

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICT IN THE SECOND-CYCLE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE MODULE AT THE UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

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In this article, after a short overview of the use of ICT in English Studies at the Universitat de València and the conditions I think teachers should comply with when planning, designing, creating, monitoring and evaluating activities using ICT, I detail two of the activities I have carried out using new technologies in the obligatory fourth-year module History of the English Language. Although this has traditionally been a very theoretical subject, the activities introduced through the medium of ICT have given it a more practical focus which attempts to give the students the opportunity to learn discipline-specific content, improve their English and acquire subject-specific and general competencies.

OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICT IN ENGLISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

This article focuses on a description of several activities I have implemented in my *History of the English Language* module using ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). In that regard, it can be seen as a practical guide on how to implement ICT in what has been, up to very recently, a very theoretically based subject. However, I also look at the more general implications that using these new technologies has had for our teaching practices. Before looking at the subject I have taught, I will start with a short overview of the use of ICT in the

English Studies (*Filología Inglesa*) degree at the *Universitat de València* in the last three or four years. In almost every subject, ICT has been used in one way or another to enhance our teaching and improve the acquisition of discipline-specific content and general and specific competencies on the part of our students. Our remit is clear: ICT is an aid to more traditional teaching and learning; not a replacement for it - that is, we focus on blended rather than distance learning not only because it is institutional policy, but because our research has shown us that students prefer it (Gregori Signes and Pennock-Speck, 2007). Most of the work done in ICT has been through our learning platform, *Aula Virtual* (AV), but increasingly

lecturers have turned to software and tools outside this platform when the need has arisen. At first, our attempts to use the AV were quite timid. The platform is free and has several technical limitations with regard to the delivery and inclusion of multimedia content in the online questionnaires, which have meant that it is not used as much and as creatively as it could be. On the other hand, the difficulties that we have had with the platform have obliged us to use our initiative and imagination to overcome the obstacles we have been faced with. In any case, it is being continually upgraded to make it more user-friendly.

As the coordinator of a project aimed at increasing the use of ICT that started in 2007 and which was renewed in June 2008¹, I have found that the members of the project have created numerous exercises and activities which have spurred non-members of the project to use the AV either because they shared the same subjects or because they attended talks and workshops we have given on ICT in the classroom. Thanks to this project, we have been able to build on our knowledge of ICT and to learn from other members of the project. In fact, one of the activities I carried out in the *History of the English Language* subject was suggested by activities designed by another teacher who had students create blogs in her Stylistics module (Alcantud Díaz, 2008). This is exactly the kind of knock-on effect that the project was designed for.

The AV has several tools and in what follows I will describe the most important of them. The first, and probably most useful, is the bulk mail tool. It is easy to underestimate how useful this is and how it has revolutionized our communication with both students who regularly attend class and those who do not. The second most used tool is resources where we can leave the programme for the course, notes, sound and video files, etc. The third is the assessment tool that the students can access to keep abreast of their progress. The fourth tool, to generate questionnaires, due to its complexity and limitations, is the one used least by the teachers. At this moment, unlike other platforms, we are only able to generate multiple choice and true/false questionnaires. The forum tool can be

used to create and administer forums and has been used to good effect by one of the Project members (Alcantud Díaz, 2008).

CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING ICT IN A THEORETICAL MODULE IN THE CONTEXT OF A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We all know that employing ICT frequently requires several hours of our planning and designing that might be employed in other activities that have more immediate and tangible effects, i.e., writing and publishing articles. Moreover, it also eats into the time we have for planning and preparing for lessons and correcting work done by the student using traditional means. For this reason, my colleagues and I have imposed a series of conditions on ourselves with regard to the use of ICT to avoid wasting time, money and considerable effort. This is especially relevant in English Studies at the UVEG due to the large numbers of students per group. The first is to only use ICT if it adds something to our teaching that traditional teaching cannot or at least cannot without, again, too much effort. I call this the “*if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it*” condition. The second is to make sure that using ICT does not involve spending too much money or the “*money doesn’t grow on trees*” condition. There are cases where a lot of money has been invested in computer programmes that are hardly used by teachers or students. The third is that engagement with ICT should not mean massive amounts of work for either teachers or students. This condition also applies to traditional teaching. If this happens, it can condition the attitude of both groups towards these technologies in education. This final condition is the “*all work and no play ...*” condition. Contravening any of these conditions will mean the ICT activity will either be superfluous, redundant or counterproductive –or all of the above.

