Trabalho de Projeto apresentado para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Teaching English as a Second / Foreign Language realizado sob a orientação científica de Allyson Roberts and Ana Frankenberg-Garcia
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my parents and my husband for all their support throughout this journey. I would also like to thank Denise, my partner in this adventure, and Sónia, for her endless encouragement.

Also, my sincere gratitude to Allyson Roberts and Ana Frankenberg, my supervisors, for all their help, constant guidance and support.

A special word to the writing workshop students, for all their enthusiasm, motivation, willingness to learn and for allowing me to learn so much more than I ever taught them.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the kind support the school I work for, for allowing me to put into practice this action research.
DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
THROUGH THE USE OF BLOGS AND E-MAIL
AT PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL

SOFIA FUNENGA

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, students, including primary school students, have easy access to computers and there are many internet resources, such as blogs, e-mail and Twiducate, that can be used with numerous benefits in an ESL classroom to promote language learning and to develop writing skills. This action research attempts to provide an answer to the research question Can the use of blogs and e-mails enhance primary school students’ writing skills?

To develop this action research, a writing workshop was conducted over a period of eight months, involving nineteen primary school students aged eight and nine years old. Groups of three and four students were set up and asked to develop writing tasks, collaboratively, through a process writing approach, using their Magalhães computers. The students had access to Twiducate and e-mail, and a blog was created and assigned to each group so that the students could post all of their written drafts as well as share their writing with their peers and post comments on the drafts.

It was possible to conclude that the use of blogs and e-mail provided a real purpose to write, a real audience and genuine feedback, allowing the students to change their attitude towards writing and improving its content and language use. The findings of this action research suggest that online tools, such as blogs, e-mail and Twiducate, can be used in a classroom environment, namely at the early stage of primary school, to promote different learning opportunities, encourage interactivity and its benefits inside the classroom and foster an active and independent learning process.

KEYWORDS: writing skills, ELT, blogs, e-mail, motivation and primary school learners
RESUMO

Hoje em dia, os alunos do 1º ciclo do ensino básico têm um acesso facilitado a computadores e a diversos recursos na internet, como blogs, e-mail, Twiducate, que podem ser usados para promover a aprendizagem do inglês como segunda língua e para desenvolver as competências de escrita numa língua estrangeira. Este action research pretende responder à questão Pode o uso de blogs e e-mail melhorar as competências de escrita dos alunos do 1º ciclo?

Para desenvolver este action research foi concebido um Workshop de escrita com oito meses de duração, envolvendo dezanove alunos do 1º ciclo, com oito e nove anos de idade. Foram formados grupos de três e quatro alunos e foram desenvolvidas atividades de escrita, com recurso a computadores Magalhães, em grupo e utilizando a metodologia de process writing. Os alunos tiveram acesso ao Twiducate e ao e-mail, e foi criado um blog para cada grupo para que os alunos pudessem publicar todos os seus rascunhos, bem como partilhar textos com os seus colegas e escrever comentários sobre os rascunhos.

Foi possível concluir que o uso de blogs e do e-mail proporcionou aos alunos verdadeiros objetivos para escrever, interlocutores autênticos e feedbacks genuínos, o que ajudou a alterar a atitude dos alunos face às atividades de escrita e a melhorar o conteúdo e a linguagem dos textos. As conclusões deste action research sugerem que ferramentas disponíveis online, como blogs, e-mail e o Twiducate, podem ser usadas em sala de aula, nomeadamente desde o 1º ciclo, para promover diferentes oportunidades de aprendizagem, para desenvolver a interatividade e para fomentar um processo de aprendizagem ativo e independente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: competências de escrita, ensino do inglês, blogs, e-mail, motivação, 1º ciclo
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1. INTRODUCTION

Developing primary school students’ writing skills in L2 can be very challenging, both for the teacher and the students, as it is often believed that in order to write the students only need to be master a certain amount of vocabulary and sentence structures. For young learners between eight and ten years old, who are still developing their reading and writing skills in their first language, learning how to write can be even more difficult, especially when using a second language (McKay, 2006), where they have to focus on the content of their written pieces as well as on the use of the foreign language.

When helping young learners developing writing skills, there are numerous aspects to take into consideration: young learners’ characteristics and their cognitive abilities using a second language, the use of authentic written language, the role of having an audience for the students’ texts and the importance of the purpose and context of the written tasks. Is it possible to address all of these issues when using blogs and e-mails to develop writing tasks with primary school students?

There are many studies about the use of these tools in L2 writing skills development with teenager and adult learners but, despite the fact that primary schools students are now increasingly familiar with blogs and social networks as well as the use of computers and online tools, the amount of research on the use of technology with this age group (eight to ten years old) to develop writing skills is sparse.

