Virtual Forums: A Pedagogical Tool for Collaboration and Learning in Teacher Education *

Explorando el valor pedagógico de los foros virtuales y los blogs para promover la colaboración y el aprendizaje: una experiencia de formación del profesorado

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Abstract

Implementing technological tools in EFL classes has not been easy for language teachers, they often struggle to make class activities consistent with the curriculum, policies, students' needs and likes and lately, with computer and internet-based ICTs. The problem regularly is that EFL teachers do not possess the pedagogical and technological knowledge to use technological tools to foster communication and interaction among students to learn collaboratively. This study deals with a teacher education experience in which tools such as blogs, learning software, e-mail, forums and internet-based tools were used to improve EFL learning and teaching. Data were gathered from the group of EFL teachers in two phases: the first phase included participants' planning, discussion, and implementation of a pedagogical project for young EFL learners; the second phase consisted of the participants' reporting and evaluating their performance using forums and blogs with their students. The study demonstrated that teacher education experiences are crucial for teacher learning to integrate the use of forums and blogs in the EFL Curriculum. It also showed that the use of blogs and forums requires addressing language pedagogy from a perspective that values communication, collaboration and participation as central elements of learning.

Key Words: teacher education, EFL pedagogy with blogs and virtual forums, collaboration and participation for learning.

Resumen

La implementación de herramientas tecnológicas en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera no ha sido fácil para los profesores de idiomas, quienes a menudo tienen dificultades para realizar actividades de clase coherentes con el plan de estudios, las políticas educativas, las necesidades de los estudiantes y últimamente, con las TIC que se encuentran en internet. El problema es que los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera, en su mayoría, no poseen los conocimientos pedagógicos y tecnológicos para utilizar las herramientas apropiadas que puedan fomentar la comunicación y la interacción entre los estudiantes para aprender colaborativamente. Este estudio trata de una experiencia de formación docente en el que herramientas como los blogs, software de aprendizaje, e-mail, foros y herramientas tomadas de internet se utiliza para mejorar el aprendizaje y la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera. Los datos fueron recogidos a partir de la participación del grupo de profesores en dos fases: la primera fase consiste en la planeación, discusión y ejecución de un proyecto pedagógico para los niños que aprenden el inglés como lengua extranjera, la segunda fase consistió en la información dada por los participantes con la presentación de informes y evaluación de su desempeño por medio de foros y blogs con sus alumnos. El estudio demostró que las experiencias de formación docente son cruciales para el aprendizaje docente para integrar el uso de los foros y los blogs en el currículo de inglés como lengua extranjera. También mostró que en el uso de blogs y foros es necesario abordar la pedagogía del lenguaje desde una perspectiva que valora la comunicación, colaboración y participación como elementos centrales del aprendizaje.

Palabras Claves: formación de docentes, Enseñanza del Ingles como lengua extranjera, usando foros virtuales y blogs.

Introduction

In Colombia, like in many other countries, there is a growing interest in using and implementing technology in educational contexts and in analyzing the contributions for school learning. Documents like Ley General de Educación (1994) and Visión Colombia Segundo Centenario (2005) state the importance of the use of mass media and electronic devices for the purpose of giving educational opportunities to all Colombian citizens regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic class. Schools and universities in Colombia are promoting the use of virtual platforms such as Moodle and blackboard among students from different majors. This study deals with a teacher education experience in which tools such as blogs, learning software, e-mail, forums and internet-based tools were used to improve EFL learning and teaching.

Implementing technological tools in EFL classes has not been easy for language teachers, they often struggle to make the activities for classes consistent with the curriculum, policies, students' needs and likes and lately, with computer and internet-based ICTs. The problem regularly is that EFL teachers do not possess the pedagogical and technological knowledge to use technological tools to foster communication and interaction among students to learn collaboratively. This study addresses that concern by providing teachers with pedagogical and technological experiences to successfully implement the use of blogs and forums to promote EFL students´ literacy.

