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Incorporation of Blogging in a Middle School Spanish Classroom

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Abstract

This action research examined the impact of incorporating blogging into a middle school classroom and the effect it had on student motivation and their ability to use conversational Spanish. The research took place with a class of eleven seventh grade students in an urban charter school. Students were given vocabulary and grammar instruction during the week and then asked to synthesize the knowledge that they have gained into a post on Kidblog. Students then commented on or asked questions about their classmate’s posts. Data was collected using a pre- and post- research proficiency rubric, a blog portfolio, a grading checklist and a student attitude questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that as students grew more accustomed to using the blog as a way to communicate, their language structures increased in complexity and length. The feedback on their attitude questionnaire also indicated that most students were motivated by the use of technology and felt confident in their ability to communicate their ideas using Kidblog. Future research would show how incorporating other social media into the classroom would affect their use of Spanish outside of the classroom.

Keywords: Blogging, Foreign Language, Spanish
Foreign language instruction is guided by five standards that were developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in 1996: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. In addition to incorporating these standards into our curriculum, foreign language teachers also strive to present instruction in a culturally authentic and relevant manner. One traditional method to evaluate student understanding of the language is to have the students create a skit that they present in front of the class. In my experience, students put the minimum amount of effort into their conversations and pay very little to no attention to the language their classmates’ are producing. The question is how do we do teach these standards in a way that is meaningful and engaging to our students?

Cell phones, tablets, and laptops have become ubiquitous in our society. With the influx of technology, more and more people are turning to it as a preferred method of conversation. Our students use technology to communicate with each other every day. From Snapchat to texting and everything in between, they are constantly on their devices to stay connected with their peers. In contrast, they fail to make a connection from their language learning to the technology that is making our world an ever interconnected place. This technology has the capability of bringing once far away countries into our living rooms through the web. Being able to communicate in more than one language opens more doors for students to information that is closed to the monolingual population. In my experience as a foreign language teacher, I have found that students are reluctant to use the language skills that we are practicing in class to communicate with one another. I began to wonder if incorporating the technology that students are accustomed to using would help them get over this reluctance.

Previous research has found benefits to students who use blogs to express their ideas in a
foreign language. Blogs are a platform that provides students with an authentic audience for their language use and requires them to actively think about what message they are trying to convey to that audience (Montero-Fleta & Peréz Sabater, 2010). The literature shows that the use of blogging in a foreign language classroom creates an environment of individualized and student-centered learning (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Blogging also develops students’ cultural competency while improving their writing and vocabulary skills in a secondary language (Cox, 2012). The ability to connect to the blogs of native speakers provides students the opportunity to make connections outside of the classroom, therefore, meeting the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) community standard “Learners use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world.” (ACTFL, 2012). When using blogs to communicate, students make personal connections with their readers in real-time.

The setting for this action research is a small, urban charter school that is divided into two campuses, the high school (grades 8-12) and the middle school (grades 5-7). The middle school has less than 100 students. I conducted my research with a seventh-grade Spanish class that has 11 students with four females and seven males. Ninety percent of the students identify their race as white, with ten percent identifying as African-American. None of the students spoke Spanish as their primary language, two of the students spoke French as a home language. None of the students receive special services and, therefore, no special accommodations needed to be used.

I designed my research to measure both the motivation to use the language and the increase in language skills. I used a variety of methods to collect data on whether or not blogging
is an effective way to develop students’ foreign language skills. My study started with students completing a previously created proficiency rubric taken from https://resourcesfromgreg.wikispaces.com/file/view/JCPS+Rubric+Color.pdf. I chose to implement this particular rubric because it has been adapted from the speaking and performance standards developed by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language but puts those standards in language that is easy for my students to understand. The desired outcome is that by the end of the study, students will have grown at least one level on the rubric. Students will then be posting an entry to our class Kidblog website once a week. They will be creating an individual post using the vocabulary and grammar structures discussed that week in class. Posts will be evaluated according to the proficiency rubric. At the end of the study, students will again complete the proficiency rubric. They will also take a student attitude survey at the end of the course.

This action research focuses on the following question: Does incorporating blogging into a middle school foreign language classroom increase student motivation and improve students ability to use the Spanish language in a conversation?

**Literature Review**

The implementation of Web 2.0 tools, such as Facebook, YouTube, blogs, and wikis has transformed people from passive observers of the information available on the internet to becoming contributors as well (O’Reilly, 2016). Blogs, in particular, have allowed people the opportunity to express personal thoughts and ideas. As citizens of this global community, students need to learn how to use the appropriate reading and writing skills to communicate in other languages and use those languages to make connections with others around the world.
Incorporating blogging into the curriculum is a way to bring 21st-century learning into a foreign language classroom and allows students to make these connections. (Thorne & Payne, 2005).

The internet has changed the way people communicate with one another (Thorne & Payne, 2005). Blogs provide students with an authentic audience for their language use and requires them to actively think about what message they are trying to convey to that audience (Montero-Fleta & Peréz Sabater, 2010). The literature shows that the use of blogging in a foreign language classroom creates an environment of individualized and student-centered learning, an atmosphere of cultural awareness, as well as improving students’ writing and vocabulary skills in a secondary language (Cox, 2012; Domalewska, 2014; Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Lai & Li, 2011; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Rahmany, et al., 2013; Thorne & Payne, 2005).