To provide an answer to the research question Can the use of blogs and e-mail enhance primary school students’ writing skills?, nineteen students attended an experimental writing workshop during a period of eight months. The students were set in groups of three and four students and a blog and an e-mail account were created by the teacher for each group. The students were then asked to carry out collaborative writing tasks (a total of four tasks over twenty-seven workshop sessions) using computers and displaying all the drafts and finished texts on the groups’ blog page. All the students had access to the writing workshop blogs and were encouraged to write feedback comments to the texts published by their peers.
At the end of the action research cycle, it was possible to conclude that the students’ attitude toward writing was very positive and that both the content and the language use of these primary school students had improved.
2. TEACHING CONTEXT

2.1. The School and English Language Teaching

The school where this study took place is a private Portuguese school providing education from kindergarten to 4th grade of primary school. In this institution, Portuguese and English educational principles go hand in hand and English language teaching plays a crucial role in the school’s project.

Kindergarten pupils, aged three to five years old, follow a partial immersion and topic based curriculum and are exposed to English language for three hours a day (a total of fifteen hours per week). Primary school students, aged six to nine years old, have ninety minutes of English lessons everyday (a total of seven hours and a half per week) and, from the second year onwards, these students also attend one weekly hour of ICT in English. English as a second language is therefore, alongside the Portuguese national curriculum, a very important part of the school’s syllabus throughout kindergarten and primary school years.

Given the number of hours allocated to English teaching, both at kindergarten and primary level, the majority of its students finish primary school after attending seven years of English lessons, reaching A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (2001). In kindergarten, the emphasis is put on oral practice and production and English is taught through the use of games, songs, stories and roleplaying. The primary English curriculum also includes a wide variety of resources and literacy is developed from the second year onwards, when these young learners start learning how to read and write in English.

Throughout primary school years, the students sit at Cambridge (2011) exams for young learners (Starters, Movers and Flyers) and at the end of the fourth year, the students, since 2010, also take the Trinity College Exam ISE0.

Overall, the students of this private kindergarten and primary school are very good at speaking, listening and reading, but the writing skills are the weakest skill of these young learners. This can be explained by the fact that these students only have contact with the second language orally in kindergarten as well as in the first year of primary school, in order not to interfere with the acquisition of first language reading.
and writing skills. The school has been trying to promote strategies to develop the students’ writing skills.

2.2. Computers and English

Anticipating the need to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century, the school has allocated two hours per week of computer classes, in a suitably equipped computer lab, for primary school students: one hour in Portuguese, one hour in English. Students have then the opportunity to become familiar with the general use of computers and with the basic features of Microsoft Word and Power Point. In those computer lessons that are taught in English, students also explore software and online resources, such as games and exercises, in order to reinforce vocabulary and grammar structures previously addressed in English lessons.

In 2008, when the Portuguese Ministry of Education started a special programme designed to allow primary school pupils access to a government-issued laptop (called Magalhães) conceived for their basic needs, the school encouraged the students to purchase this computer and promoted its common usage by installing a wireless network that could be accessed by all students in Portuguese and English classes.

2.3. The English Monday Club and the writing workshop

In order to increase the students’ exposure to English language, the school has also been promoting, since 2008, its own English Language Clubs. These clubs take place at the end of the day and have been designed for third and fourth year students. These clubs, organised and administered by the school’s English teachers, include subjects such as science and citizenship.

In September 2010, the idea of creating The English Monday Club emerged. It was planned as a sixty-minute club for fourth year students that could be sub sectioned into two different areas: a writing workshop and a Maths workshop, both taught in English and conceived with the purpose of dealing with the students’ difficulties with writing skills and logical and deductive reasoning. The students were
divided into two groups and attended 30 minutes of each Workshop, the ideal length of time for young learners who are tired at the end of the school day and have, therefore, a shorter attention span and a lower level of tolerance to formal teaching. In October 2010 the English Monday Club was launched and nineteen fourth year pupils - A2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (2001) - , eight boys and eleven girls, attended a total of twenty seven thirty-minute sessions, over a period of eight months. These students were, in October 2010, eight (five students) and nine (fourteen students) years old.

Having been given the opportunity to conduct the writing workshop of the English Monday Club with the purpose of fostering writing skills, I chose to develop these skills with the aid of computers. The previous year, in my Portuguese fourth year lessons, I had already run an experimental collaborative class blog with the purpose of fostering motivation for writing; therefore, when the school installed an internet broadband wireless connection throughout the school that could be accessed by any student’s computer, the conditions for developing writing skills through the use of blogs and e-mails seemed optimal. All students attending the writing workshop had a Magalhães computer, internet access was definitely ensured and my previous experience with blogging had shown that the students felt motivated as a result of having a wider audience for their texts and feedback from their peers.