In this study, ten Colombian EFL[1] teachers participated as users of the virtual forum www.ourdigitalculture.org, a space provided by University of Dundee, Scotland through the tool project forum during a teacher education experience carried out during an academic semester. The purpose is to describe the way teachers gained insights about the pedagogical potential of blogs and forums for language learning, engaged in activities in the virtual forum and planned and implemented pedagogical projects using blogs and forums with their students in their EFL classrooms.

The ten EFL in-service teachers participating in the study were enrolled in a graduate course at a public university in Bogotá. They gained insights about the pedagogical potential of the use of blogs in EFL learning through extensive reading and reflection they were required to do for the graduate course. Teachers were asked to post their reflections about the readings weekly in a space designed as a forum where instructors posed key questions to guide the discussion of readings.

Along with the theoretical reflections about readings, the participating teachers were enrolled in a practical module conducted by another instructor to design pedagogical activities that promoted interaction among students and to learn technological hints about how to create blogs, video clips, search and upload videos, audio, etc. and to think realistically about how these pedagogical and technological activities would fit their educational context and teaching and learning goals. The planning and implementation of the pedagogical projects was structured to be carried out in dyads. The 10 teachers were paired by grade level and were asked to coordinate the pedagogical activities they wanted to propose as a project for their EFL students in their two institutions.

The following section introduces there key concepts that supported the teacher education experience carried out with the group of EFL teachers. They are the use of internet- based ICTs in education, collaboration in online

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learning environments, and teacher professional development.

Theoretical considerations

Computer and internet based tools are thought to be useful in language classes due to its potential to enhance communication, literacy, and other learning skills. They can be used to help students interact with different people, facilitate knowledge acquisition, and increase motivation towards language learning. Warschauer (1999) argues that technology, and specifically the computer, "was designed to play several roles, corresponding to several notions of apprenticeship learning. First, it would be a medium of communication for apprenticeship learning between teacher and students, allowing more teacher guidance and individual student reflection" (p .47). Thus, computers and lately internet development referred to as information and communication technologies (ICTs) have had greater impact in the way teachers and students interact. However, the emergence of ICTs and its use for educational purposes has generated tension among teachers because of the challenges they pose to have knowledge and skills to be used appropriately.

These tensions teachers can experience when including computer and internet tools in their classrooms has been studied and documented by authors like Caballero et al. (2007) who reviewed several studies regarding the use of these ICTs by teachers in Colombia and other countries. Their report highlights the importance of looking at the processes teachers go through when preparing lessons and exploring the pedagogical potential of ICTs. The study emphasized the need to investigate the ways teachers use forums, blogs, chats or online software in their classrooms to promote learning and how they handle problems.

The challenges that teachers face when implementing ICTs rely on common concerns that have emerged during the transition from traditional pedagogical strategies to new ones supported by technology. In agreement with Littlejohn and Pegler (2007), there are concerns about "quality, control and change … that have persisted because even where we recognize that good practice exists, it is not usually easy to transfer what we learn into our own teaching and support of learners; it is not clear why this is good practice." The concerns summarized by Littlejohn and Pegler exemplify how ICTs policies generate challenges for the academic community and why the implementation of some tools demand trained and prepared teachers. Recent online development has generated new ways to communicate and interact with others as well as innovative ways to share and look for information, thus, people need to learn to use the new technological devices available and become critical about the choices they make in regards to why and when to use them as regular practices.

One of the aspects to consider is the way recent internet and virtual technological devices change practices such as reading and writing and how the different possibilities people use these devices has transformed the concept of literacy. Wollman-Bonilla (2003) provides a clear example of how the use of technology changes the way people write. The author states how on-line communication "might encourage quick, brief, off-the-cuff messages like turns in a conversation, rather than the slower pace and more deliberate care associated with handwriting letter" (p. 127). Wollman-Bonilla points out that the writing activity changes because the needs are different; when writing an e-mail it is necessary to write short, clear texts so the reader can understand without spending too much time on the task.

