

Writing Using Blogs: A Way to Engage Colombian Adolescents in Meaningful Communication

La escritura a través de bitácoras o *blogs*: una forma de involucrar a adolescentes colombianos en comunicación significativa

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We report an action research project developed with ninth grade students of a public school in Bogotá, Colombia, and which focused on innovating English communication through writing blogs. The project took into account the implementation of a specific blog that proposes activities, suggestions, strategies and links, among other things, to increase communication in English. It also prompted the written production of students in the blogs when posting entries and communicating through them. Some aspects of the project were developed in the classroom; others in the computers room, and others were developed by the students independently or collaboratively with classmates. Findings show how students communicated through writing in blogs and the main characteristics of the interaction that took place when using them.

Key words: Developing written communication, technology, writing blogs.

Reportamos un proyecto de investigación acción que se desarrolló con estudiantes de noveno grado de un colegio público de Bogotá, Colombia. En este proyecto se buscó innovar en el medio de comunicación en inglés a través de la escritura de bitácoras o *blogs*. El proyecto tuvo en cuenta la realización de una bitácora específica en la que se plantearon actividades, sugerencias, estrategias y enlaces, entre otros, para incrementar la comunicación en inglés. También motivó la producción escrita de los estudiantes en las bitácoras, al publicar entradas y comunicarse a través de estas. Algunos aspectos del proyecto se desarrollaron en el aula de clase; otros, en el aula de sistemas, o de forma autónoma y colaborativa con otros compañeros. Los resultados muestran cómo se comunicaron los estudiantes al escribir en las bitácoras, así como las principales características de la interacción que se generó.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de comunicación escrita, escritura de bitácoras, tecnología.

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Introduction

The Internet has become an excellent tool for English teachers in Colombia. So why not take advantage of these materials in public schools? We have decided to use blogs with ninth graders in order to increase effective communication, especially improving writing skill and the relationship among the students. Our work had two main phases: the first was when the learners developed some activities in the classroom, and the second, when they worked in blogs. In addition we developed different activities in order to improve the writing skill as follows:

1. Writing topics in the classroom about students' interests such as music, the city, the neighborhood, friendship, global warming, school, family.
2. Interdisciplinary work in connection with the computer teacher in order to help the students create their own blogs.
3. Reading tales such as "*The Giving Tree*," and then writing in the blog reflections and comments about the text message.
4. Listening to the students' favorite songs and encouraging them to post their comments or opinions in their blogs.
5. Watching films and publishing some comments in the blog.

With these activities we intended to develop the communicative aspect, improving writing, not only the other skills and language aspects (reading, speaking, listening, grammar, speech). We believed if the students were motivated enough we could be successful developing the writing skills. Bearing this in mind, we concentrated on the following for our research question: How do 9th graders communicate through writing in blogs?

In the following paragraphs we present the theoretical framework that guided our study, the methodology, the pedagogical procedure we

followed to explore the selected research issue, the results, the conclusions and some pedagogical implications.

Theoretical Framework

Over the last years, English teaching has focused on communication; it is helped by technological advances, especially computers. So, in our project we improved the writing skill because we consider the English language can be learned by improving this skill and taking advantage of a lot of technological resources such as computers, blogs and web pages. The central tool we used was the blog where the students could express in a written way their feelings, opinions and be in touch with their classmates and teachers.

In any research project, the literature review constitutes the essential core as a foundation for the chosen work. In this project, the concepts that illuminated our work are writing, information and communication technologies (ICTs) and writing in blogs.

Writing

We highlight the approach to writing as a process carried out by the students as active subjects, as permanent learners. The students are not only passive recipients of knowledge, but creators of their own mechanisms for working, sometimes self-directed and sometimes working collaboratively.

In this regard, approaches proposed by Ferreiro and Teberoski (1979) are taken into consideration. These authors argue that writing could be interpreted and understood from an early age (the first years when a child enters the school system and in some cases, earlier). This implies taking into account the child and her/his prospects as a future learner. Thus, success in learning cannot be attributed to the method but to the learner (p. 30),

and the acquisition of knowledge is a result of the subject's own activity (p. 32).

