

Title: Teaching and learning using the didactic platforms

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Introduction.

In the teaching and learning of English today some tools are very useful, so that most of the curricula designs have taken into account the way students learn once they are out of the classrooms with them. The use of electronic devices is very popular among teenagers and that is a characteristic most educational producers are analyzing to sell their products.

The leading publishing houses are ahead of this revolution in education, and they are considering all the possibilities to include new resources available for learning. Therefore when someone buys a series book for the teaching and learning of English is also getting a place to continue the interaction. Those places are called didactic platforms.

This contribution presents a new learning environment model based on Web 2.0 applications. We assume that the technological change introduced by Web 2.0 tools has also caused a cultural change in terms of dealing with types of communication, knowledge and learning. Thus, teachers intend to use the creative options offered by internet to accomplish a set of exercises that can fix the new content.

In the authors experience there are many future possibilities in using the internet to increase learning outputs. But to the teachers who are constantly thinking on their classes and the way the new material can be presented, practiced and used, the combination of the teachers' ideas and the exercises on the platform are very valuable.

The objective of this paper is precisely this one: to express different ways of making the lesson lasts into the informal settings, especially using the platforms to exercise the new content. Some results are provided as part of the research on UNIANDES Santo Domingo.

Some theoretical bases to use platforms in teaching and learning English.

The way people learn is always individual although is based on interaction with others in social contexts. Learning Environments for autonomy, creativity and networking, are based on the didactics of constructivism and connectivism to match the need of interaction. The requirements and basic functional components for the development of the Web 2.0 learning environment are derived from these facts. The learning environment we present consists of teaching in classrooms at UNIANDES and having the students practice later anywhere using platforms to successfully fix the new content, several components that are popular in internet applications such as Wikipedia, weblogs, social bookmarking services and others are also very useful.

The article explains the didactic potential of platforms, since it serves for the motivation and learning outcome of students. With these ideas in mind this paper finally provides some remarks on the potential of the learning environment in broader educational contexts in Ecuador especially at the University level.

Changing Technologies and Educational Change Web 2.0 means a qualitative leap in web technologies that have made the internet more creative, participative and socializing. But has this development also triggered a revolution in learning? Do education and learning require re-thinking in view of the continuous change of information and communication technologies, and do we need new concepts and designs for respective working and learning environments?

The way that all technological tools become increasingly relevant is because they added the exchange of knowledge and the development of competencies in networks when they are used for instruction.

Nowadays we can refer to internet-based learning, or at least a kind of instruction in which internet is playing a very outstanding role, Hornung-Prähauer et al. (2008) (citado por Blees and Rittberger, 2009) assume that new interactive and collaborative web applications such as Wikis and blogs are

particularly suitable for participative definitions of objectives and governing learning processes as well as for collaborative production of knowledge within the framework of self-organized learning. In their opinion self-organized learning as such constitutes the adequate learning strategy for the educational policy objective of lifelong learning.

Social software and social networks constitute important virtual places where people can open new ways of learning, especially for learner communities and groups of consultants for dictionaries and wikis as learning tools. Following this valuation, Wikis or social networks are particularly apt for preserving and organizing knowledge, with knowledge management and learning coming closer via the shared use of tools.

But how can the didactic potential of new technologies be put into use for learning processes in the knowledge society, wherein the increasingly important competencies, such as methodological and media competencies should be acquired apart from knowledge itself? The cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch (2008) assumes in his lecture, "A Portal to Media Literacy" that the information and communication culture of students has changed due to new web technologies. He contrasts them to the anachronistic conditions and teaching concepts existing in educational institutions and states the hypothesis that learners (would) well be able to effectively acquire the knowledge they require by applying the media they use anyway. However, this requires that appropriate learning and teaching settings enable them to develop the media literacy they need for knowledge acquisition as well as methodological competence – particularly as regards selfgoverning and productive learning. According to Wesch, the main future challenge to learning is "creating platforms for participation that allow students to realize and leverage the emerging media environment."