Uses of ICTs in Education

Since internet technological developments started to change society in ways such as how

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friends interact, how people access information, and how a class is taught, theorists and researchers began to work on the analysis of how technology affects certain practices in education. Blogs and forums have been extensively used to promote learners' engagement through innovative learning environments.

The virtual space, where this study was carried out, included blogs and forums produced by the ten in-service teachers. Thorne (2008) defines blogs and blogging as "terms describing use of a web application that displays serial entries with date and time stamps. Most blogs include a comments feature that allows visitors to post responses" (p. 331). Besides Thorne, authors like Cummins (2008), Warschauer (1999), Quintero (2008), and Kern (2006), among others, describe the positive effect of the use of blogs on teaching and the learning process. Blogs are an important tool that enhances reflection and sense of belonging and responsibility towards class activities.

The virtual space that served as the context for this study is a virtual environment that offers tools such as blogs and forums to enhance communication among learners and teachers form different schools in different countries. It is a learning environment where participants interact and collaborate. Holtham and Courtney (2005), as cited by Crook and Cluley (2009), defined a virtual platform as "an ICTs mediated space giving access to organized information and resources that learners, individually or in groups, can make use of in order to improve their understanding of a given subject" (p. 200). The platform www.ourdigitalculture.org is a virtual learning environment that requires students and teachers to have passwords and user IDs to access the tools available. Once they are registered, participants can explore and participate in the debate forums, the weekly reflections (that are also used as forums) or the personal blogs.

Since technological developments started to change social, theorists and researchers also began to work on the analysis of how technology affects certain practices such as education. As a result, terms such as e-learning have emerged. According to Littlejohn and Pegler (2007), it is difficult to precise a definition for e-learning due to the use of several words that refer to the implementation of technological tools in education as complementary or as the basis for all the academic interaction, however "e-learning is increasingly and umbrella term used to describe them all" (p.16).

The virtual forum was the space provided for the participants in the study to interact, discuss and reflect upon pedagogical issues raised from their experiences when reading and using different internet-based tools in their classes. Ardila and Bedoya (2006) stated that a virtual forum is mainly a means of authentic communication that is used as a tool to promote participation. Similarly, Quintero (2008) highlighted the use of forums and other Internet-based tools as resources that can be used in academic contexts to enhance students and teachers' participation and interaction; they also suggested that these types of tools ease learning and teaching experiences.

Forums, as well as e-mails, blogs, and other technological tools, provide teachers and students with the opportunity to have a real audience and a purposeful reason for participating. Being given these advantages, interaction is crucial and in the same way collaboration is needed if the interest is to foster real communication and interaction for pedagogical purposes. Palloff and Pratt (2005) present an approximation of the need of collaboration when considering virtual learning environments. The authors argue that "collaborative activity also helps to develop a sense of community, thus enabling the creation of an environment in which further collaborative

work can happen" (p. 5). A school and a class are communities in the sense that people can interact and share common interests.

Collaboration

Collaboration is established as the path that allows teachers to discuss and evaluate multiple options for implementing internet-based tools in the classroom. According to O'Donnell (2006), "collaboration has the potential to increase the quality of discourse, provide alternative explanations for the phenomenon, generate multiple solutions to problems, and allow for the inclusion of many different kinds of skills in solving problems" (p. 4). Through collaboration teachers enrich their knowledge acquisition process as well as that of their peers. Collaboration does not happen just because of participation. For collaboration to take place, critical and serious reflections have to be made about others' comments or contributions, problem solving skills need to be shown as a community skill where all the participants discuss and reflect upon the possible and best ways to solve situations.

