of student engagement is incorporating some technological tools such as web pages and glogs into the classroom, because students like being producers as much as consumers of content (McHaney 2011, Mills 2007).

Online posters or glogs are one of such Web 2.0 tools that can contribute to enhancing student motivation by making use of storytelling and technological tools. Glogs are collaborative learning platforms that can be used by students of all ages and learning styles to create projects and make presentations. The drag-and-drop interface containing text, images, audios, videos, drawings, links and data attachments is a very attractive and user-friendly tool for language learners. Such materials can be downloaded from the Internet or the hard drive of a computer, linked to other web pages or recorded from a videocamara. Teachers have traditionally used static posters to display student work; however, these offered limited potential and often ended up in the trashcan or reused for other posters once they had been graded. However, today's online posters hold much more potential, as they incorporate multimedia features which make them suitable for presentations -, foster student creativity and build visual literacy skills and critical thinking skills (Edtechteacher 2010). Also, by using online posters teachers try to integrate new technologies and learning English, since there is a growing belief that students' in-class and out-of-class experiences with literacy differ substantially (Gee 2004, Tarasiuk 2010). In the former, they are engaged with traditional forms of text, while in the latter with technologies. However, it does not have to be this way. As Tarasiuk (2010) puts it:

It is conceivable for schools to take advantage of the ICT literacies that adolescents are involved with. Instead of limiting their focus on teaching students to read using textbooks and write using paper and word-processing programs, schools should expand their notions of literacy instruction and treat it as reading and writing for the purposes of communicating in many traditional and contemporary modes using multiple tools and resources (Tarasiuk 2010: 544).

In the present study we attempt to describe how glogs can be used to stimulate our students to learn English in an English III classroom. Specifically, we wanted to investigate the following research questions:

- 1. How did the students use the glogster platform?
- 2. What were the student perceptions of glogs?

3. The lecturer had two main goals when implementing glogs: to increase the students' motivation to learn English and to improve their knowledge of the unit selected. What was the degree of achievement of such goals?

2. Combining storytelling and Web 2.0 services

The use of Web 2.0 technologies to tell stories can be seen as an attempt to combine the old and the new. Stories are one of the oldest forms for transferring and preserving knowledge, while Web 2.0 technologies are part of everyday life in the modern world. Storytelling is defined as an educational linguistic activity between individuals who share their personal understanding with each other, and therefore, create negotiated transactions (Egan 1999: 63). The use of storytelling for learning relies on the idea that people are inherently narrative beings, who think of the world around them "in relation to a narrative (or several narratives on different levels), which [they] are a part of" (Strahovnik and Mecava 2009: 2). Therefore, stories are regarded as one of the most important ways that humans can use for learning and communicating with others. Indeed, as Sunwolf (1999: 47) claims, stories have been used by many cultures to convey knowledge, to question the world, to promote debates and to show others how to live through fables and tales. Web 2.0 technologies started to be combined with stories when the technology to make storytelling possible was developed. From this point on, the term *digital storytelling* gained importance.

A classic digital story, as described by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS)¹, is a personal narrative presented as a short movie that combines a series of images, first person audio narration and sometimes a music soundtrack. The main difference between digital and traditional storytelling is the former's potential for interactivity and, therefore, digital stories are usually non-linear and there is an active relationship between the audience and the narrative, because it is possible to make choices as the story unfolds (Handler Miller 2008).

Robin (2007) categorized digital stories into three major groups: 1) personal narratives - stories that describe important events in one's life; 2) historical documentaries stories that narrate historical events; and 3) stories that inform or instruct - those designed to tell or teach the viewer. In the Digital Storytelling Cookbook Lambert (2007: 5-8) further described several types of personal stories that can

¹ http://www.storycenter.org/

Character Stories	Relation with someone we love.	
Memorial Stories	Remembering people who have passed away.	
Adventure Stories	Travel experiences.	
Accomplishment Stories	Achieving a goal.	
The story about a place in my life	Stories that have a personal meaning	
The story about what I do	Stories about a profession, interest or experience mean- ingful to us.	
Recovery stories	Overcoming a great chal- lenge in life.	
Love stories	Stories of romance, partner- ship, familial or fraternal love.	
Discovery stories	Process of learning.	