This view is also prominently held by Downes (2005) who coined the term E-Learning 2.0 conceived as an "interlocking set of open-source applications. In which learning is becoming a creative activity and that the appropriate venue is a platform rather than an application."

Jadin & Wageneder (2007) provide the following extended definition of E-Learning 2.0 with reference to Downes: "We can talk of e-learning 2.0 applications if users apply Web 2.0 media, i.e. social software, such as wikis, weblogs or RSS in collaborative learning activities for autonomously producing their own learning contents and use them for their own learning objectives. This definition clearly outlines a central feature of an eLearning 2.0 setting: learners are autonomous in acquiring knowledge."

We are not seeking for a total autonomy by the students, but a little more freedom to decide how to complete their knowledge and practice of English using active interaction with the computers platforms that accompany the courses. The implementation of collaborative and activating applications of the Social Web for ELearning 2.0 purposes refers to the related model of personal learning environments (PLE). At a descriptive level abstracting from particular implementations, a PLE allows learners "to access, aggregate, configure and manipulate digital artefacts of their ongoing learning experiences" (Lubensky, 2006).

So personal learning environments is what we like to develop in UNIANDES, although somehow attached to the regularities of this institution. It is true there is a trend in contemporary learning towards more activity, self-productivity and self-governing, to networking learners and their learning spaces and to a shift of accentuation in the character of learning from the product towards the process.

These new developments are expressed by the learning theories of constructivism, socio-historical positions and connectivism. From a constructivist perspective, learning is a constructive, active, emotional, self-organized, social, situational process.

One constructivist tendency is called the sociohistorical which follows the ideas of Vygotsky (1987). According to him psychological phenomena are social in two respects: They depend on (originate in) social experience and treatment, and they embody cultural artifacts. Social experience includes the manner in which people stimulate and direct one's attention, model behavior, respond to behavior (encourage, discourage, or imitate it), control bodily movements, and organize the spatial relationships among individuals (e.g., many people sleeping

in an area or individuals sleeping in segregated areas). Cultural artifacts include signs, symbols, linguistic terms, and humanly produced objects and instruments such as chairs and books. Social treatment and socially produced artifacts generate and shape psychological phenomena.

For example, teachers can control when, where, and how a student can respond to a conversation act using the language (through modeling, encouraging, and discouraging behavior) and that determines the kinds and intensity of emotion that the learner develops with the language. So this position is also paramount in this technological era as many students have to follow teachers' models or others that are created in social contact.

Siemens 2004 introduces a further significant aspect of learning in his learning theory termed connectivism. As Wesch has diagnosed earlier, the technological change has resulted in different information and communication habits with a strong influence on particularly the media culture of younger generations. The information sources and communication channels of the so-called digital natives or net generation nearly all exist online, in digitized form. As far as educational institutions are concerned, an insufficient competency education regarding new media is problematic in as far as these are made productive for learning. The requirements of a changed knowledge society and the educational policy goal of lifelong learning raise the demand for an e-media-literacy, which should be taught even more so if social web instruments are implemented in learning scenarios (Hornung-Prähauser et al., 2008, 20; Kerres, 2006, 7; Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2007, 160).

Learning in the connectivist sense requires open learning environments that enable connections and exchanges with other network partners, who will build up productive learning communities. But again, these connections must be based on simple steps we, teachers, have to develop with the students in simple platforms or other tools that let them work autonomously later.

Hence, connectivism constitutes a pragmatic conception of learning that actively draws upon the societal changes to learning and consequently integrates them into learning processes. Web 2.0 (social software) instruments hence become

increasingly relevant as they promote perfectly an exchange of knowledge and the development of competencies in networks and on the web.

According to Downes (2007), the fundamental concept of learning networks unites the above-mentioned common values of Web 2.0 and the idea of PLE's. The pedagogical approach associated with PLE results in the notion of a portal as particularly apt for model of designing learning environments. "The 'pedagogy' behind the PLE – if it could be still called that – is that it offers a portal to the world, through which learners can explore and create, according to their own interests and directions, interacting at all times with their friends and community." (Downes 2007, 23) This portal concept for learning environments is now further explicated by Kerres (2006). A vast number of high quality information, media and resources for learning exist on the internet, as Kerres (2006) emphasises along with Wesch (2009)

Kerres believes it is anachronistic to separate learning platforms from the cornucopia of knowledge resources and useful tools provided on the internet, and then equipping them with specially developed learning content and tools. So platforms can help the students to develop their own interest for learning by themselves, but before they have to master using technology in our universities.