Tolchinsky (1993) also stressed that writing is a process that involves practices of thought, design and construction of new knowledge that extends beyond basic copying often employed in the traditional educational system. She says writing and copying are different activities, and copying requires reproducing (a process focused on a passive subject), and writing (as in not copying), requires thinking, understanding, interpreting. Thus, every reader in any language in question, adds, removes or modifies the written word.

On the other hand, Cross (2007, p. 268) says that "writing is more difficult to justify than the other skills. However, the school is a micro world of its own, in which writing holds a most important role". We are in agreement with him because the school is the institution that encourages writing constantly, through time. However, it is necessary to take into account that writing is the most difficult skill for learners to develop; for that reason, it is necessary to implement different methods because there are many different learning styles in each group. This helped us consolidate an action research perspective when handling writing in the English class. This practice is, in turn, in tune with Tolchinsky (1993), who sees writing in the classroom as a process and as a research effort.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): Blogs

English language is very important in this global era, where we can find a lot of information around/about the world; many professional papers are published in English. On the Internet, on the radio, in newspapers, English has become the official language of many international organizations, including the United Nations. It is also the official language of air transport and shipping; the leading

language of science, technology, computers, commerce, and a major medium of education. We can learn science and culture through the English language.

Ferreiro (2001) says that nowadays the Internet, e-mails, web pages and the hypertext, among others, are producing deep and accelerated changes in the manner we communicate and receive information. It fascinates any person worried or interested in language or its changes. The fascination with the changes is higher in students, who use the new technologies to modify traditional forms to communicate. It means that technology is a great tool to use with students because it can be motivational, fun (when something is fun we learn more), and allow them to produce better published works. On the other hand, technology is a great challenge for teachers because few of us use it due to the fact that we do not have enough knowledge about it. But, it is also a great opportunity to have better relationships between teachers and students, get help from them, raise their self-esteem increasing the leadership capacities and improving communication in a written way in order to prepare them for future life.

Our research matter: the *blog* offers many possibilities for use in the educational process. The word "blog" came from "web-log", a term put in use by Jorn Barger in 1997 (Eduteka, 2008). He associates the term with the online personal diary and the author's constant updates. Then, a blog is a website that facilitates the immediate publication of entries ("posts") and permits the readers to give feedback to the author in the form of comments. The posts are kept organized chronologically.

According to Ramírez (in Suárez, 2009), the topics related to partner relationships, sex and technology are the most popular in the blogs, which do not have space limitations or censorship. However, other authors like Orihuela (in Suárez, 2009) say the

blog is a personal medium that impacts a community, but one not intended as journalism.

We find several blogs in the informative, academic and educative environment, and the school can put into practice the traditional process of writing in an interesting and enjoyable way for the students. Blogs offer many possibilities for use in educational processes. For example, they encourage students to write, exchange ideas, practice teamwork, design, and see instantly what they produce. The creation of blogs by students offers synthesis processes because writing on the Internet must be timely and accurate. The teachers are in contact with their students in other manners and the interactions are not only inside the classroom. They can publish materials immediately and allow access to the information or other sources to do classroom projects and activities, taking advantage of the time. The multimedia elements such as videos, sound, pictures, images, and animation, among others, that students use in blogs enrich the contents (Eduteka, 2008).

Based on Suárez (2009), the following aspects are necessary to construct a good blog: To shape a good idea, give a specific name to the blog and set how often it will be updated. To create a blog we can use different web blog pages like: *www.blogger.com* or *http://es.wordpress.com*, *www.ezblogworld.com*, *www.bahraichblogs.com*, *www.getablog.net/portal3.php*.

It is essential that the blog be promoted among the interested communities to continue to get more readers. Likewise, it is important that the topics be diverse to answer the comments and messages of the visitors.

Dudeny and Hockly (2007) state that the following steps should be taken into account in order to set up a blog with students:

- Setting up a sample blog: before beginning working in blogs with the students, we have to

create our own blog in order to get familiarized with the content language and other aspects the technique has to contain.

