

THE USE OF THE INTERNET IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Resumo: O artigo enfoca a questão de como a Internet pode auxiliar e facilitar o ensino e a aprendizagem de uma língua, considerando o fantástico crescimento da rede e o impacto que isto tem na vida das pessoas. A Internet é uma alternativa no ensino, uma vez que possibilita o contato com outras culturas e dispõe de materiais autênticos e significativos. É importante refletir sobre as possibilidades do uso da rede no ensino de línguas, a fim de incrementar as atividades comunicativas em sala de aula.

Palavras-chave: Ensino da língua funcional; aprendizagem da língua; Internet.

Abstract: This paper focuses on the question of how the Internet can contribute and facilitate communicative language teaching and learning, considering the amazing growth of the World Wide Web and the impact that it has in people's daily life. On fact, the Internet represents an alternative tool to language teaching, as it opens up the cultural frontiers and provides a source of authentic and meaningful material. It is important, so, to reflect about the possibilities of using the Web for language purposes, in order to improve the quality of the activities to be used in class.

Key-words: Communicative language teaching; language learning; Internet.

The Internet is becoming more and more important for the language teachers - specially the English ones - as it has much to offer to foreign language instruction. The World Wide Web can present an abundance of information and “unlimited resources that teachers can use in order to expose students to authentic language use” (Gitsaki; Taylor, 2000, p. v). Generally, students like computers and they are not resistant in using them. Computers can increase learners motivation, fact that leads to a bigger language use and to a better proficiency. In addition to this fact, the Internet use awakes the curiosity of the students and their global understanding, as they can “navigate” through different sites of different countries and cultures. To the authors Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000, p. 1):

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The Internet was undeniably the most radical agent of change in the last quarter of the 20th century. It touches all our lives at many points, and its influence will continue to grow inexorably, and in probably unpredictable ways, in the 21st century. Language pedagogy cannot and should not be immune to the advantages the Internet offers – in information, in resources and in opportunities for global communication.

The Internet can be integrated in the English language classroom in many ways, but specially through the electronic mail and through the World Wide Web. Furthermore, the use of the computers can be restricted to a single class or a simple task (to introduce a new chapter or topic, to review language aspects, for example), to a thematic unit (when bigger projects are developed with a specific objective) or through a longer planned activity (as the use of e-mail communication) that will continue through a whole semester or more. “The Internet overcomes limitations of time and space and offers teachers and students unparalleled opportunities to extend learning in ways that were not possible even five years ago” (Burgess; Robertson, 1999, p. 1).

Access to the Internet will change, at least in part, the way languages are learned. According to Gitsaki; Taylor (2000), the use of the Internet as a classroom resource in English teaching has the following advantages:

- 1 The Internet provides students with opportunities for exposure to natural language and authentic language use not only during but also outside the class, making learning English part of students' daily lives and an ongoing process.
- 2 The Internet offers a variety of topics to satisfy a diverse audience.
- 3 The information available on the Internet is current and frequently updated.
- 4 Using the Internet is fun and highly motivating. Websites are full of animation, colours, sounds, pictures, interactive forms and digital video clips.
- 5 Using the Internet has become a part of life and learning how to use it is an essential skill for students.
- 6 Using the Internet for English language teaching and learning enhances student autonomy and gives learners the opportunity to manage their own learning (Gitsaki; Taylor, 2000, p. v).

It is not difficult to recognise that the benefits the use of the Internet can provide to the language classroom are related to the words *authenticity, communication, reality, interaction, variety, current information, motivation, autonomy* and others. The ideas and concepts above are also possible to be connected with the principles and with the characteristics of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). “By its very nature as a tool for communication, it [the Internet] does lend itself particularly to communicative and task-based learning” (Teeler; Gray, 2000, p. 59). In fact, the Internet – used in the same way as books, magazines, newspapers and videos are – can be a powerful tool to the CLT teacher, who can improve his or her lessons throughout the integration of the computer use into the language curriculum.