**Rationale for Incorporation of a Blog**

Foreign language students are frequently asked to demonstrate their knowledge of the language through reading and writing (Cox, 2012). These linguistic exercises have traditionally involved reading, translating, and responding to a text excerpt or a teacher generated question (Cox, 2012). Although this method gives students opportunities for memorizing and repeating significant amounts of the language, it does not provide a context for language usage (Domalewska, 2014; Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Lai & Li, 2011; Sun, 2012; Thorne & Payne, 2005). Blogging is an instructional method that provides language practice in a novel way allowing students to write for a real audience which increases student motivation to use the foreign language (Lin, 2015).
Giving students the opportunity to practice a foreign language in real time and with native speakers offers a context for language and culture to be seen as one entity instead of two entirely separate elements of foreign language learning (Cox, 2012; Lai & Li, 2011; Rahmany, et al., 2013). According to Cox (2012), this real time practice grants students the opportunity to make comparisons between their culture and the culture being studied. Domalewska (2014) states, “Since one of the aims of education is to prepare students for the world and competitiveness of workforce, new technology should be incorporated into the modern curriculum” (p. 22). The incorporation of technology and the use of blogs, particularly in a foreign language classroom, provides a real-world context and meaning for student writing. Students can interact with the language and native speakers in a way that is not possible in a traditional foreign language classroom experience (Cox, 2012). This can be done in a variety of ways. Beginning language students can read blogs or flogs (photo logs) written in their native language to learn about the culture being studied (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005). Ducate and Lomicka (2005) also recommend reading blogs about the culture being studied and in the language being studied as another way of increasing awareness of the language.

Using blogs gives students a purpose for learning the language and an opportunity to develop their writing and vocabulary skills (De Almeida Soares, 2008; Lai & Li, 2011; Montero-Fleta & Peréz-Sabeter, 2010). Blogs allow students to create an online presence in the target language and target culture (de Almeida, 2008). It takes their learning of a new language out of the confines of the classroom and allows students to choose the time and place for them to learn real life application (Domalewska, 2014). Blogging turns learning into a social activity (Lai & Li, 2011; Thorne & Payne, 2005). Students can build upon their learning
by taking the information from their language instruction and incorporating it into the new experiences they are exposed to online (Domalewska, 2014).

Domalewska (2014) argued that technology changes the role of the teacher as the sole purveyor of information that is passed on to students. The open nature of a blog allows students an opportunity to choose when and where they learn, work at their pace and discuss topics that interest them (Domalewska, 2014). Montero-Fleta and Pérez-Sabater (2010) stressed, “blogs should not replace face-to-face interaction, instead they may provide a practice environment where students can think, reflect, and create language slowly for a real-life audience” (p. 774).

Numerous studies have shown that students report the use of a blog in a foreign language classroom allows them to use the language more creatively and as a form of self-expression (Lai & Li, 2011; Montero-Fleta & Pérez-Sabater, 2010; Rahmany, et al., 2013; Said, et al., 2013). Instead of the more formal writing style typically seen in foreign language instruction, blogs have allowed students to construct a more informal style, usually used in conversations (Said, et al., 2013). In addition to giving students a context for their writing, blogs create a portfolio of language improvement over a set amount of time (Cox, 2012).

In 1996, The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) developed standards for foreign language learners. The standards fall under the five categories of communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities, providing guidelines for “the lively exchange of ideas, the appreciation and understanding of others’ history, belief systems, ways of interacting, and customs” (Byrnes, 2008, p. 104). Using these standards to develop written and oral communication as well as an understanding of the cultures being studied is an essential part of learning a language (Cox, 2012). Today’s technologies provide
students the portal to make connections to native speakers while giving them an opportunity to use the target language (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005). Language learners need to learn the cultural expectations and customs in using online technologies including how to initiate and maintain a conversation in the virtual world (Lai & Li, 2011).

Web 2.0 tools change the internet from being a thing that users consume to something that they can participate in creating (O’Reilly, 2016). O’Reilly (2016) stated, “If an essential part of Web 2.0 is harnessing collective intelligence, turning the web into a kind of global brain, the blogosphere is the equivalent of constant mental chatter in the forebrain, the voice we hear in all of our heads” (p. 3). Students can collaborate in a way that cannot be reproduced within the walls of the traditional language classroom (Domalewska, 2014). A benefit of using these technologies is that many students can simultaneously work on a document (Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs., 2012). The ability to use collaborative technologies allows students to provide feedback to one another in real time and thus improve their collaborative writing product; transforming the writing activity from something that is done alone to something that is to be shared and developed with others (Kessler, et al., 2012).