Teaching through ICT in *History of the English Language* has only been possible because it is part of our Innovation in Education Project². As we switched from an assessment system with one final examination to continuous assessment, it became clear to us that computers would be necessary in order to lighten our teaching load

while maintaining high assessment standards. Each of the two semesters that make up this year-long module consists of three tests that each individual student sits during classroom time, three portfolio activities carried out in groups of five, and a classroom presentation also in groups of five. The main reason for asking for the portfolio and presentation to be carried out in groups, apart from giving the students the possibility to acquire or develop skills in team-work, is that the total number of students in this subject is 120, which meant that assessing individual presentations was out of the question.

In addition, I created three online questionnaires for each of the three units in the second semester. These are posted a week before each test and are self-assessment tests, although their completion was part of each student's portfolio

Students were informed that at least one of the questions in each self-assessment test would appear in the examination to make it more appealing to them. There was a balance between individual work –the three in-class tests and three self-assessment tests– and group work consisting of portfolio activities and the presentation. Individual work accounted for 70% of the mark and group work, for 30%. In what follows, I will describe two other activities that I carried out in 2007-2008.

E-PORTFOLIOS THROUGH WRITEBOARD

During the academic year 2007-2008, I maintained the same assessment system but required all the students to do all the portfolio activities through a programme called *Writeboard* (see Fig. 1). I chose this programme



Fig. 1. Writeboard

mark. Essentially, apart from the bulk mail and resources, the questionnaires were the only ICT activities I used in the subject during the academic year 2006-2007, but they proved valuable as a way of showing what kind of questions I would ask. It is important to note that I do not correct the self-assessment questionnaires and thus comply with condition three. The students get feedback on their answers and are able to do the test again.

rather than the AV forum due to the former's ease of use. To create a forum/blog, all that is needed is to give the *Writeboard* a name, a password and supply an email address. The forum/blog is automatically created and then you can invite as many members as you wish by including their emails. To be able to follow the students' progress, I asked them to include me as a member of a group. The three portfolio exercises or activities, the answers to which

were posted to each group's *Writeboard*, consisted of translations from Early Modern to Contemporary English and questions on notes left in the resource tool in the AV.

On using *Writeboard*, I had effectively switched to an e-portfolio approach. The reason I did this was because it was easier and more convenient for the students to pick up and deliver the finished activities and for me to correct and give them back. It was also possible to ascertain when the actual work had been done. Another important consideration of an ecological nature was that students did not have to use too much paper. Importantly, I could also see which students were doing what. This is an important issue for both teachers and students, as one of the reasons why the more active students do not like group work is that they complain that some students let the rest do the work. Knowing which students are working is almost impossible in traditional teaching, as you generally only have one student's word over another, but using

Writeboard I could discern which students were pulling their weight, as each member of the group had to hand in a part of each assignment. As many students work while doing their degree, this also meant that they could do the work and hand it in without coming to the university (Barbour and Collins, 2005).

Another activity I asked students to do through *Writeboard* was to keep a kind of log of their progress in planning and designing their presentation. This was because I was interested not only in the final product, but in the process of creating the presentation. Thus, I was acting according to conditions 1, 2 and 3. Writing the log gave students the opportunity to practice informal written English, something they would not normally be required to do in what is classed as a theoretical-practical subject such as *History of the English Language* (see Fig. 2). The students had to arrange meetings, plan what they were going to do in the presentation and discuss contents. In this way, they acquire rather

but I think that the correct translation is eggs.

Another thing: is the present, past and past participle tenses of understand in this way:understande/
understode/ understonden

 **sara**  **said...** (14 Apr 08, looking at [version 4](#))

Eyren is correct because in the text it is trying to show the different ways of referring to the same things depending on the dialect or origin:
From OE is "eyren" and "eyrene"
From ON is "egg" and "egges"
So Caxton writes both to show the controversy and misundertood of the waitress as a way of irony maybe.

 **Romina**  **said...** (18 Apr 08, looking at [version 4](#))

Girls, we will see on Monday in order to put Hamer and Milroy's answers in common!