1 THE INTERNET AND THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

The World Wide Web opens up new alternatives to the teacher who believes in the Communicative Language Teaching and uses it. According to that approach and as Richards and Rodgers (1998) describe, language is seen as a system for the expression of meaning and its primary function is for interaction and communication, in a way that the structure of the language is not considered as something isolated, but as an important aspect that reflects its functional use. The communicative competence is a goal to be achieved and this is why students do not simply learn the linguistic structures and grammar rules, but they have to learn how to use the language properly, throughout activities that involve the real use of language in daily life situation.

Therefore, the role of the teacher, in general, is to present and practice in his or her students the concepts and skills necessary to function well in different situations. In this belief, students will learn the language by using it in context, where they have the opportunity of developing the four linguistic abilities (reading, writing, listening and speaking). In this process of teaching and learning, the role of instructional materials is also very important, as they reflect the decisions the teacher makes considering the content and the way it will be presented to the students. Furthermore, the materials and strategies used by the teacher define the daily learning objectives and the way the classes will be conducted. As Richards and Rodgers (1998) state, the role of instructional materials within a communicative methodology might be specified in the following terms:

- 1 Materials will focus on the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression and negotiation.
- 2 Materials will focus on understandable, relevant and interesting exchanges of information, rather than on the presentation of grammatical form.
- 3 Material will involve different kinds of texts and different media, which the learners can use to develop their competence through a variety of different activities and tasks (Richards; Rodgers, 1998, p. 25).

The same authors continue to define other specifications for the role of instructional materials in the Communicative Language Teaching, considering the individualities of the students:

- 1 Materials will allow learners to progress at their own rates of learning.
- 2 Materials will allow for different styles of learning.
- 3 Materials will provide opportunities for independent study and use.
- 4 Materials will provide opportunities for self-evaluation and progress in learning (Richards; Rodgers, 1998, p. 26).

In these circumstances, and taking into account the elements above, it is possible to face the Internet with new eyes. As most of the information on the Internet has been written in English by native speakers, the international Web is, primarily, a rich source for authentic reading materials in English. As a result, to the CLT teacher, the World Wide Web may represent a valuable instrument, both for classroom preparation materials and for classroom use, where many of the elements listed before can be found. Maybe, the most important aspect

is the fact the Internet is REAL – essential word in the Communicative Language Teaching – part of the world and part of the students' reality, since many of them have contact with the Web in their own houses or possibility of accessing it at schools, universities or public libraries. So, when students are engaged in an e-mail writing activity, for example, they are really communicating, that is, the language they are using is really authentic. Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000, p. 6) state that “as a means of communication, the Internet allows students around the world to interact with one another cheaply, quickly and reliably, opening up the classroom to the real world in a way which has never before been possible”.

Again, the Internet is just a tool in the CLT teacher's hands. Technology should never be used without the objective of enhancing the language learning experience. The Internet can facilitate the work of the teacher in the information gathering process, providing source for authentic and up-dated materials (readings and writing activities, grammatical information and exercises, lyrics, quizzes, games, texts, graphics, sounds, pictures, video and much more). The offering of authentic materials in the language classroom is an important and beneficial aspect of the Communicative Approach, that motivates learners and prepares themselves to use the language in real situations. Although the Web can provide lots of alternatives to the development of the reading and the writing abilities, it can also be a source for the improvement of the audio and oral skills and, specially, for the integration of all of them. Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000, p. 66) say that “there are also increasing numbers of Websites containing material that can be used for listening practice. Such text and audio material can also be used as a stimulus for writing and speaking practice and, naturally, for activities practising integrated skills”.

In addition to that, and despite of the interaction that occurs in the classroom between the teacher and the learners, students can also “interact” with the computer. Interaction is another essential element in the Communicative Language Teaching. Certainly, computers “communicate” not by “oral words”, but by means of graphic presentation, sound effect, animated characters, pictures and other elements. Consequently, the computer software or the networked activity will respond to students' move and every decision will lead to different ends. Silva (1999, p. 289) says that “through interaction with the computer, learners also acquire knowledge of how to deal with this tool and how to deal with Internet, which can be considered a new symbolic system”.

