Glogsters and Other Motivating Technology: A Multiple Case Study of English Learners

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how undergraduate Latino English learner (EL) students were motivated to read using technology by their teachers throughout their education. To examine this, they were interviewed, asked to perform a task that involved reading online, required to make a Glogster (an online interactive poster) about their reading, and were videotaped in the process. They were subsequently asked if they found the activity motivating, and if their teachers had used Glogsters, video, or other technology-based reading incentives in the past. Moreover, they were invited to provide suggestions for teachers. Research suggests that technology both motivates and accelerates learning for EL students, and this study sought to understand what role technology played in the learning experiences of these students.

INTRODUCTION

English learners (ELs) tend to enjoy using technology to develop their language skills (Bahrani & Soltani, 2011), as is the case with many students. Furthermore, by getting students to actively participate, learning can increase. Thus, to get students engaged tasks should be interesting, challenging, and based on students' needs to keep motivation ongoing (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013).

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Shindler, 2008), and aspects of motivation vary for students depending on their backgrounds, needs, desires, etc. Moreover, many EL students have instrumental motivation, meaning they want to learn the language to succeed in school (Blyth, 2010). This type of motivation can be enhanced further using technology.

Technology "can create a lively classroom atmosphere and facilitate learning" and "materials which are available on the Internet should be selected according to the needs and

interests of students" (Gencilter, 2009, p. 155). Research also suggests that teachers should guide students in how to use the Internet to find credible sources, and how to use the hyperlinks and other features offered online that help with comprehension (Akinwamise & Adedara, 2012). This can be beneficial for ELs that are building their vocabulary and need additional scaffolding. It would also help in keeping their attention in addition to helping them comprehend.

Shortly most states will be requiring students to take assessments on computers, as a result of the Common Core State Standards, which makes the learning and ease of navigating and reading on a computer even more important (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2012). Plus, with the Common Core teachers are not only encouraged to use technology, but also can be more creative. Hence, using technology is an essential function in the classroom if students are to have the time necessary to practice using computers in order to help them succeed in these upcoming assessments. Hobbs (2011) suggests that educational leaders need to shift their focus from purchasing technology to "emphasize how digital tools are used to promote critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaborative skills" (p. 15). Research also suggests that adolescents are motivated to read when choices, such as reading online, are options (Pitcher, Martinez-Alba, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010).

In previous work, when the researchers of this study interviewed adolescents, they unveiled ways students use technology to learn and communicate on their own. In this study the researchers sought to determine ways technology was and could enhance learning for a group of English learners in school. This article provides the summary of the findings as well as suggestions for teachers from the students themselves.

METHOD

Selection of the Participants

A total of 16 undergraduate students from all fields participated in this qualitative study. They were recruited through a club for Latino students at the university. They were selected because they were English Learners (EL); thus, most of them had participated in ESOL programs where teachers tend to have more flexibility in their instruction and can use technology more often. The majority of the EL students had received ESOL services in various educational public school settings before coming to the university.

This multiple case study took place over a two-year period at a metropolitan university in the mid-Atlantic. Data sources included interviews, transcriptions, videotapes, and Glogsters. The research questions in this study allowed the researchers to learn from the subjects their viewpoints, experiences, and suggestions. The overarching questions for the study were: How was technology used in the previous educational experiences of these EL undergraduate students to motivate them to read? How would the students respond to Glogsters? What would they recommend to teachers to motivate students to read?

Procedure

The students were interviewed using open-ended questions (see Table 1) about what they enjoy reading in and out of school, and what motivating reading instruction they had experienced. They then self-selected a reading online and completed a Glogster. (A Glogster is an online interactive poster that is free to create, though one can pay to get more features. It allows users to write as well as to insert pictures, clip art, YouTube videos, various backgrounds, etc.) Afterwards, they were asked follow up interview questions to unveil if this assignment reminded them of previous reading/technology projects teachers had engaged them in, to see if they enjoyed reading online and creating a Glogster, and last to note their recommendations for teachers.

The interviews were transcribed to help with the analysis, as suggested by Seidman (2006). Next, thematic coding was used to generate key ways technology was used to motivate these students to read. Flick (2009) and Yin (2011) suggest the use of thematic coding as a method to view the similarities and differences among and between cases. Therefore, the data was first reviewed to examine what themes or types of answers emerged, thenceforth similarities and differences were outlined. Through triangulation of this data, the researchers aimed to answer if and how Glogsters or other technology was used to motivate these students to read.