The learning environment is part of a blended learning arrangement, i.e. comprising a number of presence phases as well as media-based phases in an online environment. And thus the results are improved when teachers and students are using this tool for learning. (Blees and Rittberger, 2009)

Some examples of using the platform to learn and teach English in UNIANDES.

In the classroom, the teachers of this research work measured three groups' results first without the practical interaction in the platform, and later with this interaction. It is true that any new device should help to obtain better results but the qualitative and quantitative changes speak volumes.

The first group has 11 students and they are studying in the System degree, which can be more interested in computer like activities. The second group is

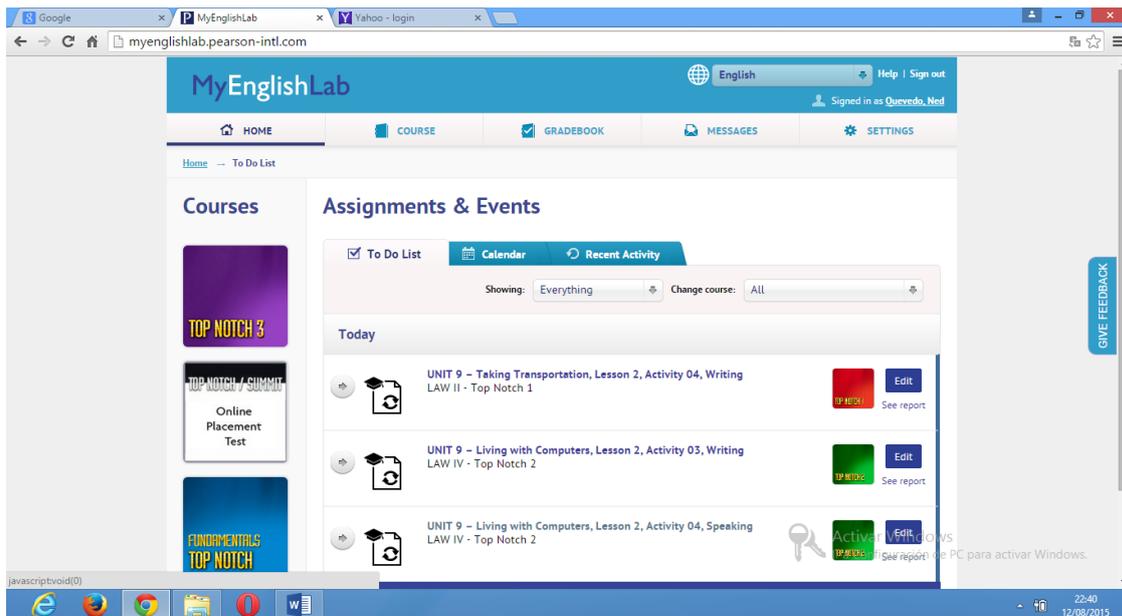
from Law students which may be interested in other subjects from their specialty which has nothing to do with computers and the last group is selected from the kind of students that are using computers in unconventional settings, so the group is from Hotel and tourism degree.

The steps followed are the following:

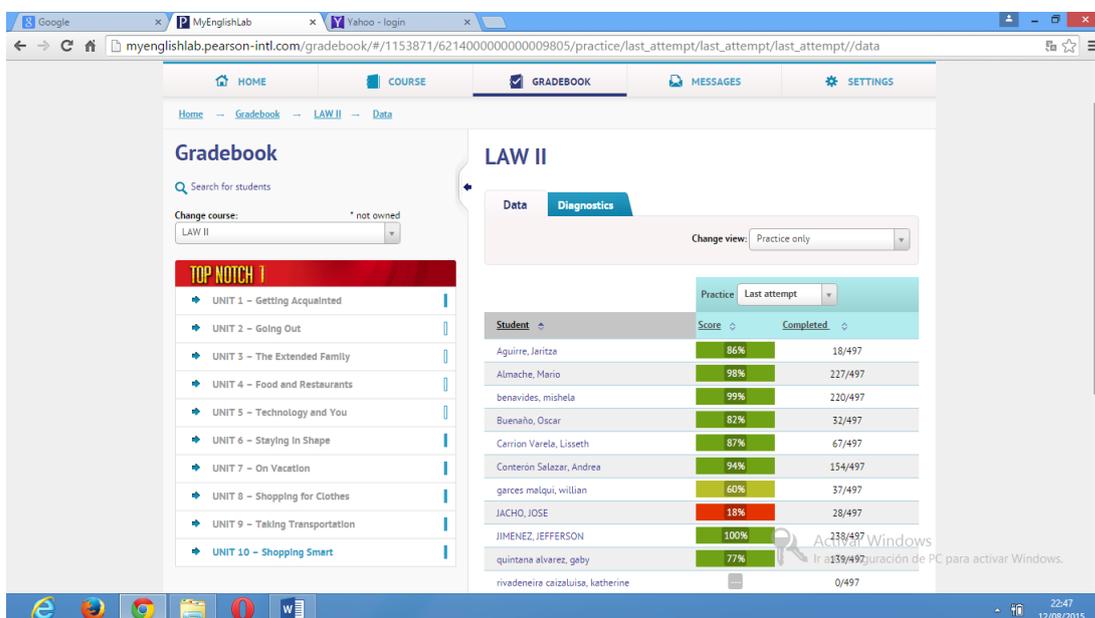
- During the first two months none was dealing with platforms.
- During the other two months they were trained and asked to use the platforms.
- Some students were asked to do certain activities that may help to solve their problems.
- All the students were free to use the platform during these months and to have practice.
- Teacher compiled students to get involved in activities in the platform.
- Students practiced after presentation in class and solved the related tasks.
- Students were evaluated when they had completed the contents of the unit and platform.
- Students got their feedback in class and in the platform.
- Students asked for the other exercises to be done in the platform.

So as it can be seen that the students asked for their time to participate in activities like those designed by the creators of the course for the platform and have a chance to practice more. The platform used in UNIANDES is MyEnglishLab which belongs to Pierson, a very famous printing house that has developed a lot of generated tools for the teacher to understand how the students have been learning.

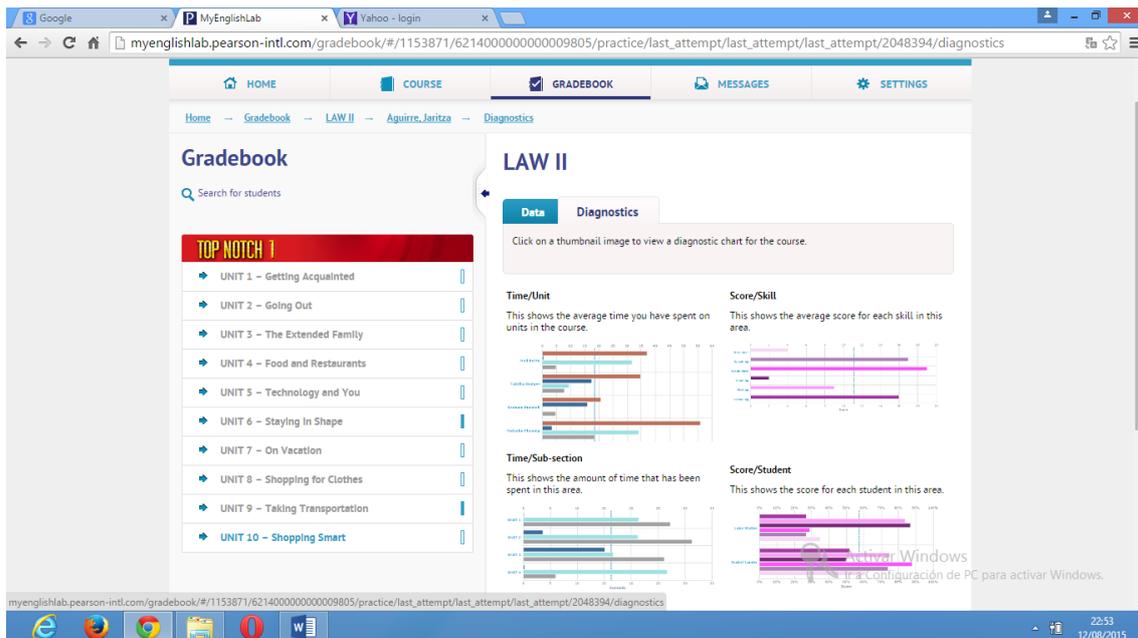
To provide some examples we can illustrate some of them by taken some spots of the platform. The first screen take the teacher and student to Home where they can have the choice of discovering the latest activities done and the teacher also has a chance to move to other windows where the courses, grades, email and settings are displayed.



