

Conversations through Web 2.0 tools: Nurturing 21st century Values in the ESL Classroom

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Abstract

21st century skills framework proposed by the World Economic Forum (2015) suggests that the development of foundational literacies, competencies and character qualities in students can help them function as responsible and productive global citizens. However, most educational systems focus only on developing foundational literacies like reading and writing, numeracy, scientific literacy, etc. This paper describes an exploratory research conducted to investigate how the 21st century ESL teacher can nurture development of competencies and character qualities through language development tasks delivered using digital tools. The paper is based on the premise that since character qualities are both social and individualistic in nature, they are ideally delivered through collaborative events and acquired best through self-reflection. Reporting from an ESL teacher's perspective, the paper elucidates how participating in the communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity activities mediated through web 2.0 tools can facilitate the acquisition of character qualities like curiosity, persistence, adaptability, social and cultural awareness, etc. It was found that certain features of web 2.0 tools like participatory environments, asynchronicity and ease of use for creating content offered students multiple opportunities for meaningful, sustained and reflective conversations. Using observational data, the researcher identifies acquisition of character qualities and development of competencies in students through these conversations.

Keywords: Adult learning, Value Education, Collaborative learning, 21st century character qualities, ESL classrooms

1. Introduction

While most teachers are guided by the immediate goals of education such as better jobs, higher incomes and improved lifestyles, quality education can, in the long run also ensure social justice and gender equality; improve mental health and physical well-being; increase lifespan; and help protect the environment (UNICEF, 2007; UNESCO, 2016; World Bank, 2018). Quality education is education that imparts knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required to function as responsible citizens; contributes to local and global societies; and furthers the progress of a nation. Sustainable Development Goal no. 4, *Education*, (SDG, United Nations, 2015) explains quality education as education that is inclusive and equitable, promotes lifelong learning opportunities, ensures sustainable development and nurtures global citizenship. One of the targets of this goal (target no. 4.7) is to achieve sustainable global development by adopting the following as integral components of education: creating awareness of human rights and gender equality; promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence; development of global citizenship; and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Education that takes into account both cognitive and non-cognitive development, or whole-person development of an individual is a concept that has gained widespread relevance. Several global education frameworks such as the American Association of College and Universities (2007); Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009); National Research Council (2012); and World Economic Forum (2015) advocate the need to impart to students not only the skills and knowledge to be professionally productive, but also the values and attitudes that are essential to mould them into responsible citizens. This paper reports an exploratory study conducted to investigate how the ESL teacher can leverage web 2.0 tools to facilitate enhancement of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities in students. The study points out that the multifaceted conversation opportunities afforded by web 2.0 tools could be utilised to ensure the development of language skills and acquisition of values in ESL students.

2. A model for quality education

The 21st century skills framework (World Economic Forum, 2015) identifies 16 skills essential for students to succeed in their personal and professional lives. The skills are classified under three larger categories – foundational literacies, competencies and character qualities. Foundational literacies include literacy, numeracy, scientific literacy, ICT literacy, financial literacy, cultural literacy and civic literacy. A significant part of formal education focuses exclusively on the imparting of these skills as they are considered essential to meet basic workforce requirements. However, to survive and flourish in the 21st century, these are not enough. The framework points out that an individual's competencies and character qualities are also significant determinants of their personal and professional success. Competencies are core transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity. Also called portable skills or gate skills, these skills are relevant for an individual's success in their social, professional, educational and personal spheres of action (European University Association, 2007). The third component of 21st century skills, character qualities includes curiosity, initiative, persistence, adaptability, leadership, and social and cultural awareness. The World Economic Forum (2015) recommends that education that takes into account the development of foundational literacies, competencies and character qualities can help bridge the skills gap by ensuring students' workplace-readiness and personal growth.

3. Developing character qualities: a review of current practices

While the World Economic Forum framework (2015) admits that defining and measuring character qualities pose a challenge, character qualities are not new for the classroom practitioner. Various terms *Life Skills*, *Character Development*, *Ethics Education* or *Values Education*, education bodies have always upheld the significance of values or character qualities for the success and well-being of an individual (Lovat, 2010). Based on this understanding, this paper uses the terms character qualities and values interchangeably.