Taking into account the age group of these students and their specific characteristics as learners, it was necessary to consider whether it was possible to develop writing skills in L2 through the use of blogs and e-mails at this age and what should be taken into account to achieve that. Issues such as process writing, collaborative writing and the purpose and motivation to write needed to be explored. This is what I wanted to explore through an action research cycle, focusing on the findings of the research question: Can the use of blogs and e-mail enhance primary school students’ writing skills?
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Second language development and young learners

The study of how people learn a language other than their first language has become an object of study since the second half of the 20th century as a result of a globalized world, where people from different nations and languages feel the need to communicate with each other either for pleasure or business. Initially, this was often referred to as Second Language Acquisition, but more recently the use of the term Second Language Acquisition has evolved to Second Language Development. Bot and Larsen-Freeman (2011) adopted the use of Second Language Development to describe and explain “the development and use of more than one language in individuals” (p. 6). This developmental perspective regards learning a language as an ongoing process, in which a language is never totally acquired.

Nowadays, the importance achieved by the English language, given its status of lingua franca, has enhanced the motivation for learning the language and, more specifically, for parents to want their children to learn English from an early age. In light of past research that indicated that the sooner children started learning a language the higher their chances were to become proficient (Shipton, 2006), schools have started teaching English to young learners, who, according to McKay (2006) are children from 6 to 12 years old.

In Portugal, for example, state schools are now teaching English to primary school students and the vast majority of private kindergarten schools offer English lessons in their curriculums.

However, it is important to bear in mind that children’s characteristics as learners set them apart from adult learners. Young learners are still growing and developing first language literacy which makes them more vulnerable than adults (McKay, 2006). Learning a foreign language at this age should, therefore, be fun, motivating and, globally, a positive and happy experience. Affective factors are of extreme importance when dealing with such young learners and the children should be exposed to the language and given the opportunity to experiment with the
language and to make mistakes (Shipton, 2006). On the contrary, feeling uncomfortable, confused, bored or under pressure can make them stop learning.

The experience that these young learners have with the language at such young age can influence whether they continue to learn the language or not, and evidence has shown that the contact with the language at such young age has strong consequences in language learning later in life, particularly in secondary education (Cameron, 2003). In fact, teachers will need to be able to deal with ever growing mixed ability classes (of students who, together in a class, are in their 5th year of language learning or in their 10th year) and find ways to maintain learners motivated after these long periods of language learning (Cameron, 2003). Some learners will even need fresh starts and to be remotivated.

In light of these new researches, the experience itself of learning a language plays a vital role in the process of language development and, more than the age of starting to learn a new language, the environment in which they do so and the experience that is provided are of major importance.

3.2. Writing skills in young learners through a process approach

Writing is often viewed as a solitary and individual task that can only be assessed on the quality of the final product of that task. Literature has shown that it is one of the skills in which learners who are learning a foreign language have more difficulties (Weigle, 2002) and young learners, who are still learning how to write in their first language, present even more problems when addressing writing tasks in a foreign language (McKay, 2006). They are still acquiring vocabulary and becoming aware of the grammar rules and structures of the second language but, more important, they are still developing literacy skills and strategies to make their writing effective.

3.2.1. Motivating the students to write

A very important aspect to take into consideration is how to successfully motivate young learners to write, particularly in a foreign language.
According to Cameron (2001) and Reilly and Reilly (2005) one of the most important things is to provide young learners as many opportunities to write as possible, helping the students to become fluent writers. This can be achieved by having the students writing journal entries, to which the teachers respond to without focusing on the language errors (Cameron, 2001), or writing texts about topics of their interest. There are also studies (Lo and Hyland, 2007; Tran, 2007) that indicate that allowing the students to write about topics that relate to their interests or their life experiences is an effective way to motivate students to write. This way the students are engaged to writing tasks that are meaningful. Harmer (2004) also suggests providing stimulating inputs that engage students, such as tasks that are challenging not only intellectually, but that can also connect to the students’ emotions.

Another motivational aspect is to ensure that the students understand why they are writing a text (purpose) and to whom (audience), rather than writing texts only for the teacher to mark. Cameron (2001) and Reilly and Reilly (2005) highlight the importance of encouraging the students to share their writing pieces, and studies as the ones described by Lo and Hyland (2007) and the Tai Po Old Market School (2003) suggest that having an audience can be very beneficial in terms of developing confidence and adding an incentive to writing.

In summary, in order to motivate young learners to write, teachers should guide them through tasks that are related to the students’ interests, and have a purpose and a real audience. Furthermore, Cameron (2001) highlights that for primary school children writing should be a positive experience.

3.2.2. The process of writing

In order to help young learners to become motivated, fluent and effective writers, they should be presented with tasks that are structured to help them write progressively extended texts, developing the content of their texts but also the language used.

With the purpose of enhancing primary school students’ writing skills through the use of blogs and e-mails, the teaching approach followed the process writing cycle suggested by Tompkins (2008), always through collaborative writing, which includes five different nonlinear stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.
Tompkins (2008) describes process writing as a multistage process that goes from gathering and organising ideas to writing drafts and polishing them before publishing. Process Writing has been researched since the beginning of the seventies. Emig (1971) and Briton (1975) looked at process writing of high school students and Graves (1975) studied young learners. Flower and Hayes (1977) also developed process writing with college students, setting planning, translating and reviewing as stages that, far from being linear, are recursive (Flower and Hayes, 1977), meaning that writers often go back to earlier stages while writing (Tompkins 2008, p. 6). White and Arndt (1991) recommend six stages - generating ideas, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating and re-viewing – and Tompkins (2008) advocates prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing as the key features of the writing process.