Another significant advantage of the computer use in the CLT classroom is the respect for the students individual pace. All teachers know that students are different from each other, even though they are part of the same group. The amount of input a student can find in the Internet is unlimited. So, with some time, it is not difficult to select and choose specific activities that fit different students in the same class, since the Web can be adapted to different levels and ages. Moreover, through the Internet tasks, students have immediate feedback on what they are doing, without the fear or the risk of being exposed for any mistake. When the student fails to answer a question correctly, the computer can stimulate, or explain what happened in a way that makes it easier for the learner to understand the mistake. As a result, computer learning can reduce the anxiety of the students and increase their confidence and motivation.

At the click of a mouse, students are presented to a variety of authentic English language texts, as well as a diversity of topics, where they have the advantage of visual reinforcement (pictures, for example). Using the computer encourages learner autonomy and initiative, as they discover that they are able to read and understand material written in English, to find

information when they need it and to discuss the same information with peers, through e-mail or chat/ forum rooms. In this context, the computer can be a tool not just for English learning but for the learning of any subject. Computers can be used for searching the Internet for materials of different areas, fact that brings another key point for English teachers, since much of the information they will find will be in English as well. So, while learning about other academic areas, students are learning the foreign language at the same time.

1.1 Pedagogical implications

The Internet is an incredible resource for language learners that should not be ignored. Teachers have to get more and more involved with computers in order to improve their abilities in using them. As any other class, the use of the Internet must be very well planned, since its effectiveness depends on the way it is exploited by the teacher and the students. First of all, as a teacher, it is important to know the skills students will need to get connected to the Web, how they do it and what is necessary to carry out the tasks or activities proposed on the Internet. Gitsaki and Taylor (2000, p. viii) say that:

although you do not need to be a computer wizard to teach [...], it is necessary to familiarise yourself with the software that your students and you will need to use for searching the Web, doing the computer projects and using E-mail.

In summary, teachers should prepare themselves for the use of modern computer technology to avoid a possible frustration that can result from the unfamiliarity of computer software or techniques. Computer training takes a valuable time, though, to Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000), the following are some important skills a teacher and a student must have to make the most effective use of the Internet. They include knowing how to:

- Search for information or materials.
- Sort and store the results of the search.
- Evaluate what was found.
- Use the Internet to communicate with other users (Windeatt; Hardisty; Eastment, 2000, p. 19).

When using computers, students can work alone, in pairs or even in groups, according to the number of machines available and also according to the type of exercise that is proposed. Working with a classmate is very good for them, even in an Internet activity, because it provides opportunities to exchange ideas, compare answers and practice the oral ability as well. Besides that, sometimes, it is possible to find students that have no experience with computers at all. In this case, working in groups can be much more useful, as students can help each other. Usually, this peer-teaching is really successful. To some activities, the teacher will also need to pre-teach vocabulary or to specify a structure, preparing the class for the task that will be realised. Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000) also suggest that a *pre-computer work* and a *post-computer work* must be prepared and proposed to the students, too. These stages or steps could be done out of the computer room and they would help the students' performance during the execution of the activity.

Despite of being an excellent source for teaching materials and activities to be used in the classroom and with the learners, the Internet is also a reference library for teachers' own development, since the Web permits almost instant access to a vast amount of reference materials. And as the Web is constantly changing and expanding itself, it is always possible to find meaningful and updated material with the push of a button. Academic publications are easy to locate and even distance-learning courses and schools information are available.

Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000) also list some tips to the teacher that plans a lesson using the Internet for language teaching. According to them, the teacher must be really prepared to use the computers, even though this preparation requires many hours of work (and it really does). One of the most important factor in determining if the Internet lessons are successful or not is the quality of the sites selected by the teacher. The fact is that Web pages change a lot and this is why it is always important to check them before each lesson. Furthermore, speed is another issue in determining accessibility. As there are times when the Web runs very slowly, it is also recommended to have alternative activities available to adapt to this situation. In addition to that, unexpected access problems are also common. Just because the first page works, the teacher cannot assume that all the links to the other pages do as well. Certainly, technical difficulties may occur and sometimes it is impossible to enter a particular Website.