Character qualities go beyond what an individual does or does not do; they are internal processes, psychological mechanisms or individual values that guide people to display virtues like wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence in their actions and thoughts (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). This is similar to Halstead and Taylor's (1996) definition of values as principles, convictions, points of views, standards and perspectives that guide one's actions, or act as reference points that help one make decisions or evaluate one's beliefs. For Bagnall (2007), values or character qualities help people realise individual and social commitments such as facilitating the progress of fellow beings, respecting cultural differences, non-violent conflict resolution, development of local and global societies, etc. In short, character qualities like curiosity, initiative, persistence, adaptability, leadership, and social and cultural awareness help guide

people's actions or thoughts, display universally upheld virtues like wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence, while fulfilling one's commitments to the development of the self, others, the nation and the world at large.

In several countries, *Values Education* is taught as a separate subject whose objective is to impart a set of values ranging from the social, personal to interpersonal. The most commonly followed method of teaching values is the Trait Approach, where the teacher teaches a set of pre-determined values that includes oft-listed values or character qualities like honesty, respect, loyalty, persistence, curiosity, selflessness, self-confidence, etc. using a textbook that has stories, tales, anecdotes, biographies, etc. to illustrate the values taught (Lovat, 2010). However, there is no guarantee that if students are taught character qualities explicitly in a classroom, they will start adopting them in their lives because values are both individualistic and social in nature (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Each person's perception of values is dependent on their experiences, cultural norms, and even socio-ecological factors (Santos, Varnum and Grossmann, 2017). And to compound matters further, values become operative in social, community or interactive events, i.e., character qualities manifest themselves only through the actions of an individual.

NCERT (2011) advocates that values are best acquired and nurtured through experiences that are rooted in the personal and social environment of students. Efficacy of *Values Education* can be improved if teachers scaffold students' abilities to think critically so that they are able to analyse and examine the relevance of values taught; develop students' social skills in order to adapt or redefine values taught to match their specific contexts; and facilitate students' self-reflective practices so that values taught are reconstructed in personally meaningful ways (Coskun and Altinkurt, 2016). However, current pedagogies and instructional methods do not support this. Feng (2019) in his analysis of 19 textbooks across primary to secondary levels raised the concern that *Values Education* textbooks are more engaged with the didactic education of students than with facilitating their critical thinking abilities or social skills.

Participation in social events or simulated social events can increase the relevance of values acquired in students' lives. Researchers (Schmidt, McAdams and Foster, 2009) recommend activities like role playing, storytelling, perspective-taking, etc. to encourage the social construction and development of character qualities. Such activities that promote meaningful engagement with a topic through conversations, questioning, discussion, reflecting and reasoning enhance students' social and critical thinking skills (Wong, 2020), and also have a positive impact on their emotional, social, moral and academic development (Lovat, 2017).

Drawing on the interrelationship between social events and the development of individual values, this writer suggests that character qualities and competencies might have a direct relationship. Since character qualities are social and individualistic in nature, students could develop qualities like leadership, adaptability, persistence, etc. when they are engaged in competency-building activities such as communicating, collaborating, critical thinking and creating, and the consequent acquisition of character qualities could in turn help students demonstrate expertise in communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity competencies. For instance, social and cultural awareness, and leadership are character qualities that can be developed through communication and collaboration activities, and the development of these qualities could in turn help students gain expertise in communicating and collaborating in socially, ethically and culturally appropriate ways. A second example is the competency of creativity that can foster character qualities like curiosity and initiative. Yet another example is critical thinking, a competency that can facilitate the development of character qualities like persistence and adaptability.

Since learning activities that provide opportunities for communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity require students to use language to think, discuss, debate, reflect, share, challenge, collate, apply and develop ideas, this paper proposes an alternate approach to development of character qualities – one that promotes interaction and is integrated with language teaching.