- Setting up students' blogs: In this step, the students will begin to create their blogs in the computer room and there they will look at the sample blog. According to the number of computers, they can work individually, in pairs or in small groups.
- Posting to and visiting blogs: Encourage the students to share their blogs, visit, write and post comments in other blogs.
- Follow-up: It is good idea that students and teachers continue posting information in their blogs. It is important to know that the blog has a limited lifespan, so in approximately the next three months they can be eliminated. Another important thing is that it is necessary to have a measure of security, especially if we are working with younger learners.

A blog is formed by different elements such as the following:

- Input list of several texts as articles, images and videos.
- Comments written by visitors; they can write their opinions, calendar and file of the published text that allows the user to access items that have been published during a given time.
- Entries and articles are classified by categories, allowing a more effective organization and easy access to information.
- Links with other blogs.
- Search. This facilitates the bloggers' finding the material that has been published in the blog.
- The hyperlinks that are part of the blog.

Blogs are meaningful tools in teaching learning processes because they permit saving

time and development of collaborative work. It is a dynamic way to do easy and difficult activities, plus, it allows teachers and students to be in touch most of the time.

The use of blogs in education allows the teachers and students to accomplish different roles. The teacher should be an animator, a director, a counselor, a facilitator, a motivator and an evaluator and the students should adopt a more active role because they are the ones who acquire the knowledge and transform it. Both become co-authors and co-workers. These words, taken from Carballo-Calero (2008), show us that nowadays teachers have to work harder than before.

The author introduces a new concept: “blogosphere”. It means a group of blogs interacting in an educational experience in which learning is shared. In this experience, the participants carry out learning activities such as readings, analyses and productions of texts, interchange of information, expression of feelings, ideas, opinions, real-life contexts, amongst others. These words allow us to have a clearer idea about the purpose of the project we are going to work on.

According to Carballo-Calero (2008), in classrooms there is an important transformation because students and teachers can connect to the Internet and access the blog at any time and place. The classroom is an open space in cyberspace. This allows for constant communication and work within and outside the stipulated schedule for classes. Teachers also create their own educational materials which encourage the cooperative exercise of access to information, construction of knowledge, writing and creation. The use of blogs in education is closely linked to the promotion of reading and writing as well as the acquisition of communication skills. The development of communication skills (data analysis, discussion, construction of consensus, collaborative work) and

literacy are objective and cross-learning strategies in any discipline, as well as skills for information or for solving problems. Given the sophistication of technologies involved, it is interesting to use these technologies to promote good learning.

Carballo-Calero (2008) also states the following are some advantages of using blogs:

- The hyper-textual content allows having links to different documents and web pages.
- In blogs, each participant can be in different places and moments.
- Blogs can be a supportive tool in collaborative projects.
- They facilitate the relation to another application on the net. They are part of the ecosystem on the net. So, it is a socialization component because we can add contents and applications.
- They are better structured and more open than e-mails. They provide the possibility of discussion and interaction between groups.
- They allow organizing the articles in an easy way e.g. by thematic categories and in chronological order.

Writing in Blogs

To establish a connection between *writing* and *blogs*, we refer to Quintero (2008), who states the following:

With the avenue of Internet and other technologies that can support writing, it is possible for students to have peers in a remote part of the world, in a different school in the same city or just peers from other levels, or even from the same class at the same institution. New Technologies have extended writing environments by linking student-writers to other people with whom they can interact through writing. Writing then becomes the vehicle for communication rather than the final purpose (p. 16).

Pennington (in Quintero, 2008) raises the issue that students are motivated to write in L2 when

they are in contact with a real audience who fosters more input in writing, encourages their writing, and empowers them to seek out resources for developing their ideas.

We understand real audience as virtual audience because students are in permanent contact and communication with friends, relatives and teachers via new tools and gadgets that mainly allow them to share different forms of writing. Maybe this is the moment when teens are writing more intensively, as Lenhart, Smith and Macgill (2008) and Chartier (2004) assert. Nevertheless, teachers and parents do not see this prolific production, maybe, because they have been concentrating on “correct writing” and ignoring the writing per se and students’ creativity.