Despite the established steps and stages of the process, the emphasis of all these researchers is on the process itself which that eventually provides autonomy and independence for writers due to recurring use of reflective and self-assessment skills. This type of reflection on how to write and what to do in each stage of the process can be enhanced from an early age at primary school. Although young learners may need some help to monitor their writing and to move back and forth between the different stages of the writing process (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1982), they can also develop an active and responsible learning attitude towards writing, while teachers provide support.

The first stage of Tompkins (2008) process writing model is prewriting. The author recognises it as a very important moment, albeit many times neglected. This is the stage where the topic is chosen, the ideas are organised and the purpose, audience and form of writing are considered. The teacher can help and foster ways to assist the students to make choices by asking them students to use drawings, spidergrams or lists. Another way to facilitate the prewriting stage, especially when addressing young learners, is providing a model for the children. The use of models or patterns (Harmer, 2004) is also a form of scaffolding, crucial for young learners that need guidance and support.

The drafting stage is where the students focus on the ideas gathered and start writing focusing on the content, rather than on spelling or neatness. What matters is to give way for the ideas to take form and to focus on conveying the meaning of the
text. In this stage, each of the texts written by the students will be called drafts. The drafting stage is inter-twinned with the revision stage, and the sequence “drafting, revising, redrafting” can be dealt with many times before a final text is achieved (White and Arndt, 1991). Revision, according to McKay (2006), “is not just polishing writing; it is meeting the needs of readers by adding, substituting, deleting, and rearranging material” (p. 13).

After revising and rewriting the drafts, the students focus on spelling and mechanical errors (Tomkins, 2008; Parsons, 2001). To deal with these language use mistakes, White and Arndt (1991) and Tompkins (2008) agree that the best way is to negotiate a correction code with the students, established and accepted by both the teacher and students. This correction code, with symbols for each error that can be written in the margin of the draft, can be used by the teacher to highlight the errors that the students will then attempt to correct. The correction code can also be used by the students to self or peer-assess the writing piece. When correcting mistakes, marked by the teacher or the students, the students, especially young learners, can be assisted by the teacher (Tompkins, 2008).

The publishing stage is the key feature of the writing process, since that is the moment when the students share their writing with an audience: “sharing writing is a social activity, and through sharing, children develop sensitivity to the audience and confidence in themselves as authors” (Tompkins, 2008, p.20). This stage is often ignored in classroom and the texts are written to no one other than the teacher. However, having an audience to read the students’ texts, other than the classroom teacher, is of utmost importance because the students start seeing themselves as authors (Rubenstein, 1998; Peregoy and Boyle, 2005) and that is what gives the students motivation to choose the best sentences and ways to interact with the reader throughout the process of writing. Traditionally, the students can create books with their final texts (Peregoy and Boyle, 2005) but nowadays there are teachers experimenting with the new technologies and using online tools to provide an audience for the students’ texts. Blogs are one of these online tools and they have been often used to publish the students’ final texts, but also to publish drafts that can be observed by all the classroom students as a learning tool. In fact, according to Arslan (2010) and Dippold (2009) one of the advantages of using blogs in writing
instruction contexts is that all students, at any time and place, can examine their peers’ drafts to learn from them or to give and receive feedback on these drafts.

The whole process approach to writing has the purpose of developing the students’ reflective skills, right from an early age as in primary school. Learners are progressively prompted to autonomously analyse their drafts and improve these while developing self and peer assessment skills. The benefits of developing self and peer assessment skills in young learners are numerous. By being aware of the criteria used to assess their work, young learners can reflect on the quality of their work and become more conscious and responsible towards their own learning (McKay, 2006).

In relation to young learners, McKay (2006) argues that with the appropriate guidance, children should be encouraged to be active participants in the self and peer assessment process. Tompkins (2010) and White and Arndt (1991) suggest the use of checklists that can be used at the revising stage or at the end of the process, to assess the final text. Although it may be new to some young learners to self-assess their work or peer-assess their peers’ work, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) as well as the Junior European Language Portfolio (2001) and the Portuguese version, “O meu primeiro portefolio Europeu de Línguas”, (2007) encourage this type of assessment, enabling students, from an early age, to take responsibility for their learning process. In order to assess drafts and final texts, checklists can be used, inspired by the descriptors used in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) or the Can do statements used in the different validated models of the Junior European Language Portfolio (2001), helping students to understand which features of a text should be met in each genre and, by being conscious of these features, the students develop independence and autonomy to improve their texts. Moreover, peer assessment presents the advantage of putting students in contact with other peers’ written texts and the criteria that is expected for those specific texts, providing an opportunity for children to learn from their peers (McKay, 2006) and to progressively develop the capacity of self-assessment (White & Arndt, 1991).
3.2.3. Collaborative writing