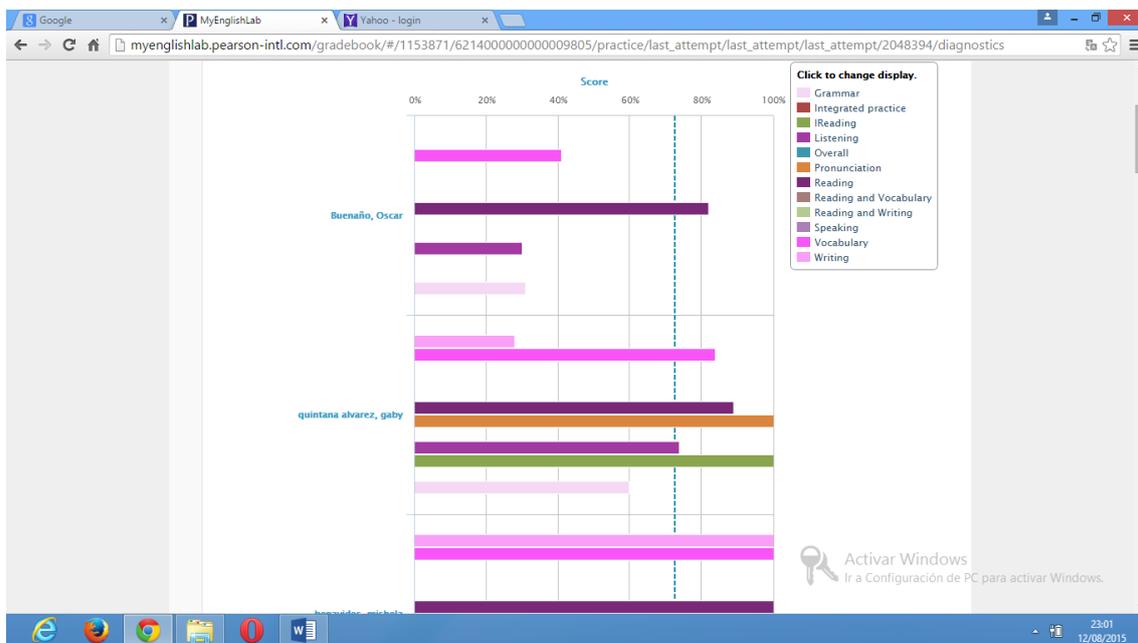
Then the teacher can control what to assign and when to receive it, the students can practice by themselves and the result may be seen immediately by different colors green when they are finishing or have finished the exercises, yellow when they have worked but not enough, red when the amount of work is not satisfactory and there is much more to do and nothing in case the student has not done anything.



A diagnose of the effort and result can be seen if the teacher moves to that part.