Another important aspect is to organise the Web pages and their recording. Addresses must be extremely correct, otherwise it will not be possible to use them. It is also necessary to be very exploratory when "surfing" the Web, trying to analyse its many possibilities. The teacher needs to look critically at any information found, as there is very little control over the information stored on the Web. "Even finding useful information requires skill and judgement. The variety of resources is so great that deciding how to exploit resources once you find them can be a challenge in itself" (Windeatt; Hardisty; Eastment, 2000, p. 5). In fact, anyone can make a Web page. This includes experts in a particular field, but also people with not much idea of what they are writing about. Once again, until students are prepared to analyse sites critically, it is really necessary that the teacher visits all sites before suggesting them. When the teacher has doubts about the accuracy of a specific site, it is worth comparing this one to other sites in the same subject area. Anyway, it is one of the teacher's responsibilities to assist his or her students in learning what the Web has to offer and how these offerings should be examined.

When evaluating a new Website, it is necessary to observe attentively what the objective of the site is, who wrote it, when it was updated, how accurate the information is and also how good the design of the page is presented. The judgement of the appropriateness of any site is also related to the students that are going to use the Internet. Depending on the grade, level and ability of the students, one site may be better than other. Some sites can be too confusing to use or their language can be too easy (or too difficult!) in order to achieve the aims that the activity has. Generally, if the site is colourful, easy to read, full of graphics and fun to use, the students will probably enjoy it. However, it isn't to say that a site with only text information will be of no value. Everything depends on the group of students and the content that is being taught.

The quantity of information that is found on the Web can also be a problem. Without the navigating tools, learners can get lost in it. It is indispensable to learn how to use the Internet portals. Nowadays, the portals are very sophisticated and, if the Internet user knows how to proceed, he or she can find information in any topic easily and instantly. "Having a

clear set of keywords can save a lot of time when searching for specific information on the Web” (Gitsaki; Taylor, 2000, p. viii). In addition to that, there is the question of “time”. Tasks in the Internet may take longer to be completed, both for occasional delay or technical problems but also because of the students’ involvement in these activities. So, the teacher must preview an extra time in the lesson plan.

Surely, the use of the Internet can be fun and interactive, what elevates students’ motivation. “[...] but the motivation generated simply by the novelty of a new medium is likely to be short-lived, unless the students feel some benefit from their tasks” (Windeatt; Hardisty; Eastment, 2000, p. 7). Technology can be very useful, but very harmful, if it is used uncritically or superficially. Students must be involved in well prepared tasks, where the use of the computer and the use of the Internet is integrated with language acquisition. Learners must feel that, with the mediation of the computer, they can “learn faster, become more creative and have more control over their learning” (Silva, 1999, p. 290)

As any other tool that is used in the classroom, the Internet use must be well balanced. Computer phobia exists and many people get tired if they are too much exposed to the machine. As different elements can interfere when we use the Internet (time available, number of students and computers, age of the students, speed of connection, ...), at the end of the computer classroom the activities must be evaluated and analysed to check if the aims originally proposed were effectively achieved. According to Silva (1999, p. 291):

Internet can be a good way of learning to be experienced by English learners in Brazil in spite of all difficulties teachers and learners have to overcome. However, teachers must be prepared for using the new technology in a more critical way, not underestimating learner’s creativity and helping them in the creation of a sense of community.

Anyway, no matter how much the teacher is prepared or how planned the classroom was, in this teaching computer environment, pedagogical surprises can always happen and they can be frustrating as well as very interesting. Despite of the risks, there is much to do in this circumstance, where pleasure and involvement are key words. Like the students, the teacher also learns: about computers, about planning a different classroom through a collaborative and interactive means, about students’ potential for contributing significantly to the class and even though about the materials that are prepared.

2 THE INTERNET IN ACTION

It is really important to discover how the Internet can be maximised as a resource in English teaching. According to Teeler and Gray (2000) there are many parts of the technology – as the audio and video components – that are not yet being exploited to their full potential. However, teachers are discovering and starting to use a lot two popular features of the Internet: the *electronic mail* and the *World Wide Web*.