4. Role of dialogues in building character qualities

Dialogues help learners relate to each other as social beings and learn from each other. Dialogues encourage learners to ask questions, to reason and to connect what is learnt with their life experiences. Dialogues also help learners to converse with themselves in an attempt to apply logic to decisions they take. Such conversations with oneself and with others help learners with self-discovery, self-reflection, understanding alternative perspectives, evaluating others' views, valuing individual differences and taking effective decisions (Phillipson, 2018). Meaningful, engaging and inquiry-oriented student conversations do not just improve students' cognitive understanding of subjects learnt, they also create attitudinal changes, promote better process skills, develop critical thinking and build a culture of trust (Nottingham, Nottingham and Renton, 2017).

5. Integrating development of character qualities into ESL instruction

In India, NCERT (2011) recommends that values should not be taught as a separate subject but “deliberate attempt needs to be made to integrate values while teaching subjects” (p.3), while CBSE (2012) exhorts all teachers to become *values facilitators*, echoing Jolls (2008) who proposes that the best way to build character qualities without compromising on knowledge acquisition is by treating content knowledge and *Values Education* not as mutually exclusive subjects, but as one complementing and augmenting the other.

As discussed in the previous section, giving students opportunities to engage in dialogues plays a major role in developing their competencies and character qualities. Since the use of dialogues for communication and collaboration in most present-day workplace settings occurs in English, this paper argues that it is the job of the English teacher to develop competencies and character qualities in students.

5.1 Using technology tools to promote dialogues in the ESL classroom

Dialogues students participate in now are to a large extent transacted through technology. Dialogues in the spoken or written form are sent via mobile phones, emails, SMSes, tweets, WhatsApp messages, Facebook posts and blogs. Teachers and education institutions often ignore this fact when they express reluctance to admit technology into the teaching-learning process. Students in turn find such classrooms disconnected from their real world, the world outside their classroom walls. Using digital tools to mediate and promote dialogues in classrooms could prove to be a value-addition that reduces the gap between classrooms and the real world.

However, just because students use digital tools for everyday communication does not mean that they do not need help in using these tools. Jolls (2008) points out that prior to the formation of the digital global village when children lived in real-time villages, they learned about life, acquired values, developed opinions and formed character qualities by interacting with the others in the village and with their surroundings. Parents, grandparents, other members of the family, teachers, and other adults provided children the filters to view the world, make sense of it, gain from it and contribute to it. These filters – internalised processes, ethics and values, are what helped children acquire knowledge in both formal and informal settings. Today, children live in the digital village that is no longer local, where adults are absent, and which offers no filters. They spend their

time trying to gain information from digital content with no adults to guide them. Jolls (2008) argues that this is why technology must be used in classrooms – to guide students to develop internalised filters (or character qualities) required to acquire, use and create digital content responsibly and productively.

Thirdly, for students who are novice or non-users of technology, using web tools in classrooms helps develop digital literacy¹, an essential component of 21st century literacy skills (National Council of Teachers of English, 2013).

Digital tools afford and warrant interactions that are richer and varied than face-to-face conversations. Using web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs and social media sites allows teachers to utilise the functions of these tools like interaction with large amounts of multimedia online content; synchronous and asynchronous collaboration with potentially anybody in the world; and creation and sharing of user-generated content, to complement and augment classroom instruction practices.

Use of web 2.0 enhances classroom conversations in many ways. Collaborative features of web 2.0 tools allow inclusion of a larger number of participants into a conversation than what typical face-to-face classrooms permit. In a classroom, dialogues occur only between the learner and the teacher and/ or the learner and other learners. Using web 2.0 tools makes it also possible for learners to interact with their peers anywhere in the world, with other teachers, experts, and community elders as well as with rich sources of online information, making conversations authentic socio-contextual events. Multifarious conversations like these (termed *polylogues* by Dobber and van Oers, 2015) help students form positive and just relationships with fellow beings and adopt a non-violent approach to conflict resolution (UNICEF, 2007).