Collaboration implies participants' reflection and their need to learn about the topic under discussion; at the same time, with their contribution, participants help others' understanding of the subject. Collaboration provides a different perspective of the issues teachers deal with in their workplaces when implementing internet-based tools where interaction and responses are necessary. As stated by Warschauer (1999), "the computer [and computer mediated communication] was designed to play several roles, corresponding to several notions of apprenticeship learning" (p. 47). The effective use of the tools is presented as a social and interactive activity; there is a need for co-construction of spaces that become valuable through collaboration. The explorations, understandings, evaluations, and responses to ideas become potent opportunities for teachers' voices to be heard, and thus for teachers to be empowered.

Collaboration entails active participation by learners and instructors. Authors like Palloff and Pratt (2005) state that, "before including collaborative activity in an online course, the instructor should conduct a critical self-reflection to determine how comfortable he or she truly is with the activity. An instructor who is less comfortable with empowering students to take control of their learning process is less likely to experience success in collaborative work" (p. 30). For the instructor to know if he or she is comfortable, s/he needs to know the tool and how and to what extent it enhances interaction and participation. The first to know the tool and its functions must be the teacher.

Teachers´ expertise of ICT tools they have available is paramount; they need the expertise to feel confident. In this regard, Johnson (2009) considers that "teacher education programs must assist teachers in the process of making their everyday concepts explicit, of reflecting on and critiquing them and of the beginning to think in concepts about aspects of their teaching which are relevant to their daily professional lives" (p. 64). The current social conditions where technological development is an everyday event have brought new generations that grow and live with technological tools as part of the nature of their world. Thus, teacher education programs that aim at preparing teachers to educate future generations are expected to create opportunities for teachers to learn to integrate ICTs in the curriculum.

The Need for Teacher Professional Development

The generational gap that exists today between teachers and students in regards to the use of ICTs has raised different concerns that need

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to be addressed to help overcome the educational issues this situation presents. Teacher education programs are required to provide teachers with pedagogical and technological tools to address the challenges of ICT use for learning in schools. This entails providing teachers with professional development experiences that prepare them to make decisions, design courses, and create online learning environments for students.

Teacher education is one of the aspects that national policies need to consider to successfully implement internet-based ICTs in schools. Including these tools in the EFL curriculum implies its importance as a context and culturally situated practice. Working with ICTs in a classroom might be seen as a single experience; however it takes place in different ways for each participant. As Woods (1996) establishes, "What on the surface seems to be the same event may be viewed by the participants as being different because its relation to their goals, intentions, assumptions and beliefs" (p. 17). In a country like Colombia, the implementation and use of internet-based tools, connectivity and the availability of hardware vary according to the context; these differences influence the level of education, the access to internet, the use of software and hardware and the preparation of teachers in regards to the pedagogical use of computer and internet-based tools.

There are other aspects that may interfere with this process, including teacher education quality and availability. Cherednichenk and Kruger (2002) argue that, "teacher education is needed for the development of a socially just society in which teachers, and student- teachers too, play a leading role in creating opportunities for all young people to participate, contribute to and lead social reform"(p. 67). The incomplete educational and professional development of teachers is a problematic area that needs to be considered because teachers are the agents that plan and adapt the implementation of the tools.

Teachers are important stakeholders in the process of implementing educational policy. Teachers need to connect the policies with the lived experiences of their students. Using technology as a pedagogical resource transforms traditional ways of learning and teaching that may still be implemented in schools. The transformation cannot be achieved by the addition of tools alone; changing the tools implies transforming teachers' and students' practices as well. The necessity of using computers, the Internet, and other technological tools in meaningful and useful ways requires careful curricular consideration. Relevant teacher training becomes imperative in the creation of opportunities to improve the use of technological devices for communication and learning in schools.

Methodology

This research project is a descriptive and interpretative case study carried out to document the unique ways the participating teachers of EFL used their learning experience as graduate students to create a virtual collaborative learning environment for their students. The graduate seminar emphasized collaborative projects in order to better, discover and implement the pedagogical potential of ICT tools such as blogs and forums. One of the key aspects of the seminar was its goal of developing a critical perspective of the theory about ICTs in pedagogical experiences. Through the use of the mentioned ICTs, the ten in-service teachers communicated, collaborated, and interacted for the purpose of exploring the pedagogical potential of ICTs.