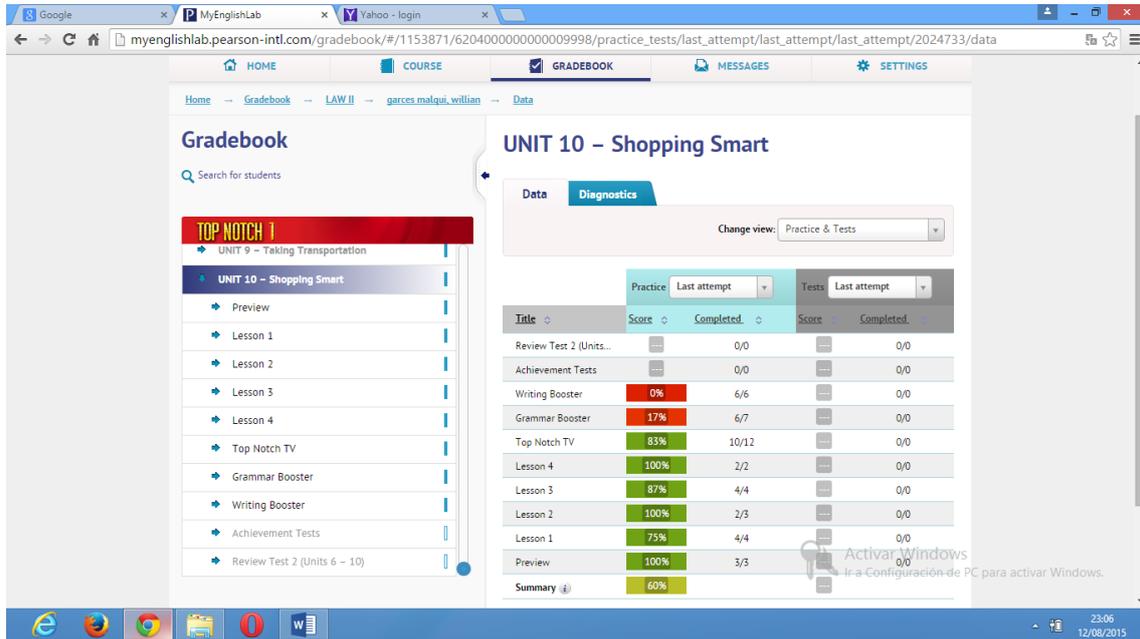


Individually, we can select the diagnose we want to work on. For instance to know how they worked on each area of instruction and how we can go to the section score by students, so you have an idea of their participation, their weak abilities, their differences, etc, and if you want to know the time they devoted to each area and result you go to another section, but everything they do is registered for the teacher to find the strategies that best suit each student and each area under analysis.



One student results can also be observed, to know exactly what they do in each activity. The one we show as an example has done many things but not the

tests, because they were hidden by the teacher and the student try with writing but did not submit the page.



In general, it is a valuable tool for the teacher, but it is also an excellent tool for the students of course the result this time is in better learning. So to compare the use of this we can show the results during the first two months without the platform and its impact once it was introduced, the evidence was similar in different groups' analysis.

SISTEMA II					
Students	Nota 1 Parcial	Nota 2 Parcial	Acumulado	Prueba	Promedio 3 Parcial
1	6	7	10,0	6	8,2
2	8	10	9,7	10	9,8
3	3	6	8,6	5	6,7
4	6	6	8,9	6	7,5
5	7	4	8,0	7	7,5

6	6	6	9,0	4	6,4
7	4	8	9,7	7	8,4
8	6	8	9,3	8	8,7
9	6	5	8,9	5	7,1
10	4	7	9,1	8	8,6
11	7	8	9,0	8	8,3

Students	Nota 1 Parcial	Nota 2 Parcial	Nota 3 Parcial	Nota 4 Parcial
1	6	7	8	9
2	8	10	10	10
3	3	6	7	9
4	6	6	7	8
5	7	4	7	8
6	6	6	6	9
7	4	8	8	10
8	6	8	9	9
9	6	5	7	9
10	4	7	9	9
11	7	8	8	9

Conclusions

It can be stated that the use of didactic platforms are very necessary for better results in English and for students practice that lead them to autonomy. The

groups under analysis have demonstrated the help they received with the exercises in the platform increase considerably their results and their learning and so their grades.

Invariable the students grades rises from the second to third because they used the platform, and in the way they were fixing the content they also increase the result in the last partial.

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