

WEB 2.0 TOOLS FOR THE L2 CLASS

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Abstract

Based on the concept of 'produsage' (Bruns, 2008), the present study suggests ways to use and produce contents using web 2.0 tools for the teaching-learning of English as an additional language (L2). Finardi, Prebianca and Momm (2013) suggest that in the globalized world we live in, some knowledge of English and digital literacy are important skills to access information online. Finardi and Porcino (2014) reviewed the role of technology in L2 learning, concluding that internet has changed the way we use, learn and teach languages. Based on these assumptions, the present study aims at offering a review of internet tools to support, integrate and/or complement L2 classes teaching/learning/using. The tools reviewed and proposed may lead to creative productions in L2, as well as offer opportunities to use the language in contextualized manners. Another objective of the proposal is to enable L2 teachers/learners/users to develop their digital literacy defined as the ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share, and create content using information technologies and the internet (Casey & Bruce, 2010). Overall, five tools were reviewed – each one for a different teaching/learning/using purpose. Results of the analysis of tools reviewed in this study seek to contribute to the informed use of technology in L2 teaching/learning/using.

Keywords: Web 2.0 tools, L2 teaching-learning, digital literacy, produsage.

1. Introduction

A reflection on the impact of current changes in education in general, and in English language teaching (ELT) in particular is necessary to keep pace with technological and social progress. We can say that until recently the book and other types of printed materials and lectures prevailed unchallenged (and still prevail in many Brazilian contexts) as teaching materials and methodologies (Finardi; Porcino, 2014). Yet, postmodernity shows that the innovation that the school environment needs goes beyond the choice of materials and methodologies. Finardi, Prebianca and Momm (2013) alert us to the fact that in the "information age" (Levy, 1999) much of the information is "digitalized" (Lankshear; Knobel, 2003, p.155), and available online and in English. In this scenario, some literacy in these two languages (English and digital literacy) is necessary to provide social inclusion and the exercise of a global citizenship.

Regarding the role of technology in L2 education, Finardi (2012), reviewed four cases of hybrid approaches to L2 teaching-learning concluding that the integration of technology in traditional classes seems to be the best choice in terms of teaching methodologies. Yet, Teixeira and Finardi (2013) and Finardi *et al.* (2014) showed that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are underused in Brazil, mainly due to teachers' beliefs and (lack of) conditions to integrate them in traditional classes.

When it comes to the use of internet in L2 education, Finardi and Porcino (2014) claim that internet has changed the way we use, learn and teach additional languages, especially after the advent of the web 2.0. One of the reasons for this paradigm change relates to the many possibilities of interaction (action between subjects mediated by technology) and interactivity (action between subject and technology) fostered by the web 2.0 for L2 teaching/learning/using.

In the web 2.0 paradigm, the relationships between those involved in the movement of learning are built in multidirectional interaction networks (student-student, student-teacher, student-teacher-world-knowledge), allowing the view of the L2 class (or learning/using experience for

that matter) as a collective and collaborative construction, capable of considerable produsage¹, especially if we take the technology and language as access tools to the produsage of knowledge and information. The changes and advantages made possible by ICTs and internet are not limited to materials and teaching methods but they can also propose a reshaping of education where all learn, teach, use, consume and produce knowledge. In order to help L2 teachers, students and users to incorporate the role of agent, mediator, facilitator, creating opportunities for L2 and digital literacy development, the present study reviews web 2.0 tools that can be used in the teaching/learning/using of English as an additional language.

2. The use/integration of technology in Brazilian classrooms

The role of technology in education has proved to be an area with many promises and questions at the same time. While the informed use of technology has been questioned together with the use of computers, tablets and smartphones in Brazilian schools, much resistance to the incorporation of technologies in education still exists, mainly because of the lack of teacher training and education for their use (Teixeira; Finardi, 2013; Finardi *et al.*, 2014).

Technology affects teaching/learning processes as well as individuals (Almeida, 2010). They bring with them a need to acquire new skills, which Lankshear and Knobel (2003) call "new literacies". Warschauer (2003) claims that there are two forms of access to technology, the limited access refers to machines and pieces of equipment whereas the ample access refers to the critical use of these pieces of technology. According to him, only the latter can lead to social capital formation understood as the individual's capacity to generate benefits for them or their communities through their social networks and relations. In this sense, the critical use of technology in education must encompass much more than the simple "use" of equipment.

In order to make an informed incorporation of technology in education, it is important to have in mind the goals and the ways in which the technologies available can be used in and with teaching methodologies. Since much of the resistance to the incorporation of technologies in L2 methodologies comes from teachers as shown in Teixeira and Finardi (2013) and Finardi *et al.* (2014), this study aims at reviewing five web 2.0 tools that can be incorporated in L2 teaching practices from the perspective of teachers thus aiding L2 teachers to make informed decisions and L2 learners/users to benefit from technology.