Collaborative writing, with students sharing ideas and helping each other writing and reviewing a text, facilitating meta-cognition, has been described by White and Arndt (1991) and Harmer (2004) as another way to enhance writing skills in a foreign language. Through collaborative writing, the students need to negotiate on how to approach the task, how will the task be done and what each of the students can bring to the task (Larkin, 2010). The benefits of collaborative writing, with students exploring ideas together and providing each other immediate feedback, have also been described by Storch (2005) who came to the conclusion that, in pairs, students wrote better texts than individually. Moreover, the advantages of collaborative writing can extend to the other skills (speaking, listening and reading) as it has been described in the study conducted by Tai Po Old Market School (2003) in Hong Kong. When negotiating what and how to write, the students are also practising speaking and listening; when self assessing their writing pieces and analysing other students texts to provide feedback, the students are putting into use their reading skills.

Kessler, Bikowski and Boggs (2012) alert to the fact that some students may feel reluctant to develop collaborative writing, whether for a matter of preference, for being afraid to expose themselves or considering writing as a personal task. Nonetheless, according to these authors, students who develop collaborative writing using web-based tasks – such as wikis, electronic portfolios, e-mail – tend to focus more on meaning rather than form and are more motivated to write, as each member of the group believes to have made a successful contribution. These findings have also been discussed by Shehadeh (2011) who came to the conclusion that collaborative writing helps students to improve the content, structure and organisation of their texts and empowers students, as they develop a positive and active attitude towards L2 writing, when realising that they can contribute to each other learning by sharing their own knowledge with other peers. In a nutshell, writing, rather than a solitary and individual task that takes place inside one student’s head, can be constructed socially, resorting to peers to accomplish an end (Larkin, 2010) which can be of significant value when addressing young learners. Tompkins (2008) also suggests that collaborative writing is especially important when working with young learners, given that it is a
good way for students to learn the steps involved in writing as well as to have experience working through the writing process without the complexities of writing alone.

3.3. Using Information and Communication Technology with young learners

In our globalised world, students are now used to technology to develop all aspects of their everyday lives and naturally expect to have it included in their classrooms and learning processes (Davies et al, 2012), especially young learners who were already born into a world where computers and internet play a major role (Hayton, 2009). In fact, the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the mainstream of ELT has been recognized and its dominance in today’s world urged ELT teachers, schools and institutions to make an effort to modernize their teaching resources.

One of the main advantages of the internet nowadays - Web 2.0 – is the wide range of authentic materials that it can provide, with real in use language to suit the exact purposes and contents of an ELT lesson, and the possibility of creating web pages, blogs, wikis or e-learning platforms where teachers store exercises, content pages, glossaries, multimedia resources or even chat rooms or forums. Cameron (2001) highlights the advantages that the use of Internet tools can have on the literacy skills: “the world of cyberspace relies on literacy skills and it already offers exciting possibilities for literacy skills development as well as ones we cannot yet imagine” (158).

Another aspect of interest for ELT is the fact that Internet tools and resources can be used to provide an authentic audience, which not only increases the students’ motivation to develop classroom tasks, contributing to a more enjoyable learning process (Davies, 2012), but also creates essential conditions for developing writing skills within a real context (Warschauer and Whittaker, 1997; Cameron, 2001). Another aspect to take into account is the easiness of using a word processor for the writing process, rather than paper and pencil. Harmer (1997) recognises that using a word processor to change a text and make corrections is more immediate and interesting.
and Tompkins (2008) highlights the benefits for the students, right from elementary level, to easily revise and redraft a text.

But there are aspects to consider regarding the use of ICT, especially when addressing young learners who sometimes lack the necessary metaskills to cope with computer-based lessons (Felix, 2008). In this case, Davies et al (2012) suggest training in computer literacy for both students, who are inexperienced and might feel overwhelmed by the degree of difficulty, and teachers, who need to be prepared to provide students support (Warschauer and Whittaker, 1997).

Since 2008, the Portuguese government has been making efforts to develop computer literacy both for students and teachers. The government launched a special technological program, coordinated by the Ministry of Education, which provided computer training for teachers, broadband Internet access in all state schools and computers available at low prices for teachers and students from the first to the twelfth year.

The computers allocated for primary school students, small and resistant laptops, are designated as Magalhães. From September 2008 to June 2011, 400 thousand Magalhães computers had already been distributed to primary school students (Ministério da Educação, 2010) and teachers have been encouraged to use them in classrooms as a pedagogical tool.