In the vein of ‘two heads are better than one,’ this ability to work together creates a scaffolding activity for the students where each student can build on each other’s knowledge (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Kessler, 2012). A study conducted by Lundstrom and Baker (2009) showed that all types of peer feedback were beneficial to language learners, but the peer editors that gave feedback benefited more because they gained the ability to evaluate writing critically and identify grammatical and organizational issues. Having a real audience for their writing created a purpose for the writing activity and caused students to engage deeper in the writing
Students who used a blog to practice their writing skills thought more about the content of their writing and spent more time analyzing the grammar structures of their post (Said, et al., 2013). Foreign language students who posted their writings online were more likely to make their own grammatical corrections than those students using pencil and paper to communicate their ideas (Lai & Li, 2011). Domalewska (2014) showed that giving and receiving feedback to peers gives students confidence in their language skills. When a student was paired with another student, it allowed for more instances of corrective feedback than when working with a small group or whole class, enabling each student to show their strengths thereby generating a positive effect on the student’s attitudes and the language they used (Thorne & Payne, 2005; Rahmany, et al., 2013).

Today’s youth are digital natives and are often more comfortable communicating by electronic means and should be allowed the opportunity to use technology to communicate and collaborate (Kessler, et al., 2012; Thorne & Payne, 2005). Most writing activities take place as a solitary activity, but blogs are a more interactive experience (Alm, 2008; Kessler, et al., 2012). According to Alm (2008), when students engaged in an online collaborative group, the social aspect of learning a language increased the participants’ language abilities.

In addition to the capacity to work simultaneously and collaboratively on a piece of writing, Sun (2010) examined the idea that blogs create an online community where participants experience a sense of belonging and can communicate with one another instantly and in a supportive environment. Students can discuss common interests and ideas in a manner that is not possible in the traditional classroom (Sun, 2010). According to Sun and Chang (2012), working with a partner on a blog allows for students to expand their knowledge and language
development. Blogs provide a framework for students’ language and ideas that they can readily share with others (Thorne & Payne, 2005). A traditional writing assignment intended only to be read by the teacher, does not give students the opportunity to write in such a public manner (Sun, 2010).

**Benefits of Using a Blog**

The literature indicated myriad advantages to having foreign language learners engage in blogging in the foreign language classroom (Cox, 2012; Domalewska, 2014; Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Kessler, et al., 2012; Lai & Li, 2001; Montera-Fleta & Pérez-Santera, 2010; Thorne & Payne, 2005). Writing a blog gives meaningful context and structure for the language and gives students a tool for greater language development (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005). Ducate and Lomicka (2005) explained that students can construct meanings of the language by choosing topics that interest them, therefore allowing students to be in control of their learning. Using a blog gave students a different perspective on how and why we need to learn a foreign language. Blogging sets a purpose to develop their foreign language writing skills by giving students the opportunity to write for individual expression and for a real audience instead of just fulfilling a class assignment (De Almeida, 2008; Lai & Li, 2011; Montera-Fleta & Pérez-Santera, 2010; Said, et al., 2013). Lai and Li (2010) stated, “engaging learners in technology-mediated communication environments helped them construct a positive L2 identity, which indirectly facilitated their language development by promoting ownership and agency” (p. 506).

Blogging provides students with a method to practice the language on a daily basis in a meaningful and interactive manner (Montero-Fleta & Pérez-Sabater, 2010). When writing for their blog, students increased their use of the language and used more sophisticated language in
the online setting than in face-to-face classroom settings (Thorne & Payne, 2005). Sun (2010), on the other hand, argued that students used simpler language structures when writing on a blog, but they still were able to improve their grammar usage and structure. Not only does blogging give the students greater opportunities to practice the language, but it also positively influences student attitudes towards writing. Kessler (2012) wrote, “Students appreciated various aspects of the Web-based collaborative writing activity and felt that they worked together successfully and that each member played an important role. They also felt that their contributions were valued and they valued the contributions of their respective group members” (p.106). In their 2005 study, Thorne and Payne showed students prefer writing a blog to using more traditional forms of writing.

Blogging allows for effective and social use of the language which is constantly being changed and updated (Sun, 2010). The ability of a blog to be read around the world gives students the opportunity to communicate with native speakers as well as providing students with an insight into the culture being studied (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005). De Almeida Soares (2008) asserted students can “not only practice their foreign language skills but also, and most importantly, share cultural knowledge, feelings, and thoughts. The learning experience becomes more fun and concrete as it involves an authentic use of the target language for real communication” (p. 520). This connection creates a positive influence on the language produced (Thorne & Payne, 2005). Students that connected with speakers of a foreign language increased their understanding not only of the language but also of the culture (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005). This connection created a willingness to write in the second language versus producing language using the traditional pencil and paper methods (Montero-Fleta and Pérez-Sabater, 2010).
Other Ramifications of Implementing Blogs

While the implementation of Web 2.0 tools in a foreign language classroom changes the educational landscape for the language learner, it also drastically changes the role of the teacher from the traditional educational model where the teacher is the purveyor of knowledge, and the students are passive receptacles of information (Thorne & Payne, 2005). For the blogging experience to be successful, it is imperative that the teacher designs the online writing tasks in such a manner so that they are meaningful to the learners. Students need to feel that there is a legitimate reason for completing the task (Lai & Li, 2011). In addition to creating authentic meaning for the writing task, the purpose of the post and the criteria needs to be clearly communicated to the students, making sure that students are aware of what should and should not be posted (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004).