Context and Participants

The context for the research project was the virtual learning space www.ourdigitalculture. org provided by the University of Dundee in Scotland. It hosts an average of 2,500 participants from different countries around the world from

elementary, middle, secondary, and university schools. The intention was to use digital tools in the virtual space to promote students' collaborative learning and participation. The University of Dundee, Scotland created the virtual space. Its main objective is to provide a safe

online environment for students and teachers to interact and to learn about other cultures and languages. The virtual space hosted schools and universities from Colombia, Chile, Canada, and Scotland. The following image shows the main page of the platform:

Figure 1. Virtual Forum Home Page

Students and teachers have their own spaces inside the forum. Each teacher-participant planned, designed, and implemented the pedagogical activities according to the specific learning needs of their students. Participants

had personal blogs and forums, and everybody who had a user ID and password could read and comment on what the other members of the online community had written.
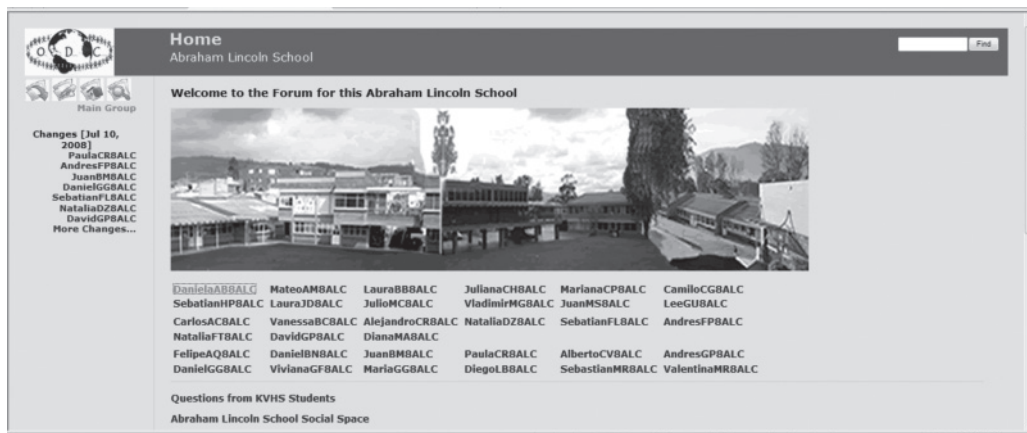

Figure 2. Forum and Participants

Among several institutions that used the virtual space, two programs from Universidad

Distrital Francisco Jose de Caldas (Bogota, Colombia) actively participated in this study.

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They were the initial teacher preparation program for English teachers and the graduate program in Applied Linguistics to TEFL. The participants of the study were ten in-service teachers, four men and six women taking the graduate course on ICTs.

Although the participants came from heterogeneous contexts, they shared the same interest and willingness to explore computer and internet-based ICTs as a resource for their teaching practices. Five teachers worked with elementary and secondary school learners in private and public schools and the other five worked with young adults and adults in private universities in Bogotá.

Data Collection

Two data sets were gathered for analysis in this study. One consisted of the debates, the weekly reflections, and the personal blogs from the ten in-service teachers that were archived in the project forum virtual space. The second set of data was an online survey administered to the participating teachers that included an interview.

The data produced by the ten participating teachers posted in the virtual forum in the form of discussions, debates, and personal blogs, were the main sources of information for this study. They provided samples that showed how participants collaborated and discussed theory constructs proposed in the seminar. The discussion of the participants in the virtual space became a primary data source that was the starting point for the analysis. Their participation in the virtual forum took place over a period of sixteen weeks and the questionnaire and interviews were applied over a period of five weeks.