**3.3.1. Using blogs to develop writing skills**

A blog, short for web log, is an online tool that allows people to publicly post messages on a web page on whatever they choose to write about, on a regular basis. It is an interactive online tool that applied to an ELT teaching classroom, particularly when teaching writing skills, can be of great relevance in the sense that it provides a genuine audience and develops authentic communication between students (Ward, 2004).

In a general teaching context, blogs can be set by teachers and/or learners and ideas and content can be generated and created by learners, individually or collaboratively (Dudeney and Hockly 2008). According to Eide (2005), blogs can improve critical and analytical thinking and develop creativity and, used inside the
classroom, they can contribute to the enhancement of the writing skills (Richardson, 2006; Arslan, 2010; Dudeney and Hockly, 2008). In fact, blogs can play a crucial role for the writing skills enhancement, since they provide writing practice and a sense of ownership to the students who own the blog, which is important for the students to consider themselves as authors (Rubenstein, 1998; Peregoy and Boyle, 2005, Tompkins, 2008). The use of blogs also gives the students a sense of audience, facilitates resources exchange and helps providing optimized feedback on process writing.

Many studies have been conducted all over the world, in a wide variety of teaching areas that draw on the advantages of using blogs in classrooms (Quible, 2005; Sparacio and Witonsky, 2006; Sun, 2010; Abate, Gomes and Linton, 2011). Although there are numerous examples of using blogs with adult or teenage learners, research about the use of blogs with young learners to foster the development of writing skills is rare (Sun, 2010).

With adult learners, research has shown that using classroom blogs creates “an effective task-based environment” (Sun, 2010) to develop writing skills in L2, improving the students’ motivation, their involvement and commitment to the tasks, the students’ autonomy and their sense of real purpose and audience for the tasks set. Arslan (2010) also conducted a study with adult English language learners and concluded that students using blogs achieved better results than students having in-class writing tasks.

The challenge is now to assess whether the use of blogs to develop the students’ writing skills in L2 is also beneficial for primary school students who are still dealing with literacy development and, at the same time, lack the computer experience that older students already have.

### 3.3.2. Using e-mail to develop writing skills

E-mail has been considered a "low-tech" medium (Gonglewski, Meloni and Brant, 2001) provided by the internet and a very productive tool to teach writing skills in ELT.
One of the main advantages of using e-mail in ELT is the fact that it provides students with an excellent opportunity for real and natural communication (Warschauer, 1995), vital interaction and feedback (Belisle, 1996), a holistic approach to writing through real-life experience (Greenfield, 2003) and authentic communicative situations (Gonglewski, Meloni and Brant, 2001), whether through tasks that have students writing to other students in or out of the class, pen pals or the teacher.

E-mail can also be advantageous for process writing. Instead of numerous pieces of paper with drafts and redrafts, messages can be sorted by name, date or type, all of easy access and electronic storage. This organisation can also be more convenient for the teacher to analyse both the process and the final product, as well as to access past writing tasks in order to grade a student’s work or to create a profile. Belisle (1996) also refers that when using e-mail to communicate, the students tend to focus more on the content of the message, rather than on the use of language, making writing more fluid and enhancing the content of the texts. Furthermore, using e-mail for the writing tasks puts the focus on the students, rather than on the teacher, making the students feel in control of their own learning (Gonglewski, Meloni and Brant, 2001).

The motivational aspect is important too. Authors as Cononelos and Oliva (1993), Kern (1995), Beauvois and Elledge (1996) agree that teaching writing using e-mail facilitates both the communication and the revision process. A study about the use of e-mails with secondary students to develop writing skills, conducted in Hong Kong (Greenfield, 2003), also showed that 84% of the students involved preferred to use computers in English learning. For these students using the computer to write, apart from being more interesting and modern than handwriting, was easier and the correction of errors was also facilitated.

It is therefore important to analyse whether the perceptions of older students about the use of e-mail to develop writing skills can be transposed to young learners. Ho’s (2000) study in Singapore is one of the few research projects on using e-mail for communication between primary school students and its conclusions indicate that the use of e-mail can have numerous advantages for the writing skills development in L2, such as providing the genuine and realistic reasons for the students to write.
4. RESEARCH

In order to answer the research question *Can the use of blogs and e-mail enhance primary school students’ writing skills?*, an action research approach was put into practice.

Action research was first described by Lewin (1946) and has since become a research methodology commonly used to address the area of language teaching. Mcniff (2002) has described it as “a practical way of looking at your own practice in order to check whether it is as you feel it should be” (p. 3) and many other authors (Stenhouse, 1975; Nunan, 1992; Elliot, 1991) have looked at this type of research as a cycle. Although many of these authors present different names for each stage of the cycle, they all agree that planning, implementing actions and reflecting are the key features of action research.

In this case, and in order to understand whether writing skills can indeed be improved by the use of blogs and e-mails at primary school level, the planning stage involved reviewing the literature on this topic and making decisions about implementing the writing workshop, as well as deciding what data would be collected and how. Reflection took place every time new data was collected, as well as at the end of the implementing stage. The outcomes of what was being done were consistently analysed, which facilitated the process of drawing conclusions and planning the following step. At the end of the action research, the reflection focused on the implications of the study in order to plan a next cycle.