According to Burgess and Robertson (1999, p. 5), “the challenge is to integrate the Internet and these new technologies into your classroom in ways that are comfortable for you [the teacher] and in ways that don’t require you to change the successful classroom practices

that you rely upon.” Once more, it is necessary to emphasise that, when the teacher decides to use the Internet as a support for the English course, he or she must analyse the student's needs, adapting the syllabus and methodology and designing the activities in detail, in order to make the Internet use really effective.

2.1 Examples of Internet classroom activities

The following are sample activities that use the Internet as tool in the English classroom and as a basis for tasks to accompany the coursebook or the content that is being taught. They are simple activities (review exercises, searching tasks, ...) that try to take advantage of what exists on the Internet, adapting what was found and aiming to focus on the practice of the four linguistic skills.

2.1.1 Introducing the Internet

Generally, students have experience in using computers. Other ones, however, cannot be so accustomed to the technology and may face computers with intense anxiety. An introductory activity to the Internet can be very appropriated at the beginning of the class or when the teacher uses the Internet for the first time. Teeler and Gray (2000) suggest that the teacher should show students the machines, identifying the equipment, gathering information about how different members of the class have already used the Internet and brainstorming useful vocabulary. Maybe, it would be nice if the teacher chooses a general and interesting *home page* to introduce and explain the way people “navigate” in the Web. If it is available, a projector could be very useful to demonstrate the steps of the activity.

The following is a simple questionnaire¹ that can be used in the first computer class to promote an initial familiarisation with the tools, vocabulary and navigation of the net.

¹ Adapted from a questionnaire provided by Teeler and Gray (2000, p. 64-65).

A Quick Tour on the Internet

- 1- Look at your *screen* and find the name of your computer.
- 2- How can you send a message to the students at one of the computers? Send a welcome message to another group.
- 3- Internet vocabulary.

Choose five new words from the box below.

<i>home page</i>	<i>access</i>	<i>real-time</i>
<i>URL</i>	<i>e-mail</i>	<i>mailing list</i>
<i>download</i>	<i>chat</i>	<i>link</i>
<i>discussion chat</i>	<i>password</i>	<i>http</i>
<i>browser</i>	<i>discussion board</i>	<i>virtual</i>

Find the Internet glossary or a dictionary and look up the new words. Explain them to your partners in your own words.

- 4- The teacher is going to give you some tips on finding things on the Internet. Take notes here.
- 5- How a search engine can help you to find documents on the World Wide Web?
- 6- Search for the main headlines of the American newspapers today. How would you do that?

2.1.2 The World Wide Web

The World Wide Web has lots of sites to visit about any topic or subject anyone would need. Many of these sites can be very useful for students who want to improve their proficiency in English. Consequently, the Web is a mine of materials to English teachers. Furthermore, it is available 24 hours a day. There are sites created specifically for English language learners, as well as sites for native speakers that are also available for EFL students. In the WWW, it is possible to find pages for reading and writing exercises, pages for vocabulary practice, grammar explanations and activities, lists of useful links to sites for the English classroom, newspapers and magazines online, literature online and much more. However, there are also many other ways of focusing on language without restricting the classes to sites specifically designed for English Language Teaching. Through the Web and according to the creativity of each teacher, lots of activities can be developed for English practice. The following are some examples:

a) Vocabulary:

Students can revise “food and drink” (and the Imperative) visiting sites that provide recipes. After that, it is also possible to take them to the kitchen and prepare a delicious meal! To fix the words about the weather, the teacher can visit a newspaper site and check for the forecast. Sometimes, the lyric of a specific song can be very useful to review vocabulary and in the Web it is possible to find all the lyrics a teacher wants. If the aim is to work with words related to the parts of a house, a rental agent’s Web Site can be accessed. If the vocabulary topic of the lesson is about clothes and colours, everybody can visit the Web Site of a famous department store. There are lots of possibilities to integrate the content with the real life.

b) Reading

Reading is one of the easiest skill to be practised on the Net. On the Internet, a teacher and a student can find different sorts of texts, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, newspapers, magazines, comics, literature, and much more. A very nice – and simple – activity can be done and adapted to all levels. The teacher must select a Web Site about a topic that is interesting to the students (the critic of a film, a text about sports, natural life, a paper about a specific city,...). Using the information on the site, the teacher prepares a fun quiz to be answered in class.