A significant amount of classroom time is required if conversations that express one's views, ask questions, reason, connect what is learnt with one's life, and evaluate alternative perspectives are to effect attitudinal changes, develop critical thinking skills and promote adoption of reflective thinking practices in students. Complementing face-to-face conversations with synchronous and asynchronous virtual interaction opportunities using web 2.0 tools can help teachers extend learning events like conversations to outside classroom spaces and after instruction hours. By allowing discussions to take place at any time of the day and in outside classroom spaces, these tools alleviate eye contact anxiety, take away the burden of expectation of immediate responses, and help build students' confidence. Giving students time to think before responding and offering multiple chances to formulate, reformulate and perfect their responses, also develop their self-correction and language learning skills.

The asynchronicity of virtual interactions on web 2.0 tools paves the way to insightful and meaningful interactions. Due to various spatial, temporal and other constraints, dialogues in a classroom are usually reduced to mere transfer of information, explanation of meaning, summative feedback, formal guidance, sharing of opinion, etc. By making dialogues possible beyond classroom walls, outside classroom hours, and away from the physical presence of the teachers and other students, web 2.0 tools nurture conversations that articulate one's beliefs, voice one's principles and express one's values.

Web 2.0 tools encourage sustained interaction by permitting longer conversations. Dialogues that take multiple turns or loops and happen over several days are essential not only for

¹ Ability to use information and communication technologies to find, understand, evaluate, create and communicate digital information (American Library Association, 2013, page 1).

forming stronger relationships, but also for establishing truthful communication. Unless there is a culture of trust, students may feel uncomfortable sharing their convictions and aspirations, and voicing their innermost feelings in front of others. Participants become less reluctant to share their views when they realise that their views are negotiable as in the case of continued dialogues.

Lastly, storage of conversation events on web 2.0 tools lets students access the complete talk text or text of conversations anytime they want. The potential to revisit these conversations develops students' reflective thinking practices (Lin, Hong and Lawrenz, 2012). And when shared with successive batches of students, these talk texts can function as tertiary learning materials that give students access to a large body of rich peer conversations.

This researcher believes that communication that is digitally mediated, sustained, reflective, meaningful, and with a wider community and a large number of resources can help build students' competencies and develop values that are personally relevant and socially appropriate.

6. The study

This paper reports the findings of a qualitative observational research conducted to study if language development tasks delivered using web 2.0 tools to assist the development of the competencies of communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity, also facilitated the acquisition of character qualities in ESL students. Secondly, the paper tries to explore if the acquisition of character qualities, in turn had any implications on the manifestation of language-based competencies.

The study is purely exploratory in nature and needs to be considered as a preliminary research into investigating if the ESL teacher can also function as values facilitator with the use of web 2.0 tools. The significance of such a study for the ESL teacher is that acquisition of character qualities could make students more competent users of language.

6.1 Methodology

The study reported in this paper was part of a course titled 'Multimedia Academic Writing' offered to semester 5 students on the BA Honours English programme at a Central University in India. The aim of the course was to encourage students to use multimedia resources while writing argumentative essays in English. The researcher was the teacher of the course. The course was taught four hours every week for sixteen weeks.

There were 31 students in the class, and all were in the age group of 19 – 21. This paper reports insights drawn from a writing task that was administered during the third and fourth months of the course.

Months 1 and 2

During the first week of the course, students were randomly divided into six groups of five members, with one group consisting of six students. The groups remained the same till the end of the course. The first two months of the course had instructor-led classes meant to develop students' writing skills in addition to digital and face-to-face group activities. During this time, the students were expected to write two expository and two argumentative essays as individual tasks. Topics of the essays were teacher-determined and were the same for all the students.

To scaffold student writing, each writing task was preceded by two digital pre-writing group tasks. Pre-writing tasks were designed to facilitate sharing of topic-related resources and asynchronous discussion during outside classroom hours. Web 2.0 tools Evernote (<https://evernote.com/>) and Padlet (<https://padlet.com/>) were used for the former and

VoiceThread (<https://voicethread.com/>) and Spiderscribe (<https://www.spiderscribe.net/>) were used for the latter. The digital tasks were supported by classroom discussions. The pre-writing activities were designed as enablers of writing and were expected to build students' topic knowledge and scaffold their linguistic competence.

By the second month, the researcher noticed that the classroom environment had become more participatory in nature; class discussions became an extension of online discussions, students were more inclined to participate in face-to-face classroom discussions, they exhibited an openness to talk about their principles and beliefs and expressed eagerness to share anecdotes. This triggered two questions that guided this research:

Can tasks designed to promote competencies when delivered through web 2.0 tools nurture character qualities in students?