However, it is important to highlight that, even with data triangulation as suggested by Wallace (1998) to achieve valid and credible data, what is presented in this action research is a small scale classroom investigation, and there are intrinsic limitations to the findings as they are related to this particular group of students targeted by the writing workshop, within this specific context.
5. THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF BLOGS AND E-MAIL

5.1. Teaching approach

In order to assess whether the use of blogs and e-mail can enhance young learners writing skills, a thirty-minutes writing workshop was conducted every week. Throughout twenty-seven writing workshop sessions, the students were asked to undertake writing tasks in collaborative writing (nineteen students distributed by six mixed ability groups), following a process writing methodology suggested by Tompkins (2008). This process writing methodology involved different writing stages - pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing - and required the students to use checklists to self and peer assess the different drafts of a text, along the continuous process of improving it until the final product was achieved.

These primary school students were asked to bring their Magalhães laptops to the writing workshop so that they could use them to write and access the groups’ online blogs and e-mail accounts. The students’ age and intrinsic language and literacy limitations, especially when using L2, as well as their poor computer skills, were crucial to the decision of having the students set in groups, helping each other and developing collaborative work.

Given that these students had had very little contact with internet tools, especially blogs, I was responsible for the creation and management of a blog for each group of students (see appendix 1). The students were then, within the completion of the writing tasks, progressively trained on how to access their blog, how to post new messages and edit old ones, how to visit the other blogs of the Workshop and how to post comments. The blogs were multi-authored and collaborative (Bloch 2007; Efimova and de Moor, 2005; Richardson, 2006) focusing on peer discussion, collective dissemination of knowledge and cooperation in the creation of a single multi-authored document (Murray and Hourigan, 2010).

As a starting point for developing writing, each group of students conceived an imaginary planet. This formed the base for all the writing tasks that followed. Once the six groups of three / four students were set and had chosen their planets’ names, a
blog and an e-mail account were assigned to each group: Matmoney Planet, Music Planet, Oxanglogle Planet, Starworld Planet, Square Planet and Teeth Planet.

The students were then asked to develop writing tasks that were related to their planets or the aliens that the students created. The students brainstormed as a group and started drafting together, each student using his or her computer but deciding as a group what to write. Each group posted their texts (drafts and final products) on their blog (each session one student was chosen by the group to post the text), which were subjected to the other groups’ assessment. A formal assessment was achieved with the use of a checklist where the students ticked all the items that were included in the text. In addition, the students, individually, in the classroom or at home also wrote feedback comments to the texts posted in the blog using English as a second language.

One of the first decisions that had to be made when implementing the writing workshop involved selecting the tasks to be completed by the students. At the end of the school year, the fourth year students take the Trinity College Exam ISE0 (2010); therefore, it appeared consistent that the Trinity College Exam ISE0 syllabus (2010) could be used to determine the type of texts, language structures and tasks to fulfil throughout the workshop sessions (see appendix 2). In order to expose the students to a wide variety of text genres, four different genres were selected:

- Descriptive text – Students wrote a description of their planet to post on the blog’s page, under the blog title, welcoming other groups and presenting an overview of their planet.
- Diary entry – Students created an alien as a character who wrote a diary entry about an imaginary occasion when a human child visited their planet.
- E-mail – Students had their alien character inviting an alien from another group’s planet to spend Easter holidays on Planet Earth.
- Note – Students wrote a note to another group’s alien with a list of chores to do around the house while they were away on Planet Earth on holidays.

There was also a concern to select fun, engaging tasks that were close to the students’ interests. Furthermore, it was taken into account the need for the students to write for a real purpose, with meaningful tasks that would adjust to the use of blogs
and e-mails, and at the same time taking into account the time limitations imposed by thirty-minute sessions once a week with such young students.

An online classroom in Twiducate (2009), a free online resource for educational purposes where teachers can create a private network for their classes, was also developed as a base for the writing workshop. The main reasons for presenting Twiducate (2009) to the students were: a) to set an online area that the students could use outside the workshop for queries clarification (appendix 3); b) to allow the teacher the possibility of posting a list of useful online resources that the students could use to develop their writing tasks in English; c) to display a list of all the workshop’s blogs to facilitate access for these young learners.

However, some students expanded its usage and adopted Twiducate (2009) as a private forum using the English language to communicate at all times: to write to each other, post opinions and thoughts, and comment on what they were doing at the Club (appendix 3).

5.2. Teaching cycle

At the writing workshop, all writing tasks followed a process suggested by Tompkins (2008): prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing (figure 1). This process, as mentioned before, is not linear but recurring.