Quintero (2008) notes that some studies have shown the advantages of using web blogs to enhance students’ writing development. Their use permits observing how web blogs could benefit the composition class and, hence, provide opportunities for enjoying and improving the writing skills. In general, according to the author, students were highly motivated to write (p. 18). The blog was a form of self expression, something similar to a diary where the students could put in all the things they wanted to share with others.

However, in our context this form of writing is new and many teachers do not risk implementing it for several reasons e.g. the conditions of schools and students, especially. The studies about this topic are very recent in particular those published during the last decade. For this reason, it is necessary to research this innovative form more to communicate.

Methodology

This project is located in the field of educational innovation that occurs in the classroom. It was a proposal that involved elements of action research, too, particularly aspects such as collaborative work (Burns, 1999), writing as a communication skill

related to other skills, new information technologies and the new ways of teens’ communication nowadays.

Participants

We developed this project at Castilla School with ninth grade students. The school is located in Kennedy Zone, Castilla neighborhood, in Bogotá, Colombia. Students belong to first, second and third socioeconomic strata. The school has some technological resources such as computer rooms, tape recorders, video beams, and software with Internet access, although many activities are done by students out of school.

The number of students per course was very large; therefore, in some classrooms we worked with 45 or more students. The majority of our students lived in Castilla and Valladolid neighborhoods. The selected group, 903, was composed of 23 girls and 20 boys. Their age range was between 13 and 17. Their English language level was elementary due to the non-bilingual context they live in and the few English classes they have in school (two hours weekly), among other reasons.

The students were open-minded most of the time. However, they seemed so shy when they spoke English but as their teachers we tried to encourage them to work in the development of all communicative skills in order to improve their English level. They were able to do almost every activity that the teacher suggested; for that reason, we believed we could engage them in the project.

Techniques to Collect Data

We used the following techniques to collect data during the implementation of the innovation and its corresponding systematization: a diagnostic survey (see Appendix A), teachers’ journals (see Appendix B), an interview (see Appendix C), and the Blog created for the purpose of the project. The diagnostic survey was applied to the whole class.

Journals were written from February to May 2010 by the teacher-researchers and authors of this paper. In these dates, notes, observations, reflections and comments about the main activities of the innovation were recorded. Journals served to analyze the writing process of the students in depth and allowed us to discover the remarkable importance of images in the new forms of communication.

We interviewed eight students at the end of the project. This was done in a school library to give students a warm environment. It helped us to learn some of their perceptions after participating in the innovation. The interviews were done in Spanish so that they could answer freely and sincerely.

The name of the blog, *Thinkingspeakingand-writing*, was chosen by a student. It also provided documentary evidence. The blog contained students' comments, works, opinions, and photos, among other things, which constituted a good instrument to analyze the students' work.

In spite of the fact that the researchers worked in different schools, team-work was possible because from the first stages of the project, we determined a strict discipline of weekly meetings to coordinate writing, analysis of activities done and the actions to take in the immediate future, as well as permanent corrections and search of readings about the project. These arrangements guaranteed real collaborative work.

Pedagogical Procedure

In the first stage we made a draft of the project. After that, in stage two, we asked parents to sign the authorization form for students to take part in it and applied the first survey to the students. Continuing with the process, the students designed posters where they showed what their final poster would be like. At that time they worked with computer teachers and us. Once in the computer room, we showed them a sample blog that we created. After that, students began to create, to write and to post their contents in the blogs. In addition, we encouraged the students to visit their partners' blogs and share the information in their own blogs.

The topics the students wrote about were interests in their lives such as music, fashion, favorite sports, global warming, and their relationship with nature. The students posted comments about their favorite songs and a film. All this work was discussed previously and subsequently in class.