Table 1. Kinds of personal stories (Digital Storytelling Cookbook).

be developed into multimedia pieces and hosted on sites like YouTube (see Table 1).

According to Lambert (2007: 9), digital stories should also include seven basic elements: 1) point of view, 2) a dramatic question (a question answered at the end of the story), 3) emotional content (serious issues that are told in a personal way), 4) the gift of your voice (a way to make the story more personal so that the audience understands its content), 5) the power of the soundtrack, 6) economy (enough content so that the story is understood without overloading the audience with excessive information), and 7) pacing (the pace at which the story progresses).

Recent research undertaken with university studentcreated Web 2.0 digital stories have offered positive results: (1) they help to develop enhanced communication skills (Gregori-Signes 2008, Robin 2007), (2) to present ideas to an audience coherently and meaningfully, (3) to share the students' work with their peers, (4) to foster collaboration, (5) to enhance the students' feelings of ownership and accomplishment (Robin 2007) and (6) to check for comprehension (Ormiston 2011). Following the same line of argument, for Gregori-Signes (2008) digital stories are also appropriate tools to introduce and emphasize new concepts and to develop problem-solving and interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, information collection, synthesis and self-evaluation.

3. A pilot project for the use of glogs in the English III classroom (C1 level)

Glogs were incorporated into the syllabus of English III (C1 level) during the 2011-2012 academic year in an attempt to boost students' motivation to learn English. This decision was stimulated by:

1) The observation that our young learners are growing up with technology; it is the language they speak. Therefore, using technology in the classroom was a way of bringing their outside world into the classroom and exploiting it for their own benefit. We were however well

aware that some research (Bauerlein 2008) has also found that technology stupefies digital natives by offering them easy short-cuts that prevent them from practicing their intellectual skills and, thus, they are not better at incorporating technological tools into learning than other non-digital natives.

2) Technology offers many opportunities for interaction and communication, which could be of interest for students to improve their communication skills.

3) The Internet offers a wealth of materials – authentic and ready-made materials for the second language learner - that could benefit our students.

Before becoming engaged with this project, the students were given a short online questionnaire containing the following questions:

1. Have you ever created a digital story? And a glog?

2. Do you have experience on the use of technologies (e.g. computers, mobile phones, tablets, software programs, online platforms and the like)?

3. How confident do you feel in the use of such technologies?

A total of 20 students filled in the questionnaire, the results of which reveal that 18 of the students (90%) had created digital stories in previous years; in spite of this, we felt that some explanation was still required as a review, especially as regards computer programs, such as Windows Moviemaker. Such decision was made after the students made comments in the questionnaire, such as "Not all students feel confident about the use of such programs, because the majority do not know how to use them. Because we have worked collaboratively, we have been able to complete the tasks" (S1²). The questionnaire further indicated that none of them had used glogster before and, therefore, some explanation was also needed. Indeed, during one classroom session, they were shown how to use the platform and learnt how to create a wall, add text, images and drawings and upload videos, photos and data attachments. Glogster (http://www.glogster.com/) was used in order to help them to create their videos. Finally, since all students reported having extensive experience in the use of technologies and feeling confident in using them, we did not think it necessary to teach how to use glogs exhaustively.

The participants in this study were told to create an informative story (i.e. a story to inform or instruct the viewer) or a personal narrative (i.e. a story of personal experience) of a type specified by Lambert (2007); that is, character, memorial, adventure, places in my life, accomplishment, actions, recovery, love or discovery stories. Their stories had to be related to one of the units of their English III textbook (i.e. challenges, community, tales, progress, fortunes, power, nature, issues, vision, and feelings) and had to include the basic vocabulary and grammar structures of the unit selected as well as field-related vocabulary. The students' glogs could also include images, videos downloaded from the Internet and graphics from the glogster platform. Once the stories were completed the students had to make a presentation to their peers and lecturer at the end of the year (i.e. about 8 months later), explain why they had chosen their-

² S1 stands for Student 1, S2 for Student 2 and so on.

topic and how they had developed the content of their glogs. The rest of the students and the lecturer had to evaluate the different glogs as follows:

Student: Glog:
 Rate from 0 to 10 the following aspects of your peers' glogs: 1. Content 2. Topic originality 3. Use of English 4. Overall presentation 5. Technical aspects (i.e. sound and image quality)
Your overall grade:

The students received an overall grade taking into account their peers' and the lecturer's own grades. The glogs were also used to assess the students' level of oral English in personal interviews with the instructor. The sheet used to evaluate the students stated the following:

Student: Glog:	 -
1. Pronunciation 2. Vocabulary 3. Grammar 4. Fluency	
Comments/mistakes:	

The narratives were created according to the characteristics of digital stories as described by the Center of Digital Storutelling. Next, the students were provided with a detailed description of the genres of informative and personal narratives (i.e. this included formal instruction and articles), which they had to use when elaborating their digital stories. Finally, they were told to read the section "Kinds of personal stories" in the Digital Storytelling Cookbook by Lambert (2007), which would help them to decide which story to write. Some story types included questions that would be of help in the process of developing their story and storyboard. For elaborating a memorial story Lambert (2007) specified these questions: "What is, or had been, your relationship to this person?, How would you describe him/her (physical appearance, character, etc.)?, Is there an event/incident that best captures his/her character?, What about him/her do/did you most enjoy?, What about him/her drove you crazy?, What lesson did s/he give you that you feel is most important?, If you had something to say to him/her but s/he never had a chance to hear you say it, what would it be?".

The second part of the students' instruction included information about the software to be used: Windows Moviemaker and Audacity mainly, even if other programs were also allowed if the students were familiar with them. The third part of the instruction dealt with building the storyboard. For that purpose, we analyzed an example and discussed how it had to be developed. The students could also ask any questions that they deemed necessary while in the

process of creating their story. The fourth part of the instruction focused on the use of still images, videos and texts that supported the overall meaning of the glogs. For that, we examined some glogs on the glogster platform and talked about how to combine them. The students were also encouraged to make searches of images, videos and texts on the Internet and to use those that best fitted their needs. As it happened in Gregori-Signes (2008) the students were given a month to complete the first draft of their stories, to collect and select images, to find a soundtrack and to turn everything in for revision and comments. The majority of the students worked in groups, although a few worked individually, which made a total of 15 glogs. The titles chosen were varied: Challenges, Paleofuture, Famous Hoaxes, The power of music, Nature, Feelings, Fortune, Animals in danger, Power, Charles Darwin, Cerebral palsy, Quatters: a way of life or a necessity?, Radical swap, Bfss News and Proaress in Education.

Research question 1: How did the students use the glogster platform?

The students created personal and informative stories that combined digital storytelling with still images and texts and placed them on a wall that had a pattern appropriate to the topic presented. The pattern could be chosen from the ones offered by glogster or downloaded from the Internet. The results were often attractive at first sight: colorful walls included texts, stickers, icons, links to audios and videos, all of which supported the topic of the story that the students wanted to tell and, thus, the glogs conveyed a mood (see Figure 1 below). Further examination consisting in finding out how much interactivity the glogs contained indicated that, in general terms, all glogs contained videos; however, only two were linked to Internet sites and one made use of audio recordings and, therefore, the students in this study gave prevalence to the moving image. Indeed, all glogs contained at least one homemade video and one or more videos downloaded from the Internet: 33.3% of the glogs included 2 extra videos; 26.6%, 3 videos; 20%, 1 video; 13.4%, 0 videos; and 6.7%, 9 videos. Still images and texts abounded in all glogs, with none using fewer than two images or texts.



Figure 1. Challenges.

³ During the oral exam the students were asked to give their opinion about using glogs for learning English and the advantages and disadvantages they had found when using such technological tool. The oral exams were recorded, transcribed verbatim and were later analyzed for opinions about glogs.

For the homemade videos, the students wrote a story, recorded it and then linked the storyboard and the voiceover. Others, however, recorded themselves telling a story. In any case, the students made an effort to use the vocabulary and grammar structures of the unit selected as well as other field-related vocabulary. For some students, pronunciation was a bigger problem, which required them to check the dictionary, ask a friend and pronounce difficult words several times until achieving a better result.

Research question 2: What were the students' perceptions of glogs?