Another important consideration for the teacher is that in to make this a successful experience for the students, the teacher should be an active participant in the students’ discussions. The role of the educator is moderating the posts and encouraging students to be involved in the online conversations (Domalewska, 2014). Teachers need to spend more time in making sure what is being posted is appropriate as well as providing technical support to their students (Lin, 2015). The added responsibility of individual blogs might be too much information for the teacher to manage. De Almeida Soares (2008) suggested an alternative could be to have students work on a collaborative class blog instead of having each student have an individual blog.

Blogging provides the student control over their linguistic development (Lai & Li, 2011). Instead of being the exclusive authority to correct grammatical errors, the role of the language
teacher shifts to providing students with the opportunity to write and communicate in an authentic fashion and give students power over their self-expression (De Almeida Soares, 2008). When using a blog, students are the ones that are responsible for editing their posts without the intercession of the teacher (Sun, 2010).

While the literature has outlined many benefits to students using a blog to practice writing in a foreign language, it also describes several negative aspects to consider when implementing blogging (Lin, 2015; Alm, 2008; Domalewsk, 2014). The first of these obstacles is the fact that students may experience anxiety or embarrassment when writing for an audience beyond the classroom (Lin, 2015). Alm (2008) stated that students that are less proficient in the language may be afraid to expose their weaknesses to a larger audience. Another drawback to the implementation of blogging is that students may experience difficulty in offering appropriate feedback on their peers’ language construction (Domalewska, 2014). The platform itself may be a source of anxiety to students. Their unfamiliarity with blogging or their inability to access it may be a cause of student unwillingness to participate in the blogging activity (Alm, 2008).

Student willingness to go above and beyond the expectations may be an obstacle to a successful blog experience as well. The study conducted by Lin (2015), showed a low frequency of posting and commenting on the blog. Most students only interacted with the blog to meet the teacher’s requirements of the assignment. Reasons for the limited amount of interaction may be varied. Students may be hampered by the lack of time or their language deficiency may cause them to be embarrassed about their communication skills and therefore hesitant to share their ideas with the world in their second language (Lin, 2015).
Conclusion

Blogs allow for students to connect to the second language in a meaningful and culturally authentic manner while improving interpersonal and presentation writing skills in foreign language learners. Blogs give students a choice in how and where they are going to practice the language and give students a myriad of opportunities to practice their communication competencies. The interaction between posters and readers creates a collaborative community providing opportunities for feedback on the language used. This give and take between reader and writer takes the language outside of the classroom and allows for its use in a real world situation, making the learning authentic. Student posts create a portfolio of the progression of development of their second language writing skills over the course of time.

When implementing a blog into the curriculum, foreign language teachers need to make sure that they are carried out in a way that is meaningful to the learners. The role of the teacher is to moderate the discussion and encourage collaboration amongst the posters. Most of the literature on blogging focused on students who were intermediate to advanced language learners; therefore future research in the area of incorporation of blogging into a foreign language curriculum should focus on how novice language learners benefit from the use of Web 2.0 technology.

Methodology

To study whether or not implementing blogs is an effective way to develop foreign language skills in middle school learners, I applied a variety of data collections methods. These included: (1) Student Pre-Research self-assessment proficiency rubric (2) Blog Portfolio (3)
Student Blog Checklist (4) Student Google Form Survey (5) Student Post-Research self-assessment proficiency rubric.

My research took place over a period of ten weeks. To begin my research, the students self-assessed using a rubric that evaluated their language proficiency (see Appendix A). This rubric was adapted from the speaking and performance standards developed by ACTFL but puts those standards in language that is easy for my students to understand.

After completing their language proficiency rubric, students were introduced to the blog technology. They were shown how to sign into the Kidblog site, how to create a post and how to respond to others posts as well. I chose to use Kidblog as our blogging platform because it is a blogging platform that is designed to be used by students. It has built-in safety controls where the teacher can moderate what the students post to the blog as well as students responses. Educators can also control who views the posts, therefore allowing students to use a digital medium in an authentic way. Their first post to the site involved introducing themselves in Spanish and asking others what their names were. Students were required to respond to at least three of their classmate’s posts introducing themselves using “Me llamo…” and their name.

Once they were familiar with the technology, we started to put the research methods into action. Monday through Thursday, students received vocabulary and grammar instruction. On Fridays, they were required to post an entry to our class Kidblog website demonstrating their understanding of those skills. Along with creating their post on the subject of the week, students were also required to respond to the posts of their classmates to encourage communication in the target language.
The students then created the following entries: (1) Research at least two blogs about learning Spanish and write a post that includes the name of the blogs and their URLs. (2) Create a fictional character or celebrity and describe their name, age, birthday, where they live, where they are from and what they like to do. (3) Tell what your week looks like, including a time and an activity for each day. (4) Describe a Monster, practicing the noun/adjective agreement grammar skills. (5) Create a situation that happened with a patient and doctor in a hospital.