The focus of the analysis was mainly on two aspects: how the teacher education experience in the virtual forum shaped teachers' engagement in classroom projects and the perceptions related to the outcome of the pedagogical proposal that could help EFL students improve and ease their learning process.

Findings

During the analysis of the data two categories were identified: A continuum on Teacher Professional Development (TPD) on computer and internet- based ICT practices and Blogs and forums a useful pedagogical tools. These two categories are described and analyzed in the following section. The use of these ICTs was discussed and analyzed by the participants based on their written comments in a virtual forum. The two categories that are explained in the following section were identified after a careful analysis of data from the different research instruments used.

A continuum on TPD on ICT practices

This category makes reference to the way teachers participated in the forum and the steps they took when sharing and discussing the implementation of a pedagogical project with their students. The term continuum is used here to refer to the process the ten in-service teachers went through during the teacher education experience. The category was named as a continuum due to the fact that teachers´ process of understanding concepts and uses of ICT tools evolved throughout time. Teachers began by reflecting upon the use of forums and blogs with their students, after, they talked about imagined realities to approximate the implementation, and last they planned the intervention. The continuum is composed of three moments of teacher collaboration in the posting from the forum: teacher reflection, imagined realities, and planning.

In the early stage of participation, the teachers reflected upon different issues regarding the pedagogical use of ICTs in their classes. Their reflections focused on their role as language teachers to implement technological tools in their classrooms. The following reflection by

participant number 6 exemplifies how the teacher perceived technological tools and the reasons for using them as a pedagogical tool.

> "In my personal opinion, I have found technological tools very engaging and enjoyable. I have noticed that when I use an interactive game, visit an English page, chat with my sister or answer my emails time goes so fast that I am not aware of it. Although I have been physically alone, I do not feel loneliness. I really think people need to be pushed toward changes in order to acquire knowledge or the ability to do things. For instance when public teachers were forced to download payment accounts from the Internet. It was terrible for some of them but in the end they learned and use this tool." (Participant 6, weekly reflections, Feb 27/2008 04:08AM)

The excerpt provides an example of how some concepts evolved after some weeks of participation and discussion of theory in the virtual space. In the first excerpt the criticism about teaching practices in Colombia was evident; two weeks later she moved from the critics to the recognition of positive effects of the use of ICTs on professional and personal practices.

The second step in the continuum was identified as imagined realities due to the nature of the posts. Teachers shared insights about factors such as alternatives they had for overcoming possible difficulties, how to engage students when working through virtual learning environments, and how to include ICTs in the EFL curriculum successfully. This step was called imagined realities because teachers discussed issues based on imagined contexts where technology was to be implemented in an EFL class. Thus, they took into consideration positive and negative potential outcomes to try to foresee doable actions they could follow in hypothetical situations. In this stage, teachers used their theoretical background and prior experience to elaborate the imagined context.

Offering alternatives to overcome possible difficulties was the first aspect considered by teachers when talking about EFL settings and the implementation of ICTs as pedagogical resources. One of the common concerns that teachers had was the lack of material as well as lack of human resources. The former dealt with the fact that in a considerable number of schools in Colombia there are not enough economic resources to buy the equipment students need to be able to use technological devices in the classroom.

In the imagined situation of having students use technology in the EFL class, the ten teachers contemplated possible ways to use technology successfully. This was done by analyzing problematic situations and offering possibilities to overcome them. Some of the issues raised in the discussions were students' motivation and engagement towards the virtual activities. Overall, teachers were positive in regards to how virtual spaces created for and by students would increase their motivation and participation. Virtual spaces were considered positive because they invite people to see different types of text, music, and videos and students have the possibility to design what they want to create.

Collaboration became crucial when the participants felt they had reached understanding and new projects were proposed and implemented. The in-service teachers worked together and created a project for their students. The following chart shows the basic information that gives an idea of two of the projects that were developed.