Secondly, can acquisition of character qualities result in enhanced competencies?

The researcher then decided to observe and document student behaviour during the third and fourth months of the course. Students were instructed to start a reflective journal to document the development of their writing abilities and monitor their feelings and thoughts. Informed consent was sought from all students to use data collected for research purposes.

6.2 The task

This paper reports the researcher's observations of the writing tasks that were administered during the third and fourth months of the 'Multimedia Academic Writing' course. During this time, the students were required to make a group presentation and write a multimodal argumentative essay individually.

Part 1: Identifying an argumentative issue.

Each group of students was asked to choose any topic they liked. During the duration of one face-to-face classroom session and three online discussions, each group arrived at a specific argumentative issue related to their topic. Topics chosen were legalising same-sex marriages, banning death penalty, allowing euthanasia, necessity of religion, women's safety in public spaces, and sanitation and hygiene.

Pre-writing digital tasks were slightly altered to facilitate the development of the four competencies of communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. Padlet and Spiderscribe were used for sharing of resources and asynchronous online discussions respectively. Each group was required to add two members from outside the university to participate in their discussions. External participants included teachers in other universities, parents, journalists, members of certain NGOs, two research scholars from Sociology and Economics, a painter, a newspaper editor, a lawyer and a dancer. The researcher was a member of all the groups.

Part 2: Conducting a survey

During this stage, the students were asked to ready a survey questionnaire to collect the opinions of 25 – 30 individuals on various aspects related to their topic/ issue, conduct a survey and analyse its results. Through digital and face-to-face modes, group members collaborated to convert the ideas and issues that grew out of their discussions to statements or questions. A questionnaire was created by each group using Google docs (<https://www.google.com/docs/>). The teacher helped finalise the questionnaire.

After its administration, using Google forms (<https://www.google.com/forms/>), students analysed the results and organised their findings into a PowerPoint presentation.

Part 3: Group presentations

Here, the groups presented the findings of their survey to the whole class. Each presentation was followed by a whole-class discussion.

Part 4: Individual writing task

Based on the inputs from parts 1 to 3, each student was required to create a multimodal argumentative text – a video, comic strip, infographic, narrated PowerPoint, or an illustrated text – on any aspect of the topic they found personally interesting or socially significant. Students were asked to share their work with the teacher and peers.

Table 1: Components of the task

Components	Competencies developed	Tools used
Week 1 Group work: brainstorming and sharing of resources	Communication, Collaboration and Critical thinking	Padlet, Voicethread and Spiderscribe
Weeks 2 and 3 Group work: create a questionnaire, conduct a poll and analyse results	Communication, Collaboration and Critical thinking	Google docs and Google forms
Weeks 4 and 5 Group work: Presentation and whole-class discussion	Communication, Collaboration, Critical thinking and Creativity	PowerPoint
Week 6 Group work: discussion to narrow down and identify topics for individual writing	Communication, Collaboration and Critical thinking	Padlet, Voicethread and Spiderscribe (from week 1), Google docs
Weeks 6 and 7 Multimodal argumentative text (individual writing assignment)	Communication, Collaboration, Critical thinking and Creativity	For videos: Dvolver, Wevideo For comics: Makebeliefcomix For writing multimedia texts: VoiceThread, Penzu
Week 8 Submission of individual writing tasks; Conducting of retrospective interviews		

7. Sources of data

Since asynchronous discussions formed a crucial source of input for the researcher, students were given guidelines (see Appendix 1) to make their online discussions participatory and meaningful. Students were instructed to consult these guidelines every time they contributed to the Padlet, Spiderscribe, Google docs, VoiceThread or PowerPoint. Kim et al. (2016) point out that students are often not willing to take part in online discussions as they are unable to see the academic value of such discussions. However, Black (2005) point out that by giving them guidelines to generate internal dialogues, online discussions can be used to encourage students to reflect on their own as well as peers' responses. Such reflective practices that pay attention to the reason and thoughts that inform one's actions will provide insights into the character qualities and ethical values that guide the individual (Moon, 1999). It was hoped that the guidelines provided by this researcher would help students articulate their views thoughtfully, respond to peer comments respectfully, and above all, facilitate reflective practices to notice how these discussions contributed to their understanding of the topic.