The last four posts that the students were to include in their learning were to be from a “Quadblog” where students connect their blog to the blogs of other classrooms. The Quadblog activity was designed to incorporate the ACTFL standards of Connections, 3.2 “Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.” and Communities, 5.1 “Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.”. I sent a request to the Quadblog site in the middle of December asking that our class to be connected with classrooms from Spanish speaking countries. Unfortunately, I did not receive a response from them, so I therefore had to eliminate this communicative experience with native speakers from my study and all student communication was completed with one another.

I evaluated each student post using a checklist (see Appendix B) to determine the quality of their blog post, the quality of their responses to other posts, as well as the quality of their responses to the questions and comments posed to the students’ posts. Students were given the feedback both through the checklists and by posts by the teacher on the Kidblog site. Every week students printed out their post along with the comments and questions that they received.
These posts were kept in a portfolio for students to measure their language growth from the beginning to the end of the trimester.

At the end of the study, students again completed the same self-assessment proficiency rubric that was administered at the beginning of the research. This allowed me to evaluate how students felt about their language growth and whether or not they have grown at least one proficiency level during the course of the trimester.

Finally, the students completed an attitude survey on Google Forms (see Appendix C) in order to measure student attitudes and perceptions of using a blog in Spanish class. The form is divided into five sections. The first section consists of two questions that focus on the students’ attitude towards using the blog in Spanish class. They are asked to rate their enjoyment and effort on a scale of 1-5. The second section focuses on how well the students met the ACTFL communication standards. Students are to rate on a scale of 1-5 how well they communicated ideas and opinions, how well they understood their classmates’ posts and how well they used social media to adapt their message for other readers. The third section deals with the understanding of cultures. Students were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5 how using a blog helped them gain understanding and insight into other cultures. The last section was a short answer about the comparisons the students were able to make between the American culture and the culture of the Spanish-Speaking countries. The data from this survey not only helped me to determine if the students felt using the blog was an effective way to practice the Spanish language, but to determine if the blogging activity effectively incorporated the ACTFL language standards into our language learning.
Analysis of Data

The research began with a baseline impression of how students evaluated their Spanish language abilities. The data collected was used to analyze if implementing a blog would help raise students’ proficiency levels in the Spanish language in six different focus areas as determined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Communication standards (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012).

Student Proficiency Rubric

Eleven students in a seventh grade Spanish classroom completed the self-assessment rubric before we started using Kidblog to establish a baseline level of proficiency. Numbers were assigned to each level for the purpose of comparing the data. The scale started at a one for a proficiency level of “Novice Low” up to a seven for an “Advanced Low” proficiency level of (See Figure I).

The pre-research and post-research proficiency self-assessment rubric focused on four areas of communication as stated in the ACTFL communication standards: “What language do I use?” (vocabulary); “How do I use language?” (function and structure); “How well am I understood doing the task?” (comprehensibility); and “How well do I understand?” (comprehension). Students were also asked to evaluate “How well do I use language?” (language control). Since no work had been completed as of yet, the question of “How much language did I deliver?” (task completion) was excluded. Students were asked to self-evaluate their abilities in each section.
Results of the initial survey showed that 9% of the students assessed themselves as a novice low, 73% as a novice mid and 18% as a novice high in the vocabulary standards. In the area of function and structure, 27% of the students ranked themselves as a novice low, 54% of the students as a novice mid, 9% and a novice high and 9% at an intermediate low level. In the area of comprehensibility, 18% marked themselves as a novice low, 64% as a novice mid and 18% as a novice high. For the comprehension standard 9% were a novice low, 45% were novice mid, 18% were novice high and 27% were intermediate low. The last standard was in the area of language control where 18% of the students were novice low, 64% were novice mid and 18% were novice high. I found the student assessments, overall, to be an accurate evaluation of their language skills at the beginning of the trimester, although S6 and S8 may have overestimated their comprehension level as an intermediate low. Their level would be more accurately at a novice-mid level.
Figure 2. Comparison of student proficiency levels from pre-research assessment to post-research assessment.

In completing the rubric at the end of the trimester, the data showed that, on average, students grew at least one level in their language proficiency from the beginning of the trimester to the end (See Figure 2). Twenty-seven percent of students reported being a novice mid, 36% as a novice high, 27% as an intermediate low and 9% as an intermediate mid in regards to their vocabulary ability. In the area of function and structure, 9% reported that they were intermediate low, 18% as novice mid, 27% as novice high, 36% as intermediate low and 9% as intermediate mid. For comprehensibility, 36% reported being at the novice mid level, 18% as novice high, and 45% as intermediate low. In the area of comprehension, 9% were at a novice mid, 27% novice high, and 64% intermediate low. For language control, 18% ranked at a novice mid, 64% were a novice high and 18% were an intermediate low. As with their initial surveys, their self-assessments were accurate reflections of their language abilities. The one exception is S5,
who rated himself as an intermediate low to intermediate-mid level. This student would be more accurately placed in a novice high level, but even at that level the student would have grown at least two levels during the course of the trimester.