Table 1. *Interview Questions*

Part 1 - Before reading for this project:
1. Do you enjoy reading?
    a. If yes, what do you enjoy reading?
2. What types of reading do you enjoy most? (i.e.; textbooks, newspapers, magazines, websites, etc.)
3. What subjects do you enjoy reading about most? (i.e.; science, history, etc.)
4. What types of reading activities do you enjoy most? (i.e.; discussions after reading, group projects about readings, book reports, etc.)
5. Are you an English learner?
6. Did you receive English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services? If yes, what (if any) of the instruction motivated you to read in your ESOL and/or regular classes?

Part 2 - After reading for this project and making a Glogster:
1. Did this remind you of technology used by your teachers to motivate you to read? If so, what did they use?
2. Did you enjoy reading for this project?
3. What did you enjoy most about this project?
4. Do you think other students would be motivated to read to create a Glogster?
5. What would you recommend to motivate students to read?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Backgrounds

Fourteen out of the 16 students in this study received ESOL services. The reasons two students did not receive services varied. One went to a school where most teachers and students spoke her native language, thus she received support without getting ESOL services. The other student knew enough English when she started school that she did not qualify for ESOL services. Out of the 14 students that did receive ESOL services, none had read online or used technology in their ESOL classrooms as far as they could recall. However, they all acknowledged they enjoyed going to their ESOL classrooms because of the nurturing environment. Furthermore, they had been exposed to technology, which they found motivating in other classes. This was a result of technology becoming more integrated in their schools as they got older, when they had already exited their ESOL programs.

Part One of the Interview – Before Reading for this Project

Table 1 outlines the open-ended questions students were asked. The first questions provided background about students' views on reading, if they enjoy reading, and what they relish reading. Overall, the undergraduate students considered reading "a tool for higher education to better yourself," "looking over words and understanding them," and "learning about a certain topic." They all enjoyed reading something that was of interest to them, which was not necessarily what their teacher selected for them. Their reading choices included: romance novels, magazines, mysteries, Japanese graphic novels, *Vampire Diaries*, books about zombies, online newspapers, Facebook, texts, Yahoo.com, blogs, sports' websites, reading online in general, and reading on a Kindle. To extend this, they were asked what subjects they enjoy reading in most at school; and, they all stated their favorite subjects in school were related to their careers. However, they agreed they do not care for textbooks; except, they all liked having discussions about their readings in class. As one student noted, "If I don't understand it I like discussing it in class in little group activities. That is beneficial." This is important to note, since textbooks have academic vocabulary that ELs need time to learn, understand, and process. Moreover, in the *Application of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners*, it states that it is "essential that they have access to: literacy-rich environments where students are immersed in a variety of language experiences and opportunities for classroom discourse and interactions that are well-designed to enable ELs to develop communicative strengths in language arts" (The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Self-Selected Reading Online and Making a Glogster

Videotapes were made of the students reading and creating their Glogsters. These videos demonstrated their enthusiasm in getting to self-select their own reading, and writing about it. They were smiling, engaged, and made positive comments throughout the process. Most students selected newspaper or magazine articles to read online. The articles ranged from topics about their native country, to articles related to their field of study, to articles about entertainment news. One student asked if she could read on her Kindle, since she was in the middle of a book. They all stated that if they were allowed to self-select readings, they would be

motivated to read (and believed other students would too). They all said this rarely happened in their school experiences.

    After they completed reading the article or chapter, they created their Glogster. They had to write on the online poster to present a summary, highlights, quotes, related videos, and/or pictures to show what they had read about. They explained why they were adding text, etc. as they went along since they were working one-on-one with a researcher. One student stated "I learned something new." All others had similar comments about Glogsters. They had never used Glogsters or comparable online programs. See Figure 1 for an example of a Glogster created.
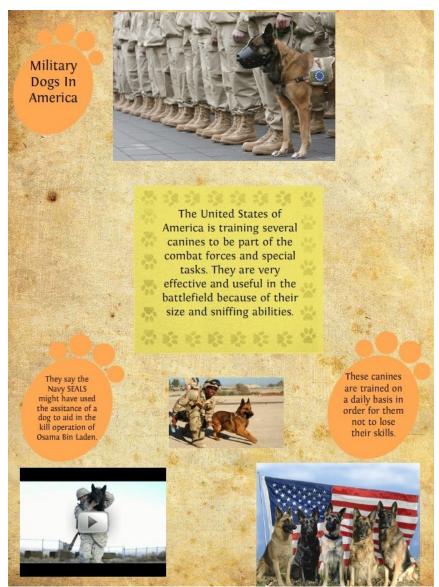
Figure 1. Example of a Glogster

    One of the students suggested it made writing "something out of the box."
Unfortunately, his Glogster was erased after he completed it, before he had the chance to save it.

Nonetheless, he created it over again, even though the researcher told him he did not have to re-write it. He said, "It is something fun to do." All students said they enjoyed making Glogsters, which required students to read, write, listen, and speak, which are areas that English learners need to build.