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|	Project 1	Project 2
In- service teachers	2	2
Target Population	University Students. The two in-service teachers worked in two different universities, one public and the other private. Both were teaching introductory language classes.	High School students. In this case the in-service teacher worked with a school in Canada. Her students participated in forums where they interacted with students who wanted to learn Spanish and who helped them learn English.
Type of activities done by the in-service teachers' students	Since the participants' students lived in Bogota, the teachers chose famous local places and typical activities that people from this city do. The teachers found common tasks for students to complete based on common places and activities. Participants' students shared their information in the forums and shared pictures and their written activities.	In this case the in-service teacher suggested her students to discuss and share cultural related information. Her students talked about Bogota and Colombian and discussed social and cultural issues with the students from Canada. Likewise, students from Canada shared the information about the country.
Layout		

Chart 1: Samples of Projects

The creation and implementation of the projects shown in Chart 1 was supported by the collaborative work teachers carried out by dyads. This experience shows how teachers learned together about the implementation of small-scale projects using ICTs in their classroom.

Planning new pedagogical experiences is the third stage in the continuum. In this phase teachers moved from imagined realities to their actual contexts in order to design the intervention and propose the types of activities they could implement and evaluate. This stage of the continuum was documented with data provided by teachers through surveys and interviews. The design and implementation of the intervention that the ten in-service teachers created was a requirement for the seminar. The discussion of readings, reflections, and individual mentoring about how to use ICTs prepared the participating teachers to carry out a pedagogical experience.
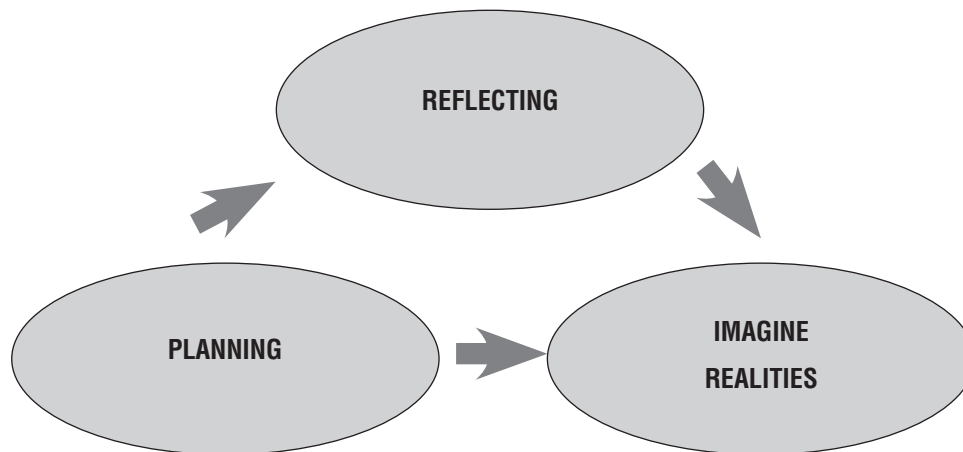
Figure 3. Continuum on teachers' professional development

The subcategory Usefulness of technology was connected to the category continuum on TPD on ICT practices. During the teachers' reflections, the imagined realities, and the planning stages identified in the continuum, the ten in-service teachers made evident their interest and the potential they perceived ICTs could have in their classes. The way teachers perceived ICTs was a pattern identified in all stages of the data analysis and it complemented their reflections about their pedagogical activities, their contexts, and the way they plan the implementation.

Blogs and forums as useful pedagogical tools

In the data there were many ideas that stated positive aspects about the technological tools used. The participants stated that technology is not just a necessity but also a tool that helps them in the process of teaching a second language. Participants highlighted tools such as forums and blogs by highlighting the importance of having an audience when writing or making comments. Forums provide users with the opportunity to write with a purpose. These tools enhance

communication and motivates writers to carefully post their comments because they know they have a reader, the awareness of having readers is called Telepresence. According to Ioannou-Georgiou (2002), "telepresence means the feeling of transmission of the user's presence to another location, allowing the user to act from distance but at the same time giving him or her illusion of actually being present in this other location." (p. 21). Having the feeling of being in other place by using words and images allow students to act in different contexts, and in this way, it allows them to use forums for real interactions, in the case of language learners to use the language for real purposes. The advantage of having a real audience and, in the same way, a real purpose to writing, is the advantage that makes virtual forums so rich and useful.