For the final proficiency rubric, students also evaluated their proficiency level of the work completion. One student reported as “Completing little of what I was asked to do.” Three students reported that they “Completed most everything I was asked to do.” Five students stated that they “Completed everything they were asked to do”, while two students expressed that they “Completed more than I was asked to do”.

**Student Blog Portfolio**

Each week the student were required to post a response to our Kidblog site from a prompt that was based on the grammar and communication structures that were covered in class that week. Along with creating their posts in Spanish, they were required to respond to at least four of their classmate’s posts in Spanish with questions or comments to further the conversation. These posts were printed out to show the growth in the students’ language skills over the course of the trimester.

Every blog post was evaluated by the teacher using a checklist to evaluate the quality of the individual student posts. The checklist rated the quality of the comments students made, and the quality of the comments they received. The teacher checklist also recorded if the student responded to comments and made any language corrections due to student feedback.

In comparing the student blog posts, students showed growth in both length of their posts as well as the complexity of language that they were using. The comments students posted also demonstrated growth in their language abilities. Students started with very simple sentences and
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grammar structures and as the trimester progressed they made longer statements as well as asking multiple questions in regards to their classmates’ posts.

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the overall quality of these posts. Posts were qualified at three different levels. The first level was “Simple” where the student used few Spanish words with English support. Posts using simple language compromised 40.9% of the overall posts, but 70% of the initial blog posts were evaluated as simple. The second level of language used in the posts was labeled as “Moderate”, where the student provided some feedback to their peers’ post and/or asked a question. Of the total posts, 42.4% of them fell into the moderate category. The last category was “Detailed”. In a detailed post, students gave several suggestions and/or they asked several questions. Overall, 16.7% of the posts were used detailed languages, but the percentage of detailed posts grew as the trimester progressed, with 32.2% of the last three posts falling into the detailed category.

![Quality of Post](image)

*Figure 3. Quality of student blog posts.*
The interaction between students was also evaluated, determining whether students’ comments to their classmates posts were “Simple”, “Moderate” or “Detailed” (See Figure 4). Overall, 39% of the student comments were simple, 50% of student comments were moderate, and 10.3% were detailed. Like the posts, student comments grew in complexity over the course of time with 91.3% of the comments for the first three blog posts being assessed as simple, whereas none of the comments for the last three posts were evaluated at the simple level. In comparison, of the comments for the last three posts, 81% were marked as moderate and 18.5% were detailed.

![Quality of Comments](image)

*Figure 4.* Quality of student comments.

**Student Survey**

At the end of the research process, the students completed a Google Forms questionnaire that helped to measure the amount of student engagement and effort into their blog posts and their attitude towards using the tool (See Figure 5). Students were asked to rank their
experience on a scale of one to five. The first two questions “How much did you enjoy using Kidblog?” and “How much effort did you put into your posts?” evaluated students’ overall experience using the tool. The next three questions “How well do you think you used Spanish on Kidblog to communicate ideas and opinions?”, “How well did you understand the language of the other students?” and “Did you use the language and different types of media to get your meaning across to the blogosphere?” addressed their communication abilities. The questions “How well do you understand the cultures of the other bloggers?” and “What kinds of things did you find that were the same and different between English and Spanish?” allowed students to discern what kinds of connections they made between their language and culture and the Spanish language and culture.

The feedback from the survey indicates that the students enjoyed using this form of technology to show their learning. According to the responses they gave, students reported that they consistently put effort into their posts. They felt that they were able to communicate their ideas and their learning, and they were able to understand the ideas presented by their classmates. When reading the blogs outside of our classroom experience, they felt that it aided their understanding of cultural practices of Spanish speakers.
The original design of the research was to give the students an opportunity to use their Spanish skills outside of our classroom experience using a “Quadblog”, which is a program that allows students to connect to three other classrooms using Kidblog. Although I applied for the program in the middle of December, I did not receive a response from Quadblog to set up the activity. Not being able to connect with native speakers could account for the weak response in the area of “I used Kidblog outside of the classroom.” Students were already using the program to communicate with their classmates, there seems to be very little motivation to use it more with the same people.

Apart from the numerical valuations that students assigned to their experience, the students also were given the opportunity to provide comments on their experience. These ranged from “I learned new words”, “Positively impacted my Spanish learning” to

Figure 5. Student Google Forms Evaluation.
“I did it for the grade” and “It didn’t impact my learning”. I believe that this reflects the personality of the participants in this research. Many of them embraced the learning for the sake of learning, but a few of them have a negative outlook on any learning activity.

I noticed three major themes that evolved as students progressed through the trimester of using Kidblog. The first finding that emerged was that students were more willing to take risks with their language usage and vocabulary than when using traditional pencil and paper or peer conversation exercises. Evidence of student progress with language usage was noted both by the portfolio of student posts and the analysis of the teacher evaluation rubric. By comparing their initial posts to their final posts I was able to ascertain signs of growth in language usage from the beginning of the trimester to the end of the trimester. The evaluation of these posts showed that students not only demonstrated growth in vocabulary use, but grammar structures as well. Their first posts were short and used similar vocabulary. Each week, the posts indicated a wider use of vocabulary words and greater interaction with their peers in the target language. Over the course of the study, students also interacted in more meaningful ways with their questions and comments in regards to their peers’ posts. During the trimester, due to various circumstances, there were three weeks where students did not complete a Kidblog post. During those weeks, I noted that student vocabulary usage and interpersonal communications skills were more limited. I believe this demonstrates the impact that using a blog in a foreign language classroom has on students language abilities. The second finding is that students expressed they enjoyed the opportunity to use technology to show their learning in a foreign language classroom. The last theme is that when using a computer to demonstrate their writing, students became more
dependent on online translation programs, such as Google Translate, to help them formulate their writing.

