Technology integration in an “English as a Second Language lesson plan”

1.- INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to explain how to integrate technology in an “English as a Second Language” lesson plan.

For doing so, we are going to take into consideration the special current context in which we are living today, to understand the characteristics of our “knowledge society”.

Nowadays, technology, and especially “Internet” and the “digital culture” in general terms are the most important factors responsible for constant social changes. Teachers and pupils are learning to communicate in a natural way using these digital tools.

Following Keats and Schmidt (2007) ideas, the concept of education follows a permanent change in time, experiencing three different stages over the Internet: Education 1.0; Education 2.0 and Education 3.0, depending on to what extent technology is affecting education.

In the period were Education 1.0 was predominant, students came to class to be educated by teachers, who merely transmitted information, and thus content was created by a few specialists. It was a traditional way of teaching, even in the last period when technology was already present.

With the arrival of Education 2.0, there are e-learning collaborations and what users do is share information. Social tools are used to supplement traditional classes and students learn in an interactive way, having access to the development of the contents. Internet gives a great deal of resources, but it also serves as a platform to work with these resources and to increase them. The user experience and participation are key characteristics of the web 2.0, being its content very dynamic and allowing the mass participation, as access to the sites are normally universal.

The 3.0 Education is the following step. In some places it is already present. In some others, it is to come. The objective is now to connect the classroom to what is happening beyond its walls. Learners are creators of knowledge to be shared and teachers are facilitators of the learning process.
With all these changes in the way we deal with information and knowledge, it is essential to consider how to integrate technology in the classroom, and in our specific case, in an “English as a Second language” lesson plan.

It is a common thought that we need to rethink educational approaches.

Considering George Siemens’ ideas, and its Connectivism, with which I mostly agree, teaching and learning processes are nowadays maintaining the communicative approach, taking also into consideration technology and digital tools and environments.

As technology is changing our brain and so it is our thinking, learning occurs now both inside and outside the individual, inside and outside the classroom, with teachers and without them, in a huge variety of ways.

Formal education is no longer the most important part of our learning, as there are many other different ways of learning in a more informal way through “communities of practice”, “personal networks”, and realization of “work-related tasks”. Informal learning has become a significant aspect of our learning experience.

Learning is now a continual process that lasts all our life.

Know-how and know-what are being supplemented with know-where, which means to understand where to find the knowledge needed.

There are new items that appear in this new way of learning to help students in the control of their own learning process: autonomy, collaboration, exchange of information between learners and learning in networks are some of them.

2.- CONTEXT

Once we have briefly commented on some of the main features of the learning process that occur nowadays, we are going to propose a specific lesson plan where technology is going to be implemented. We advise and suggest this lesson plan to be implemented in a 4th year of E.S.O, Compulsory Secondary Education class of no more than 25 Spanish (or other nationalities) students.

These students are about 14 years old and they are in most cases independent users of English. According to the Common European Framework of References for Languages they have about an Intermediate or A2-B1 level.

2.1- Timing

The estimated time these students devote to learn English as a subject is 3 hours per week, but they also learn other subjects entirely in English.

We estimate that there are 33 weeks of course. Three of them (one per quarterly) are devoted to prepare, do and correct an evaluation exam. It is important to highlight that these tests are only one of the ways a student is evaluated, as there are also other evaluation resources.

During each of the other 30 remaining weeks, students have 3 hours of English class. Consequently, 90 hours are entirely devoted to English as a subject classes per year.

The course is scheduled in such a way that students devote one hour to “Speaking” and one hour to “Listening” skills per week and half an hour to each of the two remaining “Writing” and “Reading” skills. Grammar is not specifically taught, but it is learnt through these other 4 skills, trying to do it in such a way that it is easy to understand.

There are 15 different topics, and each topic lasts for two weeks.

2.2.- Further considerations

The educational curriculum of this potential school is based on competences. One of them is the digital competence that, paraphrasing what Lara (2010, p.10) explains, is “connecting with the way we communicate and socialize in today’s society, educating from a perspective that is flexible and open to change, with strategies to read, write, search and participate in the Web from a critical perspective”. We try to follow all this in our lesson plan. The main objective in the use of technology in second language education is to develop the basic communicative skills in the language the student is learning.
The first week of each topic students are involved in the materials preparation, and so actively collaborating. During the second week, classes are going to follow teachers’ materials. There is an interactive board in class and students have also access to computers if needed.

3. - ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Choosing a topic

One of the most innovative ideas of this lesson plan is that the 15 topics are not decided in advance, but students have to choose them while the course is going on.

Every two weeks, and one week in advance to the teaching of the lesson, students spend 15 minutes to decide what the next topic will be. (The first topic of the course can be decided by the teacher). Students do a brainstorming and they prepare a list of possible topics to choose. Through doodle, excel, Google Surveys or any other tool (that does not necessarily need to be technological), they take a democratic decision. (See appendix 7.1 as an example).

If technological tools are going to be used, students might need to have their own email address that can be created in class if they lack of it.

With this activity, collaboration of all students is needed, accepting the diversity of opinions and answers, and taking responsibility of their own learning.

Activity 2: Preparing materials for the 1st week: collaborating and using technological tools.

For the first week of each topic, three of the 25 students of the classroom are in charge of the materials’ preparation. In groups of threes, students prepare, in collaboration with their teacher, the material needed for one hour of Speaking, one hour of Listening, half an hour of Reading and half an hour of Writing, following the topic chosen the previous day of class.

Teachers are closely in touch with this group of students, advising them and deciding altogether which kind of materials can be used and where this can be found, helping them to search and select the sources in a critical way: dictionaries, magazines, podcasts, webs, blogs, wikis, webquests and any other virtual learning environments that can be used in class. Teachers also make materials available to students, manage and correct their work, motivate students and help them to design activities by integrating external resources, paying special attention to the diversity of the student.

With this activity, the main objectives are to make students participate, and getting involved in the processes of collaborative learning, taking responsibilities and decisions and socializing.

We are going to consider that after a brainstorming activity, several topics were eligible and that after a democratic vote (either through excel, doodle, a Google-survey or just by raising their hands), students chose “Tips to decide what to study at University” as the first topic to see in class.

For the first session of the week, a reading and writing activity has to be prepared. The teacher can suggest to the group of three students to organize an activity to learn how to manage a “Linkedin” account, and to be able to analyze its information in order to relate what people study to their current jobs.

For the second session of the topic, in which listening is the main skill to be considered, students can work on the 8 following videos, to understand different situations and people talking about the given topic. Some activities can also be done with the transcriptions (filling gap activities, for instance).


Students can even record themselves talking about the matter.

Similarly, for the third session related to the topic, students can have a look at the following questions taken from the website of the University of Navarra in order to develop a speaking activity:
Guide: What do you want to be?

Deciding which degree to study is probably one of the most important decisions of your life. Your education, your skills, your preferences; everything influences your decision and everything is crucial when it comes to making the final decision. We will provide you with a series of tips aimed at helping you weigh your options and guiding you on this exciting path to choosing your future.

- What's the first thing you need to know?
- How can you identify your abilities and skills more effectively?
- Are you sure about your preferences and interests?
- How can you find out about your employment prospects?
- Where can you find information on the degrees that interest you?
- How can you find out the level of difficulty of your degree?
- Should you choose a double degree or supplement a degree program with other studies?
- You have got all the information you need. What do you do with it now?
- Who can advise you?
- What if you don't get in?

Students are supposed to work in groups and talk about all these information. A visit of someone from the University who could advise them will be a great option.

Activity 3:

During the second week devoted to each topic, teachers will give their own material. It will be updated and preferably original, to encourage the introduction and consolidation of new technologies in the classrooms.

There is a huge range of different possibilities and activities to do so, especially if we carry out a search on the internet.

Authentic learning experiences for English learners are essential, and so activities in the language class are effective if they replicate the kinds of interactions that students encounter outside the classroom. In today’s world of smartphone cameras and Instagram and Facebook applications, images play a central role in our students’ lives. With this activity we try to make photographs a part of the authentic learning experiences we try to create.

One of these huge ranges of possibilities is the following one:

With the use of an interactive website as “piclits.com”, teachers have to select one image from a group of them, which changes daily.

The idea is to choose one picture that is related to the current topic. All the students receive the same selected digital photograph and have to work with it, first personally. Afterwards they will do it in groups.

After looking closely at the image they have to think about these three questions:

1. What is going on in this picture?
2. What do they see that makes them say that?
3. What more can them find?

Then, in a second step, students have to label the image with words that appear in the web (or typing their own words if they use the free-style option), creating their own personal written pictures.