Results

In order to account for the way 9th graders communicate through writing in blogs, information was collected from the four instruments already mentioned: a diagnostic survey, journals, a final interview and the blog itself. The results of the diagnostic survey can be read in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Diagnostic Survey

Question	Answers			
	Writing	Reading	Listening	Speaking
1. Which skill do you think you have developed more in English?	19	13	7	2
2. Do you often have the opportunity to use a computer? Yes: 38. No: 3				
3. Do you practice English activities using the computer outside of school? Yes: 21. No: 20				
4. Do you know how to use blogs? (How to create one? How to post information on blogs?) Yes: 35. No: 6				
5. Would you like to create your own blog to post information and communicate with your friends and teacher? Yes: 35. No: 6				

Table 2. Categories and Subcategories Found as a Result of Data Analysis

Research question	Categories	Sub categories
How do 9 th graders communicate through writing in blogs?	Communicating through writing in blogs	Communication beyond formal writing
		Communicating through short texts
		The role of affective issues in written communication
	Communicative interaction taking place through blogs	Interacting based on topics of interest
Using tools to convey messages		

The answers showed students feel they had developed writing more than the other language skills. This might be so because they had been in touch with English through readings, guides, texts, among other items. On the other hand, the use of computers was important; most of the students had the opportunity to work with them. The answers showed that about fifty percent of the students have a computer at home so they could work there. The answers also showed that the use of technology is increasing nowadays because most of the students had used a blog. On the whole, a high percentage of students were motivated with the idea of creating their own blogs. It was a way to encourage them to use technological tools and thus improve their English level.

We analyzed the data having in mind the theories and authors read and worked for the theoretical framework and the pedagogical design of our project. The information was analyzed and validated through the combination of techniques used (survey, journals, final interview, and the blog created). Thus, the triangulation process (Burns, 1999) was the technique used to validate data. The points of view of the students and the researchers allowed us different perspectives to make the innovation less subjective, unbiased, more dialogical and valuable.

From the analysis of these instruments and taking into account the research question, we could establish the categories and subcategories shown in Table 2.

Communicating through Writing in Blogs

We could confirm how necessary it is to incorporate new technologies into classrooms. Blogs provided evidence of their usefulness to implement interactive processes that engaged students in writing about themes connected to their own lives.

We understand that writing is a crucial process in the school, a process which crosses all the knowledge and the curriculum. We need it to understand, analyze, and communicate. Some authors like Chartier (2004) and Álvarez (1995) argue that school is writing and that without it there would be no school as we conceive it. In this sense, writing could be the core of pedagogical processes brought into school and it would determine the academic life of our students.

In the diagnostic survey students answered, we could observe that they felt writing was the skill they had developed most (see Table 3).

The answers showed us the crucial role writing occupied in their school life. This was convenient for our project because the ability they worked on more was writing. This is so because the school had given more attention to this ability and then students felt surer about it. The students have been accustomed to writing from the beginning of their school life, so writing is a common practice. But when they reach adolescence, especially in 8th and 9th grades, they feel bad because of public

Table 3. Students' Responses about Their Skills in the English Language

Which skill do you think you have developed more in English?	Writing	Reading	Listening	Speaking
No. of responses (Total: 41 students)	19	13	7	2

scorn; bullying is permanent in the environment when they speak in public and much more if it is English they are speaking. The students have fear to humiliation. The following reflection, written in the journal, evidences what the teacher thinks: “students prefer writing than speaking, because teens are afraid of public scorn” (4th March).

We could observe that when communicating through writing in blogs, *communication went beyond formal writing*. Nowadays ICTs show us that writing is another way of communication. Besides tools like images, video and audio resources, students can engage in writing messages, modifying, changing, expanding and simplifying them. For this reason, it is very important to investigate it and understand the changes that occur when students write, in our case in blogs created to communicate among themselves and with the teacher.

Being aware of the usefulness of new technological devices, we observed that writing is understood by the group of students we worked with as a tool to communicate, to express feelings or opinions and to send messages to friends or peers. It is important to note that the content, creativity and originality of the teens when they sent messages or communicated in the blogs were the most essential issues they bore in mind when they engaged in writing. The spelling and the criteria required in school for correct writing were secondary when students wanted to do so. In Figure 1 we can see these aspects evidenced in the sample containing a photo used as background to a message sent to the blog.



Figure 1. Message Posted by a Group of Students

The sample presented in Figure 1 shows the importance of the image or photo. The written message was used by Cindy, María, Jirehe and Danna to reinforce a friendship message. Number “four” is replaced by the symbol “4” because it is shorter than the word. The verb “want” in this case represents the meaning of “love”. The phrase “he love to all heart” reflects the use of the mother tongue –Spanish, in our case. We infer the phrase included in the message to mean that they deeply love being friends “with their whole heart” (in Spanish: *con todo el corazón*).