In order to answer this question, we asked our students what opinion they had of glogs³, whether or not they had enjoyed the experience and whether or not glogs had helped them in learning English. Their opinions and insights helped the lecturer to have an overall idea of the success of this technological tool in the English III classroom. These could be arranged into the following themes:

a. Technical aspects

Some students commented on the scarce difficulty that the glogster platform posed and, therefore, once they had their videos recorded, putting videos, images and text together had been a relatively straightforward activity. In contrast, learning to use the software for the videos had been a different matter, which had required them more effort, especially for the less technologically skilled.

b. Collaborative learning

The glog activity was carried out in collaboration with a peer. This decision stemmed from the idea that students could benefit from working collaboratively on language use (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and language in context (politeness and impoliteness, conversational structure, discourse organization, choice of address forms, among others). Indeed, the majority of the students regarded as positive working with a peer, as "he pointed out problems and solutions that I had not thought of" (S2) and "we worked on pronunciation because I have problems with that" (S3).

c. Improving vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation

Glogs contributed to the use of a wider vocabulary and grammar assortment on the part of students since, in order to complete the activity, they had to look for field-related vocabulary and take care of grammar and pragmatic aspects. As an example, see the content of the glog *Nature* as compared to the content of the corresponding textbook unit:

Textbook4

Vocabulary: mammal, fur trade, carnivore, tame, natural habitat, stalk, animal rights, breed (n, v), hibernate, sanctuary, nature reserve, endangered, reptile, animal testing, exotic, rare, cage, lay eggs, nest, predator, overhunting/fishing, spectacular, permanent, tourist, below sea, active, ghost, inhospitable.

Grammar: relative clauses, verb followed by infinitive/ing, as ... as and describing quantity (as much as, well under, not very much, a tiny minority, virtually all, precisely, as many as, a minimum). *Glog* Vocabulary: widespread, warm something up, bring something up, drown, tough, lifting, harmful, cotton grass, birth rates, vulnerable, roam, soar, blink, at heavy extinction risk, habitat displacement, global warming, in a blink of an eye, wildlife, in danger of extinction, humidity regime, fungus, sedge, tufts.

Grammar: would + infinitive to refer to routines in the past, use of conjunctions, conditional sentences, could to express possibility.

Many of the problems encountered were solved once the students got back the first draft of their stories and wrote a second draft, while others were eliminated as a result of peer work. Errors were still noticeable in the glogs and videos prepared, which is especially the case of pronunciation problems; however, grammar and vocabulary had been substantially improved. See the extract below of a student's first draft, the comments received and the revised version of that extract:

First Draft

"The climate crisis, in particular, <u>is getting a lot worse</u>⁵ (*is becoming worse*⁶) − much more quickly than predicted. Scientists with access to data from Navy submarines traversing underneath the North polar ice cap have warned that there is now a 75 percent chance that within five years the entire ice cap <u>will completely disappear</u> (*will have completely disappeared*) during the summer months. And now we have to do something about it". (Power glog)

Comments

1. Consider adding some vocabulary dealing with power, as in the unit on Power in your textbook. E.g. power over (decisions), in positions of power, come to power.

2. Can you use any idioms? What about "face the music" instead "do something about it"?

Final Draft

"The climate crisis, in particular, is becoming worse – much more quickly than predicted. Scientists with access to data from Navy submarines traversing underneath the North polar ice cap have warned that there is now a 75 percent chance that within five years the entire ice cap will have completely disappeared during the summer months. And now we have to face the music, especially those in positions of power".

Research question 3: What was the degree of achievement of the lecturer's goals?

As pointed out, the glog activity had two main objectives: (1) to increase the students' motivation to learn English and (2) to improve the students' knowledge of the unit selected, which meant in-depth investigation of a topic. Interviews were conducted to find out the students' opinion about the activity. The scripts of the students' stories were also revised to check on content, vocabulary and grammar.

The results of the interviews indicate that the students enjoyed using glogs to learn English, as it was a "fresh alternative to traditional learning" (S4) and "the final result is very attractive" (S5). Some pointed out that it was a homemade product that they could resort to any time to find out what they had done in *English*

⁴ The glog Nature was based on the textbook unit Nature in Total English (student's book) p. 85-97.

⁵ Underlined phrases need revising.

⁶ Alternatives provided by the lecturer.



Figure 2. Charles Darwin.

Figure 3. Famous hoaxes.