c) Writing

The Internet is obvious a resource for any writing assignment. A lot of projects can be developed on the Internet in order to improve writing skills. Students can be asked to prepare a “tourist folder” about a specific city, after visiting different Web pages. They can also search information about cultural aspects of other countries and write an essay about it. Despite of this kind of activity, there are a lot of sites where students can write cards or postcards and send them by e-mail to a friend. There are also the *e-mail projects* and the “penpals” that give students a real audience for their writings.

d) Listening

“The multimedia content available on the Web is stunning. There is anything and everything from live concerts and interviews to time-honoured radio serials” (Teeler; Gray, 2000, p. 77). In fact, listening activities require a sound card and headphones in the computer. With this equipment, it is possible to use a big number of Websites that provide listening exercises or sound effects.

e) Speaking

Although it is possible, until now, the Internet is not fully used to develop the speaking ability. However, as it was said about the *writing* ability, the Internet is a source for discussion topics in any area. Teeler; Gray (2000, p. 74) say that “the Web can provide a real impetuous for discussing topics which the artificiality of the classroom setting sometimes curtails”. According to the same authors, another real motivating factor in using the Internet for speaking practice can be related to its potential for communication beyond the classroom, that is, through the use of videoconferencing and also chats.

2.1.3 Searching on the Web

Navigating through the Web is not difficult, but it requires much time and also patience, specially if you have no specific Web addresses. To find a specific topic among a collection of information and materials, students and teachers must use appropriated tools called *search engines*.

These *search engines* are very famous on the Web. The *search engines* will look for sites that have the key words the user asked. The student or the teacher must be very specific when typing the topic wanted. Choosing the keywords carefully makes the search much more efficient and avoids waste of time.

After the search is completed, the user has to select what was found. Evaluation of Websites is a serious issue. Many times, the teacher or the student has hundreds of sites as the result of the search. Since anyone can write anything on the Web, it is necessary to verify the source, although, in many cases, it is not easy. The teacher has to decide which ones are relevant and exclude the others. Certainly, this is a task that requires a lot of time.

2.1.4 Chats

Another alternative on the Internet, that is extremely popular, is the “chat room”, where a person can communicate with another in real time and online. Students use their keyboards to type out what they would like to say, replying to what other people in their group have typed before. The *chat rooms* are also part of the Websites and, as the interaction is immediate, they can be useful for English purposes. The *chat* is really motivating to the students, as it means real communication with others. Burgess and Robertson (1999) give some suggestions of how a teacher could use the *chat rooms* in the language classroom. For these authors, students can use the *chat* to:

- Hold a “virtual debate” about a topic of common interest.
- Compare opinions about a book your class and others just finished reading.
- Gather data about the cost of living in different parts of the world.
- Plan collaborative activities working out details without having to wait for e-mail replies (Burgess; Robertson, 1999, p. 39).

Despite of these activities (and many others) that use the *chat room* as a means of doing other things with the English language, *chats* can also be used for “talking” in English, that is, for fun and for making new friends. The teacher must monitor the exercise and limit the time. Afterwards, he or she can print the “conversation” or save it in a disk to check the language more carefully with the students later. Sometimes, students can also form a private “room” where they just chat among themselves.

Unfortunately, there are some important aspects to observe when using the *chat* for learning purposes. According to Windeatt, Hardisty and Eastment (2000), the teacher must consider extra elements that can influence the activity. First, in “public chats” anyone can enter. Secondly, if there are many people in the *chat room*, it is impossible to join the discussion, as each person is *chatting* for different reasons. Thirdly, people usually use short sentences when *chatting*, full of expressions and abbreviations and with mistakes, as well. Finally, when a whole group is using the *chat room*, the conversation is generally not private.