**Action Plan**

I was able to draw several conclusions from incorporating Kidblog into my curriculum. I found that incorporating blogging into a middle school foreign language program has had a positive impact on student learning through engagement and extension of vocabulary and grammatical concepts learned in the daily lessons. Students were more engaged with the language because it became a real life activity and an opportunity for them to connect with their peers using the Spanish language. In my observations about the student blogging, I found that to communicate their thoughts and feelings, students relied heavily on electronic translation technology.

The data from my research showed that student engagement with the activity was greater than using the traditional vocabulary and grammar activities that I had previously used in my curriculum. Students inquired about what the post was for the week. As the trimester progressed, student posts also showed more of their individual personalities and creativity. According to the Google Forms survey that students completed at the end of the trimester, students reported “above average” ratings on their enjoyment of the activity and the effort that they put into their posts.

I reviewed their posts and responses in Kidblog by looking at the portfolio of their work over the course of the trimester as well as using a checklist to grade the quality of the language that the students used in their posts. Through the compilation of this data, I observed that students were able to use the language in a more creative fashion than with the traditional
textbook driven dialogue exercises and pencil and paper grammatical practices that I had previously incorporated into my curriculum. One of the most notable observations that I made is that when students are given access to technology to create their conversations, they relied quite heavily on online translation services such as Google Translate. While this practice exposed students to a wider variety of vocabulary, it also exposed them to a greater possibility of grammatical errors as well. Students found that tools such as Google Translate may be helpful, but they are still run by computer algorithms and therefore do not always match the writers’ intentions. Using Google Translate exposes student posts to unintended meanings and possible confusion to the reader. Having to rely on Google Translate may be because they are beginning language students and do not have enough vocabulary and grammatical structures at their immediate disposal to create a coherent post without outside aid.

My research took place over the course of one trimester with a small group of high achieving seventh graders. The initial findings show that incorporating blogging into my Spanish classroom is beneficial to my students’ language practice and growth. Due to the small sampling of students used in this study, I believe it would be important to repeat this research with a larger group of students over a longer period.

The findings from this research will influence my teaching practices moving forward. I intend to continue to incorporate blog posts as part of my assessment of student language skills. From my findings with my seventh grade students, I feel it will be advantageous to start incorporating Kidblog into my fifth-grade language curriculum, which is the lowest grade level I teach. I will then be able to compile their posts to show the growth of their language as defined by the ACTFL standards in the three areas of communication: Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and
Presentational. These blog posts could also be used to show their growth in cultural understanding as we use the tool to reach out and communicate with people and cultures outside of the confines of our classroom walls. I would be able to compile their blog posts to indicate how students are meeting the ACTFL standards and the growth of their language skills from the time they enter our program in fifth grade to when they finish up their Spanish II and III courses in high school.

After completing my action research with incorporating blogging into my middle school Spanish classroom, I feel there are many different areas for future investigation. The first area would be in the area of student choice in their entries. In my current research, the posts were framed around the vocabulary and grammar structures that were presented in class for the week, I then posted the prompt for the students to create their post. Although this provided a framework for students to follow, it could also be quite limiting in their production of the language. It would be interesting to see if leaving the subject areas of the posts as open-ended would increase student motivation to use the language and increase the conversational aspect of posting a blog and leaving comments.

With my current research, the posts were created as an in-class activity. I believe it would be valuable to evaluate whether or not students attitudes and connections to the language would increase if students were required to use it outside of the classroom. Would students view blogging as a natural method of communication with one another as well as a method to exchange ideas with the outside worlds?

The use of technology to communicate has become an everyday activity for the majority of our students. I believe it would be valuable to investigate the impact of other forms of social
media on students’ language development. How would students grow if we used face-to-face technologies such as Skype in the Classroom or Google Connected Classrooms to practice their Spanish skills with native speakers? Would getting to see students from around the world allow my students to make a greater connection to the language and cultures and make it more “real” for them instead of just being typed characters on a computer screen? Continued investigation into how incorporating these available communication tools impacts the language growth and skills of my students will continue to be part of my teaching practices.
References


*Innovations In Education & Teaching International, 47*(3), 327-339. Retrieved from 
doi:10.1080/14703297.2010.498184