III. Also, a few commented that the tool was useful and they would recommend it: "it's so easy to use and you can use it for any subject, not just English" (S6); however, they also admitted having thought at the beginning that the tool was somewhat infantile and not very appropriate for English III students, as some images and icons in glogster seemed to be intended for children.

After revising the scripts and checking the final result, we concluded that most students had researched a topic in depth, which required them to read and synthesize information, select texts, images and videos that best suited their needs. In order to do so, the students had to learn new fieldrelated vocabulary. For example, the glog on Darwin (see Figure 2) dealt with the theory of species and its impact on society. In the glog, the texts and the videos provided a general idea of Darwin's theory and dealt with concepts that were not part of the textbook unit, such as "evolution of species", "views of humankind", "variability of species" and "Mendel's studies". Also, the glog called "Famous hoaxes" (see Figure 3) dealt with false old stories, where the students used vocabulary belonging to the field of fairytales and aliens. Further insight revealed that, once they were familiar with the video software, they spent more time on vocabulary/language research in order to "to write a good script for the video" (S7) than on learning how to use glogster, because "it is so easy to use" (S5).

As expected, students' difficulties with the glog activity had to do with pronunciation in the homemade videos and lack of technical knowledge about the video software. Indeed, many students needed further instruction to improve their pronunciation skills and additional help with the software to create their videos. When the students were asked about the difficulties encountered, some mentioned "problems with the videocamera" (S4), being "unable to import files into Windows Moviemaker" (S5), "repeat[ing] the video-recording many times to make sure everybody understands" (S8) and spending a lot of time looking for photographs and videos. Therefore, in the future more attention should be given to pronunciation through activities that require weaker students to listen to spoken English as often as possible and to pay attention to difficult sound patterns, intonation and stress. The problems with the video software could be solved by giving further instruction on the use of Windows Moviemaker and Audacity. Finally, although some students had their audience in mind when making their video-recordings (see S8's comment above), others needed

to be reminded, so that their final products matched the needs of their audience.

4. Conclusions and pedagogical implications The present article has dealt with glogs used as an instructional tool to teach English to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the C1 level. The characteristics of online posters and digital storytelling were examined, followed by the types of digital stories and the use of storytelling as a tool enhancing learning in the English classroom. The final part of the paper focused on the description of a glog-based pilot project undertaken in an English III classroom.

The research carried out with glogs showed that our students spent little time in learning about the technological tool; instead, they invested more time in doing vocabulary/language research for their digital story, which is the ulti-

mate goal of the activity. The participants in this study used the vocabulary of the unit selected in the textbook, but did further research to learn vocabulary within a given lexical field as well as context-specific uses. For the digital stories, they also had to make a selective exploitation of texts, images and videos that were suitable for their own purposes and had to analyze and synthesize information to design a script that included a monolog or a dialog between two students. That was also a good opportunity to practice their listening and speaking skills and see aspects for improvement. Indeed, pronunciation is an issue to be taken over in future uses of digital posters, as some students lacked the skills needed for the C1 level. Other problems related to the use of the video software indicate that more instruction should be given before the students create new glogs.

As this study shows, the use of glogs in the EFL class also has some pedagogical benefits that can be of help to students and teachers interested in using these materials for instructional purposes: 1) Glogs encourage collaborative learning. 2) They help learners to evaluate their progress in learning English, because they have a final product they can resort to any time. 3) The different stages in the process of creating a glog provide practice in the four linguistic skills; i.e. speaking, listening, reading, and writing. 4) They provide an audience that influences the content and structure of learners' messages so as to communicate them effectively. The students in this styde presented their glogs orally to their classmates in a public presentation and to their lecturer in a personal interview, which no doubt influenced them into writing a coherent script and paying attention to pronunciation matters so as to make themselves understood. 5) Learners enjoy using them and feel more motivated to learn English, as they are using a new alternative form for learning. 6) Learners can use them to express their own creativity, which is possible for the multiple options - linking, uploading and combining images, icons and texts - that glogster offers. These pedagogical benefits indicate that Web 2.0 technology through storytelling has a place in today's classrooms; however, it is the teacher's duty to go beyond the bells and whistles of available technology and find ways to help students engage in successful learning while telling stories.

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