3. Design

As previously stated, this study aimed at reviewing five web 2.0 tools to make suggestions on how they could be incorporated in L2 teaching/learning practices. Each tool was meant for a different teaching purpose and was chosen among over one hundred possibilities shown in the Results of the 8th Annual Survey of Learning Tools², which compiled a list from 1,038 votes of learning professionals from 61 countries worldwide, published on 22 September 2014.

4. Web 2.0 tools

In the early 2000's a new generation of web tools appeared, differing from the "read only web" (web 1.0) created before them, and allowing anyone to create content online for low cost or even for free, sharing and collaborating contents online. With the "read & write web" (web 2.0) the user is not passive anymore: people can select and produce contents with fast access to different pages. Besides that, the web 2.0 acquired a new dimension for its potential for social purposes and interactions. A learning tool can be defined as any software or online tool or service used either for people's own personal or professional learning, for teaching or training. The following review aims to identify features of some p 2.0 web tools that can be incorporated in L2 teaching practices. The review describes strengths and weaknesses of the selected tools, with their challenges for the use in L2 classrooms.

¹*Produsage* is a term coined by Axel Bruns in his book "Blog, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: from production to produsage" (2007). It refers to the type of user-led creation, that is, users can also play a role of creators, and it shows how the boundaries between passive consumption and active production have faded, hence the portmanteau of the words "production" and "usage".

² More information available on the website: <http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools/>

4.1. Web tool for reading practice – DIIGO³

It is a cloud-based personal information management system. It provides tools to collect and access a variety of information that goes to a library on the Diigo server, in the cloud, so that the user can access it anywhere. That is, after Diigo browser is installed, the user can select, highlight and have keynotes of different shapes that stay on the page to access the same page, with the same annotation system, on their personal computer, tablet, iPhone. It is the highest ranked social bookmarking tool on the research of the 8th Annual Survey of Learning Tools. Though it is not a produsage tool, it collaborates with the processes of searching and reading that the creator has to do before the production itself.

This resource sharing tool allows collaborative work and one can also share his/her findings and get some feedback through highlights, sticky notes or screenshots. Groups can be created for classes, for teaching the design of group projects, for instance, and also join other groups of people that are commenting on topics of interest, or conduct searches for topics already researched and commented about on Diigo. It is a relevant organizational tool, especially because the lists of websites can be archived and organized by category or searched, rendering the search process easier. The inconvenience of this tool relies on its printing which requires screen capture and comments made on the findings are not viewed on the printed paper.

4.2. Web tool for speaking practice – VOICETHREAD⁴

VoiceThread is a web-based application that allows users to create a timeshare presentation in any form of digital media, such as a media album in which visitors can, asynchronously, comment in text, image, audio (including their own voice) or video. The output resulting from this combination of digital presentation and comments from viewers accumulated is called "VoiceThread." Once they are completed, voicethreads can be shared across web pages or blogs, and can be exported for use offline, computer hard drive, DVD, mobile phone, among others.

With the growing collaboration of technology in education, more and more teachers have sought tools to facilitate group interaction and teamwork in their classrooms. VoiceThread is a tool that fits this trend because it is easy to learn which is why it has been used by many students to have a voice and express their opinions without the pressure of having to make sentences face-to-face and online (without any prior planning) in class. A teacher can ask the students to make videos, show photographs and narrate comments, tell stories related to any topic they may find interesting to his/her pupils, for example, and according to studies such as Light and Polin (2010), for instance, students will probably find it funnier to produce a voicethread than writing in a paper, focusing more in the creative process than in the language structures.

One disadvantage of VoiceThread is the inability to allow multiple users to have access to the same account simultaneously, which requires every student to have their own login, and collaboration. Also, free accounts are more limited than paid accounts when it comes to space and restrictions of editing and viewing capabilities. Yet, the advantages, especially for speaking practice, out-weigh these disadvantages.

4.3. Web tool for listening practice – PODCAST⁵/VIDEOCAST

Podcast is a digital medium that consists of an episodic series of audio streams, that is, it is a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the Internet. The word is derived from "broadcast" and "pod" from the success of the iPod, as audio podcasts are often listened to on portable media players. If it is a "video podcast" (vodcast/videocast), it includes video clips. According to Berry (2006), it is a horizontal media form, that is, producers are consumers and consumers may become producers and engage in conversations with each other. And if the user chooses to subscribe to a podcast feed, she/he can automatically download any podcast.