After that, they have to explain to the rest of the class (or the group) why they have chosen these words.
This activity might be helpful for speaking practice but also for the written part. Students are said to write, for instance, a poem or a creative piece about the photograph.

This activity is also helpful to build new vocabulary.

This website is a resource to introduce a communicative situation, to exemplify expressions, new words and new situations, to stimulate oral and written expression.

It can be used as a support for the verbal memory through the visual memory. With the image students can tell stories, practice grammar, describe and use communicative aspects.

As students become familiar with ways to talk about images, visual literacy can be integrated into daily classroom routines, and discussions about photographs can occur regularly to enhance other learning.

4.- EVALUATION OF THE PREVIOUS ACTIVITIES.

Evaluation of Activity 1

When students are to decide the following topic, they should firstly reflect about the previous one. Did they like it? Did they go deep into the subject? Did they have clear conclusions? Did they learn and incorporate new words to their vocabulary?

Did they share information? Did they collaborate?

In order to make them think about these questions and help them to choose an adequate new topic, teachers can ask them to give a general evaluation of the previous topic (even rating from 0 to 10 the topic chosen), creating a list that will classify at the end of the course, all the topics in order from the most successful one to the least interesting.

Evaluation of Activity 2

The remaining 22 students that have no prepared the materials seen in class will answer a brief survey (Attached in the appendices section in 7.2) to assess the activities prepared by their colleagues, after each session, considering three different aspects:

1. Did they find the materials interesting? Did they meet their expectations?
2. Were the activities clearly explained and easy to understand?
3. Were the objectives clear?
4. We should also ask them to give any other kind of suggestions.

Secondly, if we think about how students’ knowledge should be evaluated after (or during) this activity, we have to think about the objectives we wanted to achieve, and then decide if we still have to insist or emphasize in its practice or not.

1. Did the three students learn how to find interesting material through the web?
2. Did they incorporate at least three different adequate sources to their A2-B1 level to take into consideration any time they need to look for information on the net?

Evaluation of Activity 3

The third activity is a very interesting one, and evaluation should be addressed to check how students are improving in their speaking and writing skills. Considering for instance only the speaking part, students could complete a recording of themselves talking about a picture at the beginning of the course, and then doing the same at the end, to compare both and assess their speaking progress.
5.- CONCLUSIONS

The use of technology in this specific English as a second language lesson plan occurs especially when students in groups of threes access to the content preparation, as they have to search, filter and analyze information and interpret it critically.

But it also appears when they have to evaluate their colleagues’ work and when they use the interactive web to describe images.

The purpose of this article was to create different activities with which students were actively using technology, to show and demonstrate how it is incorporated in an “English as a Second Language” lesson plan. But the intention was not the use of technology in itself, but to teach students how to use it, and specially where to find similar sources, to help them to be independent in their learning, being capable of choosing relevant, adequate and suitable information to their personal circumstances.

For a successful achievement of the task, we should encourage participation, interaction and collaboration among students, to help them to connect the new content and knowledge to their previous one, helping them to critically interpret and relate new and existing information.

6.- APPENDICES

6.1 Taking decisions examples: The possibility of using a Google Survey

"B". English subject. Decision making: TOPIC 1

*Obligatorio

Please choose only one of the following list of possible topics *

- Best places to go on holidays
- How do we spend our free time: Leisure
- Music: to play an instrument
- Sports: Football league
- Tips to decide what to study at University
- Books and films
- Best places in Pamplona
6.2.- Examples of evaluating activity 2: materials prepared by other classmates.

"B". English subject. Evaluation of material prepared by classmates.

*Objetivo*

1.- Do you find the materials your classmates have prepared interesting? Do these materials meet your expectations? *

Tú respuesta

2.- Were the activities clearly explained and easy to understand? *

Tú respuesta

3.- Were the objectives clear? *

Tú respuesta

4.- Suggestions *

Tú respuesta

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- **Linkedin**: http://www.linkedin.com/
- **University of Navarra**: Gabinete orientador: Guía de qué quieres ser
- **Various Interactive websites** to work with images
  - www.piclits.com
  - www.fotobabble.com
  - cct2.edc.org/PMA/image_detective
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