In the sample shown in Figure 1, it is clear that the students fulfill the necessity to express a message more than the necessity to write the correct written form. Here we can see that students prefer *communicating through short texts* because quick messages are very common today among teens. This preference is facilitated by new technologies they are familiar with (chats, text messages sent by mobiles, among other forms).

The third sub-category, *The role of affective issues in written communication*, informs us that the affective dimension is very important in the school processes that teens experience. As we know, affective factors can make learning experiences easier or difficult. Evidence of this aspect can be seen in the blog created along the development of the project. On it, we can see, for example, the importance of friendship in the students' school life.

The photos accompanied by affective messages show us that text production can be influenced by feelings or students' inner personal driving forces. Likewise, it was observed that the friendship theme allowed the students to directly connect the images, the written texts and the messages they wanted to convey.

It should be noted that the ideas and comments evidencing their affective issues arise more easily when they engage in writing because they have thoughts and comments to share with their peers. We could also see that great emotions appear and enthusiasm is high when tasks are related to the things of the heart, not only of the head.

It is interesting to see that, regarding the affective dimension, McCourt (2006) presents autobiographical texts that deal with the life of an English teacher (Mccourt) in a public school of New York. The anecdotes presented show us the feelings of the students as regards academic requirements, especially those connected with reading and writing: They read or write more when they find a meaningful link with their life aspects, mainly with their sensibility or their affective relationships.

Communicative interaction taking place through blogs

We saw that interactive communication took place when students engaged in writing in the blogs they created. Their participation engaged

them in communicating around topics of interest –which is the first sub-category of the second big theme that emerged from the data analysis. This made the writing activity meaningful for students. In the journals we kept, we can find evidence about topics of interest. Work was done in groups and this reinforced the collaborative atmosphere we promoted in the project. This also facilitated getting to know about each other and finding common interests, likes and dislikes. All of this was useful for the purpose of engaging in the creation of authentic and original blogs, as can be read in the following extract:

They asked about blogs. They were organized in groups of two or three, as they wanted. They began to make a draft of their possible individual blogs. They discussed and selected their favorite topics and the ones that they could include in their blogs. (Journal, first week of February)

The topics of the blogs created by students were related to global warming, teen fashion, rock and other musical genres, dangers of the Internet, family violence, and touristic places in our country, among others. We respected the topics that motivated students to write because we knew it was a factor that drove them to write more easily and fluently. Regarding this, it is important to highlight that the topics of interest demonstrated social responsibility and concern for community issues. In this respect, teens have deep concerns and worries and expect teachers to be able to guide them to write. Their hopes and dreams motivate them to do it so that this world can be a better place to live. All in all, students' worries and concerns are framed in their affectivity and they are the sources that provide inspiration for students to take action and play an active role in the adolescent world.

On the other hand, allowing students to work in groups showed that production was more notorious and that they preferred group-work more than

writing alone. Getting together with peers permits them to share likes, dislikes, problems, solutions, and ideas about several topics. As already said, affective relationships are strengthened.

The following excerpt, from the interview done at the end of the project with eight students of the class participating in our project, illustrates how students perceived the communicative interaction taking place through blogs:

T: How have you felt in the English Project using blogs?

S1: It's been an interesting experience because we have learned about the ICTs, and have implemented this in our studies.

T: Would you like to continue working with blogs? Why?

S2: Yes, it is a way to express ourselves and connect with others, and continue learning more English.

S3: Yes, with the blogs we find English most striking when we work with blogs. This is contrary to say "Ah! How boring it is to write or something like that!"... This is what we often say... And the teacher would feel the same as what we feel. So... It's much better!

Additionally, some students' comments in the blog we created (see: www.thinkingspeakingandwriting.blogspot.com) showed us their positive feelings about the activities they participated in. These are some samples:

Mafe wrote...

hi teacher good blog We learned a lot from this blog, is interesting to see pictures of friends and interact....!!!GINA LUGOEDWIN
CORTESSMAFE VELASQUEZ903JM

Sergio wrote...