Figure 2. Student Working on a Glogster

Part Two of the Interview – After Reading for this Project

All of the students stated they enjoyed reading for this project and had never completed a Glogster or anything similar in school before. As one student said, "I didn't know about the Glogster." Another student indicated, "I enjoyed after I read something that interests me, how I got to put everything together in a Glogster. It is kind of like writing a report except in a more fun and creative way." A third student reported, "I am a visual learner. Glogsters help you visualize things. Illustrations help and it reinforces what you read."

When asked what types of technology their teachers had used with them that they found motivating, some said there were none, even at the university level. "None that I can remember," was a typical response. Of the concepts discussed, they stated that Promethean Boards were motivating because of the interaction with the class. "In high school the Promethean board was really cool. The teacher would use that to get the kids more involved." PowerPoints also motivated them because it helped them to comprehend reading material, which was outlined. Furthermore, "when the teacher puts the information on slides it makes me want to read more about this topic."

Investigating answers to their own questions for extra credit was also very motivating. One of the students shared that one of her professors at the university, "gives us extra credit to look it up and come back and present it to the class." They also shared that reading self-selected books allowed them to read something of interest, and that reflections on Blackboard provided time for discussion to help clarify the meaning of readings. Likewise, they all remarked that they appreciated having regular face-to-face discussions because it assisted them in comprehending the reading material. One student observed, "I really like the group discussion because it gives you someone else's viewpoint."

In terms of videotaping, some students were unsure about their feelings related to videotaping being motivating because they said they were concerned that shy students might not feel open to the idea of being filmed. "I don't know if students would be motivated to read if they were videotaped, but for doing the Glogster yea." Conversely, more outgoing students liked being videoed because "there is someone looking at you," or "the kid wants to be the superstar and be the best reader you have ever seen."

When it came time for them to provide a recommendation to motivate other students to read, they all said to let students select their own texts, and "not just saying go read the chapter and then there is a test in three weeks." One student also suggested allowing students "through the Internet keep an update on what is going on, finding something that they are interested in. There is a reading for every topic."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative study provides a view of a group of 16 undergraduate students on how technology was used in their instruction, and how they believe it can be used to motivate students to read. The students suggested ways technology motivated them in addition to providing suggestions. Based on these sixteen students, they all enjoyed using technology, such as Glogsters, to motivate them to read. They indicated the key is to have these types of activities occurring in more classrooms to stimulate students and help lessen the gap between how students acquire knowledge and literacy outside of the classroom to inside of the classroom. As we were able to see in this study, the use of the Glogster, motivated the students to the extent that one student was excited to re-write his again when it was erased. These students told us that using "out of the box" resources on the Internet stimulated them to want to read and write more.

With the Common Core Standards, which emphasizes the use of technology, having students research and read online, and teaching students to read digital resources is necessary (The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). "It is necessary to develop effective ways of using Internet resources" (Duan, 2011, p. 238). Shifts that need to take place were noted in the *Overview of the Common Core State Standards Initiatives for English Language Learners,* such as the need to "create and use scaffolding and supports so that English Language Learners at different levels of English language proficiency can take part in meaningful conversations and writing using complex text" (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2013, p. 5).

The students in this study read on their own in many multi-media contexts, and were motivated by it. For that reason, teachers at all levels can move their instruction out of typical textbook reading to embrace what their students' value, to motivate them to read, and hopefully create life-long learners, while addressing the Common Core. The following outlines the recommendations provided by the students in this study:

1. Provide time for self selected readings.
2. Have students read and write on interactive websites, such as Glogster.
3. Use PowerPoints to help students comprehend readings along with class discussions.
4. Use Promethean or Smart boards to engage students.

5. Videotape outgoing students reading, to provide a purpose for them to practice reading fluently, with expression, and to work on the English pronunciation of words. They can also practice reading strategies for comprehension.

View this video for a summary of the findings: http://youtu.be/U93N8BntHTA

The following free websites and app provide other interactive reading and writing resources:

Read, Write, Think Comic Creator: Students create comics for others to read, and the visuals help English learners with comprehension.
http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/

Read, Write, Think Postcard Creator: Writing a postcard with a template online helps guide the English learner that might not be familiar with the format.
http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/postcard/

Free Rice: This is a motivating game where by answering questions correctly it helps feed the hungry. It includes a section for English vocabulary and grammar development.
http://freerice.com/category

Fun Brain: With Fun Brain students can read books and comics online, which also include visuals to help English learners with comprehension.
http://www.funbrain.com/

PhotoCard App: This iPad app allows students to select a postcard and stamp, and guides them in writing postcards to email.
https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/photocard-by-bill-atkinson/id333208430?mt=8

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