Appendix A

Student Proficiency Rubric

### Major Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Novice Low</th>
<th>Novice Mid</th>
<th>Novice High</th>
<th>Intermediate Low</th>
<th>Intermediate Mid</th>
<th>Intermediate High</th>
<th>Advanced Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can use a small number of repetitive words and phrases for common objects and actions.</td>
<td>I can use a limited number of words and phrases for common objects and actions, but they are repetitive.</td>
<td>I can use familiar words and phrases on a range of familiar topics, but I am not yet fluent.</td>
<td>I can use a variety of words and phrases on a range of familiar topics, and I can express my thoughts clearly.</td>
<td>I can use words and phrases on a range of familiar topics and I can express my thoughts clearly.</td>
<td>I can use words and phrases on a range of familiar topics and I can express my thoughts clearly.</td>
<td>I can use words and phrases on a range of familiar topics and I can express my thoughts clearly.</td>
<td>I can use extensive vocabulary to communicate ideas on a wide range of topics and effectively express my thoughts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function &amp; Structure</th>
<th>Novice Low</th>
<th>Novice Mid</th>
<th>Novice High</th>
<th>Intermediate Low</th>
<th>Intermediate Mid</th>
<th>Intermediate High</th>
<th>Advanced Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can use some simple words to provide basic information.</td>
<td>I can use words and short sentences to provide basic information.</td>
<td>I can combine words and phrases to create original sentences.</td>
<td>I can use longer sentences to express my thoughts.</td>
<td>I can combine longer sentences to express my thoughts.</td>
<td>I can use connected sentences to express my thoughts.</td>
<td>I can use connected sentences to express my thoughts.</td>
<td>I can use connected sentences to express my thoughts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Novice Low</th>
<th>Novice Mid</th>
<th>Novice High</th>
<th>Intermediate Low</th>
<th>Intermediate Mid</th>
<th>Intermediate High</th>
<th>Advanced Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can be understood only with great effort.</td>
<td>I can be understood with difficulty by someone accustomed to a language learner.</td>
<td>I can mostly be understood by someone accustomed to a language learner.</td>
<td>I can easily be understood by someone accustomed to a language learner.</td>
<td>I can generally be understood by someone accustomed to a language learner.</td>
<td>I can be understood by native speakers, even those not specifically trained in the language.</td>
<td>I can understand and participate in conversations on familiar topics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Minor Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Control</th>
<th>Novice Low</th>
<th>Novice Mid</th>
<th>Novice High</th>
<th>Intermediate Low</th>
<th>Intermediate Mid</th>
<th>Intermediate High</th>
<th>Advanced Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
<td>My errors in grammar, word order, and word choice prevent communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional Feedback

- JCP& World Languages - Performance Assessment Rubric - TK5 08/11

Taken from www.creativelanguageclass.com
## Appendix B

### Student Blog Checklist

| **Student Name:** |  |
| **Date of Observation:** |  |
| **Student Completed the Blog Post** | □ Yes □ No |
| **Quality of Post** | □ Simple  Student uses few Spanish words with English support.  
□ Moderate  Student uses simple language structure. May repeat prompt with few added details.  
□ Detailed  Student elaborates on the prompt. Uses language to connect ideas. |
| **Student Commented on Another Post** | □ Yes □ No |
| **Quality of Comment Posted** | □ Simple  One or two word answer. Little feedback provided.  
□ Moderate  Student provided some feedback and/or asked a question.  
□ Detailed  Student gave several suggestions and/or asked several questions. |
| **Student Received a Comment(s)** | □ Yes □ No |
| **Quality of Comment(s) Received** | □ Simple  One or two word answer. Little feedback provided.  
□ Moderate  Student provided some feedback and/or asked a question.  
□ Detailed  Student gave several suggestions and/or asked several questions. |
| **Student Made a Grammatical Correction Based on Feedback** | □ Yes □ No |
| **Student Responded to Peer Feedback/Question** | □ Yes □ No |

### Notes:
Appendix C
Google Form Kidblog Activity Survey

On a scale from 1-5, how much did you enjoy using Kidblog?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>I loved it!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t like it at all.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much effort did you put in your posts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>I went above and the requirements.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t complete the assignments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Standard 1: Communication**
I can use Spanish in a variety of ways.

Interpersonal: How well do you think you used Spanish on Kidblog to communicate ideas and opinions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>I was able to express my ideas and opinions accurately.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not very well at all.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpretive: How well did you understand the language of the other students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>I understood almost everything.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not very well at all.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentational: Did you use the language and different types of media to get your meaning across to the blogosphere?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>I was able to adapt my message to my audience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not very well at all.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Standard 2: Culture**  
I can understand the practices, perspectives and products of other cultures.

I used Kidblog to help me understand the cultural practices of Spanish speaking countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I could not tell the difference between our cultures.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>I gained a lot of insight into how other cultures perceive things.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Standard 3: Connections**  
I can use Spanish to think about problems from a cultural perspective other than my own.

How well do you understand the cultures of the other bloggers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I didn’t see any differences.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>I gained a lot of insight into how other cultures think differently than we do.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Standard 4: Comparisons**  
I can use Spanish to make comparisons to my own language and culture.

What kinds of things did you find that were the same and different between English and Spanish? ____________________________________________

**Standard 5: Communities**  
I can be participate in a global community using languages other than my own?

How much did you use Kidblog to communicate with students outside of our classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Overall, how did using Kidblog weekly impact your learn to use Spanish learning? Explain your answer.