Sergio Rojas 903 J.M this website is very interesting because this site is very dynamic and has very good material submitted by students.

The second subcategory, *Using tools to convey messages*, was related to the resources used by students to make communication meaningful. As can be seen in the samples of the journals kept along the development of the project (see Appendix B),

students used e-mails, videos, edited photos, short messages similar to the chats besides topics studied in classes (see the blog created). With these tools we could become conscious of the students' necessity to communicate through elements that enhanced the use of key and correct words to convey given messages quickly.

When students were given the chance to use different tools they seemed to feel more engaged in their learning process. Being in touch with computers, cameras, and mobiles was more interesting to them because they explored their own possibilities with new technologies and confirmed that these were also ways to learn English. This shows that although we had some problems at school with the use of technological tools, we could take advantage of the students' enthusiasm for them.

It should be noted that new technologies offer tools that can be a good possibility for teens to find new learning strategies, but they are not always well used in teaching and learning processes. Although teens nowadays are inclined to use technology, very often they do not care much about aspects that require concentration, special attention and a capacity to memorize. To illustrate this, we now present an example. In one of the activities developed in our project, the teacher checked some pictures and messages sent by e-mail. Some technological tools were used, but the teacher found some mistakes, as we can see in the photo sent by one student:



Figure 2. Photo Sent by One Student (Julián)

¹ T = Teacher; S1 = Student 1; S2 = Student 2; S3 = Student 3

The following is the answer that the teacher sent to the student after reading the mail:

Hi, Julian.

Thanks for your photo. Please, write "Do" at the beginning of the sentence: Do you speak English?

Regards,

Teacher

This type of communication is an interesting way to use keys and correct words and helps students to be more alert to write better. Although it is impossible to answer all messages to them, the fact that the teacher answers their e-mails is important for them. Communication is more effective and meaningful. Hence, students can feel more inclined to expand their knowledge and improve their writing with the corrections provided by the teacher. In so doing, the teacher makes students conscious of their mistakes. Needless to say, it should be done appropriately, not as bad evaluation. This way, students can realize that errors or mistakes are possibilities for learning more and better.

The students wanted to express themselves quickly by using tools such as chats, Facebook, and e-mails. Even though they did not show correct writing, students engaged in the tasks because they felt the necessity to convey a message, an idea, a feeling or a comment. In this sense, the teachers are at a crossroads between allowing them to express themselves freely or giving them rules and explanations about the correct use of the language.

Conclusions

According to the activities done in the project, we can conclude that as teachers we can encourage our students to write or improve this skill using technology. We noticed that in the project students tried to write a little more than before. Although

they did not write as much as we wanted, we consider it to be a good beginning. The interest was fed and the innovation showed us many possibilities to continue encouraging our students to write more and researching the processes they engage in.

On the other hand, and taking into account our experience in this project, we can say that a blog is an excellent tool to work with students in a creative and interesting way. The students were very enthusiastic working on the project because it was a different way to obtain knowledge. In some cases learners did some online activities outside of school. This shows the necessity to have technological facilities in their homes or in their contexts, to support them in their efforts to communicate in English. The students' writing also evidenced it was necessary to increase the hours allocated to studying English at school because two hours weekly are too little to do relevant work in the management of a second language.

Conversely, we could observe that with these activities collaborative work is really possible because the students cooperate and collaborate with their partners and teachers solving the majority of activities. It is important to say that most of the students developed many activities at home or in a café Internet, which showed an autonomous attitude and commitment to fulfilling the goals of the different tasks.

As teachers we can say that the project was a challenge for us because at the beginning we did not know much about blogs. But nowadays we know how to create a blog, how to publish information, videos, photos, and links. We also know how to write a comment in it. The most important gain is that we are now more confident because we were in touch with technology. This confirms that with this kind of projects we can learn and explore different technological resources.

Pedagogical Implications

Using blogs to foster students' writing is an interesting possibility to work with students, but it is necessary that the school have several computer rooms where the project can be developed. In our case, the computer rooms were busy most of the time, which produced difficulties in the development of the project. Another important issue to take into account is the possibility of giving students the opportunity to form groups as they wish because the work needs collaboration and sustained engagement.