 **sara**  **said...** (24 Apr 08, looking at [version 4](#))

Ok and next Tuesday at 9h we'll meet at the hall? let's talk about the presentation and the questions of Milroy and Hamer.
bye
Horte I'm sending to you now the mail with the first semester files! Just add what you scanned

Fig. 2. Informal conversation in English in Writeboard

than learn the language (Krashen, 1982), as the main focus is communicating, not language form (see also Zaragoza Ninet and Clavel Arroitia, 2008 for a discussion on acquisition in a blended learning environment in this volume). The preparation for the presentation in this asynchronous forum was assessed by taking into account the frequency with which the students used *Writeboard* and also the relevance of the students' comments. I provided feedback on content and form through the medium of *Writeboard* and at the end of the term, when I sent a document listing the most common mistakes and ways of avoiding or correcting them.

MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTS CREATED BY STUDENTS

Another innovation that I put into practice during the last academic year was to ask the students to create a video as part of their presentation using mostly *Microsoft* programmes such as *PhotoStory* and/or *Movie Maker*, which are both free (Robin, 2006; Gregori Signes, 2008). The rationale behind this was to coax the students into acquiring computer skills and to allow them to be more creative. Logically, this kind of activity complied with condition one, as one cannot create digital presentations using traditional methods. The programmes cost nothing, which complies with condition two. However compliance with condition three is a question of opinion, but no students complained of excessive work in this respect and several voiced the opinion that they had enjoyed doing this kind of activity. Ease of use and keeping costs down can conflict at times, as *Movie Maker* is not the easiest programme in the world to use and, depending on what one wants to do, might be somewhat limiting. However, the fact that students are unwilling or unable to buy software probably means that in the making of the films there exists a level playing field. In order to give the students the skills necessary to make a digital presentation, I gave a seminar on the use of the programmes mentioned above to one of each of the 24 groups of five that I had. The students who attended the seminar then had to teach the others how to use the programmes. Fortunately, students will have more input on new technologies as ICT skills for teaching and learning will become a subject in

English Studies when our new degree structure comes into force in 2009-2010.

Without going into too many details, *Photo Story* is a programme which allows you to make a series of images into a digital narrative. The first thing to do is to choose the correct order for the photos. Once that is done, you can add captions, music and voice-overs to the photos and finally save the completed project as an avi movie. The only drawback to the program is that you cannot insert videos. *PowerPoint* slides can be saved as images too, which proved very useful in making the type of movies we had envisaged. The finished product can actually be quite sophisticated and depends not only on technological prowess but personal creativity (see Gregori Signes on educational digital storytelling (EDS) in this volume). *Movie Maker* has similar capabilities to *Photo Story* and allows you to insert either photos or movies, but is less user-friendly. Many students opted for videos downloaded from the *YouTube* site. Although the flash videos in this site are not compatible with *Movie Maker*, they can be downloaded and converted into a compatible format using programmes like *YouTube Downloader*. Students had to be made aware that their video presentation could not consist solely of a downloaded video no matter how interesting it was, as this meant that their input would be minimum. Several students used screenshot software such as *ScreenPilot* and software to capture moving images on the screen such as *CamStudio*. In this way, they were able to use the zoom-in feature of *Google Maps* to show, for instance, where a particular dialect was spoken (see example in Fig. 3).

The creation of the movie for the presentation was a test of the students' ability to include a digital product of their own making with the rest of their oral presentation. The theme of the presentations was language attitudes in English from a diachronic point of view. Most of the students placed their movies at the end of the presentation as a kind of grand finale, and they normally dealt with language attitudes at the present time using their own material and videos downloaded, normally from *YouTube*. The movie was assessed using quality, content and relevance and was part of the assessment for the presentation itself.



Fig. 3. Movie made by a group of students

FINAL REMARKS

ICT in the field of education is an exciting opportunity for teachers and students. With more and more teachers being expected to apply more student-centred teaching, even if they do not particularly want to (Bailey, 2008), practically all teachers will end up using ICT to teach or at least to communicate with or evaluate students to a greater or lesser extent. The more free, user-

friendly programmes that emerge, the easier this will become, but we should all be aware of the advantages and problems involved in using ICT, some of which I have outlined above. My feeling is that using new technologies is a very efficient and effective way of giving students the opportunity to acquire discipline-specific content and competencies, including the ability to communicate confidently in English, and also for us as teachers to assess the work they do.

Notes

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- ² *Projecte d'Innovació Educativa de Filologia Anglesa*. [<http://www.uv.es/oce/faseactualprojectes.htm>]

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