The comments posted by the participants stated that technology was a key element in teaching and learning processes. Participants also highlighted forum as a tools that enhances students' responsibility, autonomy, and participation in class. By doing so, forums become useful to help students in the learning process; it gives students options to work at their

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own pace. In the interview, Participant 3 talked about her pedagogical experience:

> "I mean in the way that you can see that you teach, teach your students a new way they learn not only in the classes, but, but also in the use of the digital factor. So you see how your students improve the vocabulary, how your students use some things in order to learn to communicate through these tools. For me it was successful because I saw how my students learnt or I see it now because I am working with ICTs." (Interview, Participant 3, April 10th, 2010)

Teachers try to use the available resources in their classrooms, and to do so they need to be skillful at using them. An example of a situation where technology needs to be implemented and teachers have the possibility to help themselves through a teacher education program is the seminar in which the participants of this study took part. This experience shows a way for teachers to understand theory through the implementation of small-scale projects.

Some of the insights and contributions from teachers' in the forum show how using a forum as a medium to communicate enhanced teachers' learning process and reflection about ICTs and their understanding of ICTs new role in the classroom. For teachers to consider including ICTs in the EFL curriculum, careful planning and awareness of students´ reality are considered imperative.

To summarize, the findings presented through two main categories: A continuum on TPD on ICT practices and Blogs and forums as useful pedagogical tool state that the experience in the virtual forum prepared teachers to carry out pedagogical projects using ICTs in the classroom. The study triggered teachers' reflections about the way ICTs can be implemented in the EFL classroom and allowed teachers to recognize the importance and usefulness of having a space where they can collaborate and discuss how to carry out a pedagogical innovation.

Conclusions

The systematic analysis and interpretation of the data through the two categories described leads to the conclusion that a teacher education experience can prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to carry out ICT pedagogical projects. The analysis showed how the dynamics established in the graduate seminar enabled them to appropriate concepts and experiences in regards to their teaching practices and respond to problems they faced. The ten teachers went through a process where theoretical, reflective, and technical-practical components were identified. The theoretical component of the in-service teacher seminar was considered by teachers as input that served as a starting point for understanding and reflecting on the pedagogical uses of ICTs in the language classroom, a source to theoretically frame their pedagogical projects, and a means to critically consider other researchers' points of view. Figure 3 shows the stages of the continuum of teachers' professional development and the process that prepared them to implement ICT pedagogical projects with their students.

The reflections about theory helped the in-service teachers support their comments and pedagogical proposals when working with ICTs. Their participation in the forum showed a growing awareness of the pedagogical potential of ICTs. The awareness was acknowledged first in the early stages of their participation when teachers discussed whether or not ICTs could be a rich source as pedagogical tools. Later, they relied on theory to show how research and authors had argued that ICTs are in fact an innovative and valuable tool that can be used in the EFL

classrooms. Some discussions exemplified the process teachers went through and how their personal experiences and critical perspectives towards ICTs led them to show awareness about how human and technological resources need to be combined to guarantee successful implementations.

Collaboration is a key issue is this study; through collaboration in the virtual forum teachers participated in debates and discussions that were relevant in the development of the forum. From the ten in-service teachers' participation, their reflections and decisions about the pedagogical intervention were identified. Decisions such as which tools to use, how to implement them, and what problems they had to solve were adapted to the curriculum.

The data collected in the study also demonstrated that teacher education experiences are crucial for teacher learning to integrate the use of forums and blogs in the EFL curriculum. It also showed that the use of blogs and forums requires addressing language pedagogy from a perspective that values communication, collaboration and participation as central elements of learning.

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