It is also necessary that all teachers are trained and continually updated in the use of new technologies and that they have time at school to implement interdisciplinary projects that involve issues like the ones handled in our study. Also, it is important to open spaces in schools in which to present projects and conferences connected to English learning with the use of new technologies, as well as the technology already in use in other disciplines.

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Appendix A: Diagnostic Survey

Castilla School
Morning Shift

We invite you to answer the following survey in order to learn a bit about your interests and knowledge of English. Please answer honestly. Remember that you will participate in the project: *Writing using blogs: A way to engage high school students in meaningful communication.*

Student Name: _____ Age: _____
Sex: _____ English level: _____

1. Which skill do you think you have developed more in English?
Reading _____ Writing _____ Listening _____ Speaking _____
2. Do you often have the opportunity to use a computer?
Yes _____ No _____
3. Do you practice English activities using the computer outside of school?
Yes _____ No _____
4. Do you have any knowledge about the use of blogs? (How to create one, posting information on blogs)
Yes _____ No _____
5. Would you like to create your own blog to post information and communicate with your friends and teacher?
Yes _____ No _____

Appendix B: Samples of Journal Entries

Date	Issue/ Question	Action	Reflection/Comments
February First week	Blogs introduction Questions and answers about blogs. Draft design blog	The project was set up in the grade. The students paid attention to the explanation of the teacher where she gave some justification about how to design a blog. They asked about blogs. They were organized in groups of two or three, as they wanted. They began to make a draft of their possible individual blogs. They discussed and selected their favorite topics and the ones that they could include in their blogs.	The class was quiet; all the students were very enthusiastic and motivated in this new and interesting project. Jaisson said that they have some experience in blogs because they had worked in it in their technology class. For this reason the English teacher spoke with the technology teacher about the possibility of creating an interdisciplinary blog involving not only English and technology, but the Communication class that is also working with blogs. The teacher felt pleased because of the attitude of the majority of the students.
Third week	Management of ICTs and the beginning of the blogs creation	The technology teacher helped the students to continue adding more information to their blogs. She gave them some explanations about how to use several tools in order to take the best advantage of them and design a very nice blog. She then let them go to the computers room and continue working in their blogs. The teacher asked the students to send a photo by mail with a sentence or message written in English in order to select the better ones and publish them in the common blog in construction. The name of this blog was chosen from the names submitted by the students: "Thinking speaking and writing", was the selected name, created by Angie.	The students showed their abilities in management of ICTs and they enjoyed posting drawings, illustrations, pictures, and photos. The technology teacher commented to the English teacher about the abilities and knowledge that some students have in blogs and the pleasure they feel when working on them. Work with the group is good because they seem very motivated, plus the atmosphere is calm.

<p>May First and second week</p>	<p>Reading the story: "The Giving Tree" Comments on blogs about this story Remembering auxiliaries: did and will</p>	<p>The students read the story "The Giving Tree" on the Internet before this class. Once it was read, the students in the classroom commented and exchanged feelings and opinions about the story orally and in writing. The independent work was: write questions in the simple past and future using 'did' and 'will' related to "The Giving Tree". The students published their comments and opinions in their blogs.</p>	<p>The students participated via exercises and questions. The class was dynamic. The story allowed highlighting the parents and children's relationship. These are some comments written by the students and posted on the blog: "...it is necessary we value the love of the others" (Cristian). "I like the video you have (the Giving Tree) is very good but a bit sad". (Victor) "The video to "given tree" gives a very interesting and my sentence is that we appreciate the love that others give us and we will have it received with affection". (Geovanny)</p>
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Appendix C: Questions for Students' Final Review

Objective: To find out students' perceptions about the project after participating in it.

1. How have you felt in the English Project using blogs?
2. How was communication in English through the common blogs? How was it with blogs made by groups?
3. What problems or difficulties have you experienced in this communication? What has been the most interesting part of this work you have done?
4. Which communication skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) practiced through blogs are easiest for you?
5. Why do you like to write little and use a lot of imagery?
6. Do you feel that today you manage or know more about blogs?
7. Would you like to continue working with blogs? Why?