2.1.5 E-mail

English teachers are finding creative ways of using the *e-mail* in the classroom. E-mail is an important tool that can really help students to develop their writing and reading skills. The communication through e-mail can involve all the group (the teachers and the students), small groups (two or three students) and even groups of students from different classes. It is good to know that there are Websites providing free e-mail service. So, each student can have one e-mail, even though they do not have computers at home. Burgess and Robertson (1999) also give their opinion about the benefits of using e-mail in the language classroom. According to those authors, the following are good reasons for the students to correspond with others by e-mail:

- Your students are second language learners and would benefit from an opportunity to correspond in the target language.
- Your students would like the opportunity to work with real data from a variety of sources.
- Your students have expressed an interest in learning more about what they are studying (Burgess; Robertson, 1999, p. 29).

Despite of being a single activity developed in some specific moments of the classroom, the *e-mail* can be used as a permanent exercise, throughout the “keypals”. Generally, language learners like communicating in the target language via e-mail. Having a keypal is very interesting and fun because of the immediacy of response. The old “penpals” had to wait for many weeks until their letters could be answered. Teachers can divide their groups in pairs and ask the students to write on specific topics, or to finish a story that was started in the classroom, for example. Students can exchange their writings, helping each other in order to accomplish the task. Students may also have a keypal from a different classroom, school and even country (there are Websites that provide individual names of students who are looking for an electronic friend). In this context, the activity should be really exciting, as students are writing to someone they don’t know. Moreover, if the participants are from different cultures, the experience can be very rich not only in terms of linguistic improvement, but also in terms of personal formation. This kind of activity also helps shy students, giving them an opportunity to express themselves and participate without fear. However, there is a negative aspect to be considered: working with e-mail may be very frustrating if a student sends a message to his or her keypal and does not receive the answer.

Students can also sign up for *electronic discussion groups*, according to their specific interests. In these groups, students will receive lots of e-mails from different Internet users that write their opinions about the topic in question. The student can write his or her message as well and post it online. So, everybody that is part of the group will receive, agree or not with it, rewrite or answer again and so on. Most *discussion groups* are free and can be joined or left any time.

2.2 Internet Vocabulary

There are many specific expressions and abbreviations on the Internet. The following is a list of basic, but current vocabulary that students and teachers will constantly find on the WWW and when using e-mail. The words below were adapted from a bigger list of Internet Vocabulary provided by Gitsaki and Taylor (2000). These words – and their meanings - are very useful to the teacher and to the student who are interested in understanding the computer and its systems in a better way.

Internet Vocabulary	Meaning
Data	Information.
Download	To copy information from the Web to your computer.
E-mail	Electronic mail: sending and receiving messages through the Internet.
E-mail address	An address where you can send an e-mail.
E-mail program	Software you can use to send e-mail.
Home page	The first page of a Web site.
The Internet	The world wide network of computer networks.
Internet portal	A Website that allows you to search the Web.
Keyword	A word or words you use with a search engine to find relevant Websites.
Link	Also called "hyperlink". A "live" spot on a Web page. When you click on a link, you can jump from one Web page to another.
Login	The process of identifying yourself to a computer or Website.
Online	Connected to the Internet.
Password	A secret word you have to type to enter a computer system.
Surfing the Web	Exploring many different Websites.
URL	Universal Resource Locator. A Website's address.
Web browser	Software that allows you to search the World Wide Web and look at Web pages.
Web page	An electronic page of information (text, pictures, sound), similar to magazine pages, available on the World Wide Web.
Web search engine	Part of an Internet portal that allows you search the Web using keywords.
Website	A collection of Web pages with a title.
The World Wide Web	Also called "WWW" or the "Web". The part of the Internet where Web pages from people all over the world are available for viewing.

2.3 Interesting sites for teachers and students

There are many interesting sites on the Web designed specifically for teachers and students of English. Despite of that, another enormous quantity of them can be adapted and used in the English classroom. This is a sample of what a teacher or a student can use in order to improve the process of teaching and learning the English language.