During months 3 and 4, the researcher also recorded her impressions of each class as detailed narratives. Asynchronous conversations indicative of demonstration of character qualities and student transformations were also noted on the researcher's log. Special attention was paid to conspicuous events like when a group decided to ignore a topic or shift their attention to another topic, how students responded when they felt challenged or irritated, how students expressed their disagreements, etc.

Retrospective interviews were conducted at the end of the course to understand students' experiences and thoughts during the course. Some students preferred to be interviewed alone, while others chose to be interviewed along with their group members. Intensive interviewing, a qualitative method that uses unstructured questioning through which the interviewer seeks in-depth information regarding the subject's feelings, experiences and perceptions (Lofland and Lofland, 1984) was used to seek students' feelings about the different tasks. Students were asked open-ended and exploratory questions guided by inputs from their asynchronous discussions, multimodal essays and researcher's log, to elicit their experience of working with web 2.0 tools as well as language gains self-noticed while performing the various tasks. Students were asked to bring their reflective journals for the retrospective interviews to use as stimulation recall or prompts to trigger their memory of specific events to support their responses to questions (Silverman, 2008). Though some of them were reluctant to share their journals with the researcher, all of them consulted it extensively while answering interview questions. These interviews were not audio-taped, but field notes were made by the researcher.

7.1 Analysis of data

Using the list of character qualities drawn by Peterson and Seligman (2004) (See Appendix 2), data from the researcher log and retrospective interviews were analysed, coded and categorised to identify events that demonstrated character qualities. Next, using sequences of asynchronous conversations as portfolios, instances of transformations in student communication behaviours as indicated by their comments were identified. To establish respondent validity, students were invited to comment on the researchers' interpretation of data.

Based on the insights formed, this researcher has attempted to draw rich pictures of learner gains in the classroom. Given below are six classroom vignettes drawn from the researchers' interpretation of the data collected. All student names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

8. Observations

a. Vignette 1: Asha and Ahana

Task: asynchronous discussion on Padlet

Topic: educating men can ensure women's safety in public spaces

In the first round, members discussed general issues like types of public spaces, dangers vs threats, types of dangers in different public spaces, nature of education to be provided, etc. However, there was a shift in the content of their discussion after a high court lawyer and a newspaper editor joined the group. Two women students, Asha and Ahana came forward to share their stories of sexual harassment.

During the interview, Asha reported that until then she had never discussed the incident with anyone since it was "too traumatic". She found it easier to share her story on Padlet, "where one doesn't have to see those sad or disapproving faces" and the discussion is "not followed by questions." She also said it felt "cathartic" to write about the event "in a few sentences and not give out too many details". The discussion that followed helped her learn that she was "not to be ashamed of the events;" recalling what the lawyer posted she said, "the shame is on the perpetrators."

Ahana remarked that the language of discussions became more "real" and "emotionally responsive" once these personal stories were shared. She also commented that the group was able to build a survey questionnaire that went beyond close-ended questions based on definitions, explanations and facts to more "crucial, soul-searching and open-ended questions" that attempted to give a voice to all.

Character qualities reflected: open mindedness, self-confidence, social responsibility, fairness.

Language gains: conscious use of different types of supporting sentences.

b. Vignette 2: Bimala

c. Vignette 3: Cicily and group

Task: asynchronous discussion on Spiderscribe

Topic: death penalty

The face-to-face discussion during week 1 saw the group members sharing strong opinions either in favour of or against death penalty. At this time, Cicily had reported to the researcher that the face-to-face discussions left all the members "bitter and angry". During the interview, another group member said that he was "enraged" and "infuriated".