With podcasting, the listener can download the file and replay it at anytime is convenient for her/him. If the teacher wants all students to hear (over and over, if necessary) what s/he has to say, podcasting is a relevant option. Students can also record themselves speaking about a topic or even reading their favorite story and then upload the podcast to the class website, where they are able to share and access and listen to it at home, for example. Then they can check pronunciation, intonation, and the pace of their speech, allowing them to verify what they need to improve in speaking. Also, the podcast creator can turn the material into a written transcript as well to make it more accessible.

In order to make a podcast, it is necessary to have a computer or smartphone, software to record the presentation and a connection to upload it to the Internet. If the person uses someone else's

³ Official website: www.diigo.com

⁴ Official website: <https://voicethread.com/>

⁵ Though it was first created by iPhone, through iTunes –it can still be found on <http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/> - there are diverse websites for podcasts, with diverse themes.

copyrighted material in his/her podcast, one has to take steps to protect it against unauthorized copying and file sharing. There are some important issues that need to be addressed, including legal concerns over ownership of the content and debate over if the podcasts are going to be public or private too, and that are not covered here for constraints of space but can be viewed in the Langbein's (2010) study.

4.4. Web tool for creative writing - PIXTON⁶

The Web 2.0 implies the acceptance of flexible choices, that is, it allows people, regardless of any talent as an artist, comedian or web design expertise, to create their own comic strip, for example. Pixton is the comic strip creation website that allows as much customization as possible without the need to build from scratch. There are options to adjust the color, shape, sleeves and size of a shirt, for instance. Instead of relying on preset poses and emotions for each character, users are able to click and drag character limbs into new postures and can customize eyes, ears, noses and hairstyles. And there is a plus: it is convenient not only to choose a background from a big variety of atmospheres, but one can also add images from Flickr or Google images.

Users are required to register online to create a comic. There are three user account types available: Pixton for Fun, Pixton for School, and Pixton for Business. Pixton for School allows for a private and secure space where teachers are able to moderate student creations and publish them in the student gallery. Students are then able to read and comment on each others' work. An interesting feature is the permission for recording voice-overs for the characters, which allows students to check their pronunciation too. Pixton can be used to apply vocabulary by summarizing a book, for example, it can be used to explain and practice the characteristics of a comic book, it can be used to demonstrate comprehension of many kinds, and develop creative and critical thinking skills.

4.5. Web tool for collaborative work - PADLET⁷

Padlet, is an online noticeboard maker. Ideal for making announcements, keeping notes and things people can do with Post-its. Previously known as Wallwisher, this tool allows people to add members to your wall, a virtual notepad, and share ideas collaboratively. A teacher just needs to create a username, build a wall and share the link to the class that will join in. Students do not need to create a username to access it, what will depend on the teacher's choice of privacy settings.

This tool is a relevant resource for group work because with Padlet students can all see on the same page the notes of every groups and no information is missed. They can make a poem wall, a character analysis if they are reading a book or studying adjectives, a community word wall to express their feelings about the class, for instance, just to mention some examples of what a "simple wall" can provide, also by integrating other tools to make videos, to record audio, to edit photographs and post on the same wall.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to suggest ways to use and produce contents using web 2.0 tools for the teaching/learning/using of English as an additional language (L2). With that aim, the present study reviewed internet tools to support, integrate and/or complement L2 classes. Overall, five tools were reviewed – each one for a different teaching/learning purpose. Results of the study suggest that the tools analyzed show potential to positively impact L2 teaching/learning practices.

Given these advantages to incorporate these tools in L2 classes, the study concludes that for that to happen more frequently in Brazil and notwithstanding, political and structural problems associated with this inclusion there, the key factor appears to be teacher motivation to use technology in their practice and so the study suggests teacher training and education programs to support the inclusion/integration of technologies in L2 classes.

The tools presented here are just a few options in the myriad of possibilities we may find available online. The Web 2.0 tools reviewed here may need teachers' management of classroom activities and materials, but they can also be used for the learners to use and produce contents online in or out of class, thus optimizing contact with and in the target language. As for teachers, although it is not necessary for them to have deep expertise in the use of technology, they do need to know how to deal with unexpected online situations, such as how to integrate one tool with another, to download, share or present the production, and they also need to be conscious of the purpose of the activity to be included on the class to turn it into a hybrid experience.

⁶ Official website: www.pixton.com

⁷ Official website: www.padlet.com

With that in mind, it is also important to remember that the networked nature of web 2.0 has been blurring the traditional boundaries between school and home, and other cultural and communicational aspects are also reshaped with web 2.0: especially on how, what, where, when and with whom people communicate. These changes bring along challenges for educators and internet users and require the constant reflection on the informed and critical use of technology in the service of education.

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