a) National search engine sites

www.radaruol.com.br

www.buscaweb.com.br

www.aonde.com.br

b) International search engine sites

www.altavista.com
www.yahoo.com
www.google.com
www.lycos.com
www.excite.com
www.hotbot.com
www.webcrawler.com

c) Free E-mail addresses

Eudora: www.eudoramail.com
Hotmail: www.hotmail.com
Yahoo: www.yahoo.com

d) Encyclopaedias and dictionaries

Britannica online: www.britannica.com
Dictionary.com: www.dictionary.com
Merriam-Webster dictionary: www.m-w.com

e) Newspapers, magazines and television

BBC: www.bbc.co.uk
CNN: www.cnn.com
FOX news: www.foxnews.com
Seventeen: www.seventeen.com
The Times: www.nytimes.com
The Washington Post: www.washingtonpost.com
USA Today: www.usatoday.com

f) Grammar exercises, general English activities and games

1000 ways: www.1000ways.com.br
Better English: www.better-english.com
Dave Sperling's ESL Cafe: www.eslcafe.com
English town: www.englishtown.com
Lingolex: www.lingolex.com

g) Musical electronic cards

Be mine greetings: www.bemine.com
Bluemountain: www.bluemountain.com

h) Curiosities

British Tourist Authority: www.visitbritain.com

Disney: www.disney.com

FIFA: www.fifa.com

Funny.com: www.funny.com

Hollywood: www.hollywood.com

Love Poems: www.weddings.co.uk/info/poem.htm

LuckNet: www.lucknet.com

Lyrics: www.lyrics.ch

Project Gutenberg: www.Gutenberg.net

TESOL: www.tesol.edu

The Academy Awards - official site of the Oscars: www.oscar.com

The Weather Channel: www.weather.com

CONCLUSION

Language learning is, above all, a very human experience and so, human teachers will be always needed in the classroom. Computers will never replace the people involved in the educational process, but they can be part of it, as another extra resource that is in favour of the teacher and the learners. Students generally like computers and feel really motivated when using these machines and this is why, if well prepared, computer activities can mediate and emphasize the learning experience.

The Internet, in particular, is a resourceful tool to be used in all areas, but mainly by educators, as it offers to its users information, culture, fun, opportunities of getting in touch and exchange ideas with other people, curiosities, knowledge about the world and much more. Specifically, the World Wide Web can help English teachers and English learners to improve the quality of their teaching and learning, being a special partner to the ones who face language as a system for the expression of meaning, that is, for interaction and communication, in a way that the structure of the language is not considered as something isolated, but as an important aspect that reflects its functional use.

In this context, the Internet can be a very good ally of the English communicative teacher and his or her students. First, because the Web represents a rich source of authentic material, as the majority of what is on it has been written in English. Secondly, because the content of the Web is related to the real life, that is, language is not artificial, but used in context. Thirdly, because of the possibility of negotiating meaning and interacting in the target language with native speakers or other students of English from different places. Next, because of the respect to the individuality of each learner (the Internet provides, at the same place, sound, images, text and movement, elements that can benefit different styles of learning. Furthermore, the Internet respects the pace of each learner, that can carry out the activity without pressure. When using an Internet exercise, teachers have time to be more attentive to learners' reactions and feelings). Finally, because the Web has lots of different options to develop the linguistic abilities and can be used as a permanent tool of improvement.

Students become more comfortable when surfing the Internet as they understand that it is a vast resource that can be used not only to develop linguistic abilities, but also for gathering information of other areas of knowledge. Discovering that the Internet is useful for their lives, students are more responsible for their own learning, as the computer encourages their initiative and autonomy.

However, to take advantage from the Internet, teachers and students must be prepared to use it. They must learn how to send e-mails, to navigate and also how to evaluate the information they find there in terms of validity, reliability and also in terms of relevance to the topic. This necessity requires knowing how to use search engines, Web browsers and comprehension of the Internet technical terms. Despite of that, Internet activities require much time to be prepared and accomplished. The information is all on the Web, but to use it, it is necessary to look for it, being patient and persistent. Moreover, problems with the Net itself or with speed connection can occur and interfere in the success of the classroom. Educational institutions should provide Internet workshops to their teachers and students in order to help and encourage them to use this technology.

Although this paper presents just the beginning of a bigger discussion that can be done about the effectiveness of the Internet for English teaching and learning purposes, it is possible to stress that the use of this technology in education has a positive impact in the way students learn. The Internet is a powerful communication medium which can enhance and diversify a second language curriculum, motivating students and facilitating language learning, throughout collaboration and engagement.

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