During their retrospective interviews, many group members pointed out that once the discussions moved to Spiderscribe, the virtual, written mode of discussion helped to "calm" them down and made their responses more balanced. Their "anger dissolved" as they took time to read others' arguments, form rational responses, and word their comments carefully. A group member reported that she was able to "read and receive others' views with an open mind" and that she could record her thoughts more effectively when writing on Spiderscribe than when speaking. Moreover, rather than rely on personal opinions, group members started searching for online resources and linking to them in order to strengthen their arguments.

Character qualities reflected: curiosity, open mindedness, teamwork, adaptability, social responsibility, perspective to take unbiased decisions, fairness, prudence.

Language gains: reduced occurrence of logical fallacies and increase in information literacy skills.

d. Vignette 4: David

Task: individual submission on Makebeliefcomix (<https://www.makebeliefscomix.com/>)

Topic: sanitation and hygiene

As part of his individual submission, David planned to create an animated video using Dvolver (<http://www.dvolver.com>) on hand hygiene. During his interview, David reported that once he started researching and discussing with peers, he started thinking about his audience more carefully. The discussions made him realise that his audience can also be slum dwellers, those in remote or rural areas, and those who have no access to clean water, to clean running water, or to soap. It was at this point that he decided to make a comic strip, and not an animated video, on hand hygiene, focusing on those who do not have access to running water and soap. The decision to make a comic strip was so that it could be printed and pasted near slum areas, “whereas an animated video can be viewed only by those with internet”. He listed “social awareness” and “engagement with community” as benefits he derived from the discussion and the task.

Character qualities reflected: social responsibility, adaptability, leadership, creativity, perspective, love of learning, enthusiasm.

Language gains: better awareness of modifying writing based on audience and message.

e. Vignette 5: Eenas and group

Task: using Mentimeter (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>) and Kahoot (<https://kahoot.com/>) for group presentations

Topic: the need for religion

During the group’s face-to-face discussions with the researcher, Eenas had expressed that the group felt that a PowerPoint presentation was inadequate since it was “one-sided and not interactive.” Their argument was that for a topic like *religion*, the presenters would benefit and the audience would gain if all students were allowed to voice their opinion. Therefore, in addition to PowerPoint, the group used Kahoot and Mentimeter, two web 2.0 tools to ask the audience questions, seek their opinion and gauge their understanding of the ideas presented.

During the interview, Eenas said that “hearing different voices” helped them modify later sections of their presentation. Another member said that their own arguments became stronger and more precise when peers’ opinions were addressed.

Character qualities reflected: development of social, emotional and personal intelligences, love of learning, open mindedness, enthusiasm, curiosity, initiative.

Language gains: heightened sensitivity to the importance of backchanneling in effective communication.

f. Vignette 6: from researcher’s logs

Teacher participation in students’ asynchronous discussions

The researcher feels that the comments she made during asynchronous discussions guided students towards two possible gains – better communication skills and judicious use of web resources.

The researcher intervened during asynchronous discussions to make the students aware that delayed, deliberate and thoughtful sharing of ideas with peers could help them form their own ideas better. It was also noted that most students tended to ignore comments that were awkward or disruptive. The researcher posted responses to such comments with the intention of modelling ways to address all views courteously and empathetically. It was hoped that these responses would help bridge the social gap bound to arise when students misinterpret others and also reduce the interpersonal divide that could form due to overuse of technology for communication (Bugeja, 2018).

By sharing online resources that supported her views, the researcher demonstrated how online discussions can be scaffolded and strengthened with facts and evidence. Most of the students expressed eagerness to adopt this practice – they shared web resources to support their views during asynchronous discussions with many commenting that they felt more confident (“it is easier here”) during online discussions than in face-to-face discussions. Through her comments, the researcher was also able to instil in students two essential practices of checking the credibility of information sources before sharing and citing their sources. Students were also encouraged to adopt the habit of examining the content for harmful text or pictures before sharing.

Character qualities reflected: perspective, open mindedness, integrity, enthusiasm, compassion, social responsibility, fairness, forgiveness, prudence, self-regulation.

Language gains: acquisition of digital and information literacy skills

9. Discussion

These vignettes elaborate how classroom tasks that required students to communicate, collaborate, think critically and create using web 2.0 tools, also taught them values like respect, integrity, confidence, justice, etc. in the way that the students understood them, in the sense that they could relate with, and in the manner that was beneficial for them. Tasks such as these that teach students how to think together, engage in collaborative efforts to arrive at shared understandings, and to arrive at better resolutions of conflicts and problems also seem to be capable of facilitating ESL students’ writing abilities.

According to Phillipson and Wegerif (2017), participatory conversations that are *caring*, *collaborative*, *critical* and *creative* in nature can help establish personal relevance in values, internalise these values and use them. Classroom vignettes reported in this paper illustrate how conversations through web 2.0 tools might be able to better realise these features than those that take place in face-to-face classrooms and indicate the potential of such conversations to develop competencies, character qualities as well as language skills in ESL students.

10. Limitations of the study

Since this is a qualitative observational research that is exploratory in nature, no hypothesis testing has been done. The observations made by the researcher are based on interpretation-driven qualitative analysis of data. Though member checking was used, the suggestion that students developed character qualities which in turn enhanced their competencies and language skills could be influenced by the researcher's personal biases. Further empirical based studies may be required to test the hypotheses proposed by the researcher.

Secondly, language gains listed are based on student self-reports. Since students’ multimodal essays scored high on the use of effective writing and argumentation techniques, matching learners’ reports of language gains with their writing samples would have provided stronger evidence for the claims made in this paper.

11. Implications and conclusion

This paper outlines how instructor-led tasks that develop communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity skills when delivered through web 2.0 tools might help implement effective dialogic pedagogies (Alexander, 2020) in the ESL classroom. Such tasks could help students develop filters to make sense of their surroundings, construct individual understanding of events and thus acquire socially and personally relevant character qualities. The writer suggests that when the ESL teacher becomes a values-facilitator, the resultant development of competencies and character qualities could also lead to demonstrably effective writing skills.

A significant contribution of the study reported in the paper is that by engaging ESL learners in tasks that promote dialogues via web 2.0 tools, teaching no longer remains dominant or repressive; it becomes student centric. Language teaching becomes more responsive, facilitating whole-personality development of individuals. And language becomes not merely a tool for communication but also for expression.

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Appendix 1

Follow these instructions whenever you post:

1. Be friendly
 - Address participants by name
 - Acknowledge their ideas by complimenting them
 - Be respectful when disagreeing with their point of view
 - Inform your group members before you edit or delete their contributions
2. Respond to at least two participants’ comments during every discussion. Your comments should be one from each category:

Category A

- a. Re-state other’s ideas while agreeing with them
- b. Justify or clarify your ideas. Explain what you’re saying and give reasons to support your ideas
- c. Extend others’ ideas by adding more information or a new perspective

Category B

- d. Present alternative perspectives or different points of view to further your own or a participants' views
 - e. Challenge the ideas raised by a participant by pointing out problems/ loopholes/ fallacies
3. Once you've posted your comment, it's time to reflect on your growth. Keep the discussion page open. Think about the discussion event, your **learning**, and your **reactions** and **responses** to peer comments.

Re-read all comments and ask yourself the following questions.

- a. Did you learn anything new from this discussion? Did it increase your topic knowledge? Did it make you question your ideas?
- b. Now, pay attention to your **feelings**, **thoughts** and **actions**. What prompted your comment? How did you feel?
- c. What made you feel so?
- d. What thoughts did you have?
- e. How did you deal with negative thoughts, if any?
- f. How did you behave?
- g. What did you learn from today's discussion experience? Has the discussion changed your behaviour in any way?

Now, write a short paragraph in your journal.

Adapted from *Online Communication Strategies* by Verenikina, Jones & Delahunty (2017)

Appendix 2

Virtues (V) and character qualities (CQ)

wisdom and knowledge: (V) (CQ) curiosity, creativity, perspective (wisdom), love of learning, open mindedness
courage (V) (CQ) bravery, persistence, integrity, enthusiasm
humanity (V) (CQ) love, kindness (compassion), generosity, social, emotional, personal intelligences
justice (V) (CQ) social responsibility, teamwork, leadership, fairness
temperance (V) (CQ) forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation
transcendence (V) (CQ) beauty, gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality

From Peterson and Seligman (2004)