After presenting each writing task to the students and overcoming the initial stage of prewriting - which involved students gathering and organising their ideas, brainstorming on the topic and creating spidergrams, lists or tables to help them focus on what to write (see appendix 4) – each group wrote a first draft. In this drafting stage, students initially used a word processor and copied the draft to the blog after having it written. However, later on, when feeling more comfortable using the blog, students wrote all the drafts directly on it. All drafts written by each group of students for all tasks were posted on the group’s blog in order to assess progress made from one version to the following, within the same writing task. A special page inside the blog was also created to post all published versions of each text in order to assess progress of these texts.
For the revising stage, after writing or rewriting a draft of a text, students were asked to fill in a checklist by ticking the descriptors that they, or their peers, believed to have fulfilled in the written work (see appendix 5). These checklists, which contained items related to content issues such as interesting beginning sentence and summary sentence to end the text, significance and originality in descriptions and events, consideration for the audience and structure organization, were based on those that have been presented by White and Arndt (1991) and Tompkins (2008). These checklists used for self-assessment after writing the first draft of the text, helped the students to improve their draft autonomously but with an oriented approach. After self assessing their drafts, the students went back to the drafting stage and redraft their texts, trying to improve them. When assessing a second draft of a text, the students’ peers assessed their text using the checklist. This gave the students the opportunity to compare another group’s text and the items of the checklist and to evaluate a piece of writing. Peer assessment, as White and Arndt (1991) have suggested, had advantages for all of the students involved: the students who subjected
their piece of writing to evaluation worked under the pressure of having other students assessing their draft and tried to write the best text possible, including as many items of the checklist as possible; the students who were assessing other students’ draft were using their text analysis competences with the aid of the checklist to breakdown a text and find out which features were missing or could be improved.

To simplify the process of meta-language awareness for the students and to effectively measure progress from the first to the last task, most descriptors of these checklists were the same from task to task, displaying only small changes depending on the genre of the task and the special features of each genre.

For the editing stage, where mechanical (punctuation, sentence structure, formatting) and language (spelling, tense) errors were identified, a correction code was developed (see appendix 6) based on the ones suggested by Tompkins (2008) and White and Arndt (1994).

For the first two tasks, the correction code included eight symbols (spelling, wrong word, wrong order, not clear, extra word, missing word, punctuation and paragraph). These eight features were selected with special care, in order to avoid overwhelming these young learners who had never used a correction code before. After the second writing task (diary entry), both the students and the teacher felt the need to add a new symbol for wrong tenses, which had been previously marked with the symbol for “wrong word”. Given these young learners’ age, the correction code was only applied by the teacher but recognized and understood by all the students.

When writing the final text of each task, and because final texts were published on the blog and made available for other students and parents (see appendix 1), the teacher helped the students to proofread the work. Tompkins (2008) seems to concur with this approach: “When mechanical correctness is crucial (…) the teacher proofreads the composition with the child and assists in identifying and correcting the remaining errors.” (p 19).

To finish each writing task, after publishing the final text, students were asked to use a rubric (see appendix 7), based on those presented by Tompkins (2008), to assess published texts. These rubrics included a list of descriptors related to content and mechanical and language errors. They were used by the students to self and peer
assess published texts, as well as by the teacher. The assessment of each descriptor is based on a scale, from 1 to 4 (1- poor; 2- fair; 3- good; 4-very good).

5.3 Data collection

In order to evaluate whether the use of blogs and e-mail contributed to develop these young learners writing skills in English, it was necessary to identify the impact that each of these tools had on them.

A wide variety of data was collected in order to shed some light on the research question *Can the use of blogs and e-mail improve primary school students’ writing skills?*

5.3.1. Developing writing skills through the use of blogs and e-mail

It was highly significant to infer these young learners’ ability levels and opinion on the writing workshop and the completion of the writing tasks through the use of blogs and e-mail. In order to accomplish this, several questionnaires were created and then answered by the students. All questionnaires were available online and a link to them was displayed on the writing workshop page of Twiducate (2009). Some students filled in the questionnaires at school, others at home.

When the writing workshop sessions started, it was necessary to have a more precise notion of these students’ previous experience with process writing and the use of computers, word processors, e-mails and blogs, in order to tailor the writing tasks to their abilities and be aware of difficulties that they might experience when using blogs and e-mails. In order to do so, a first questionnaire (see appendix 8) was prepared and answered by the students between the first and the second sessions of the writing workshop, before any task was set.

After the completion of each writing task, it was necessary to assess possible changes of the students’ opinion regarding their ability to complete writing tasks and also their opinion on how the blogs and e-mail, as well as the use of computers in general, helped them to complete the writing tasks successfully. Therefore, after completing each writing task, students were asked to answer an end-of-task
questionnaire (see appendix 9). These questionnaires, very similar in between tasks in order to successfully assess progress, used ‘can do’ descriptors, identical to those presented by the Junior European Language Portfolio (2001) for self and peer assessment, and also those referred by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001).

For a final feedback on how the writing workshop sessions and the use of blogs and e-mail contributed to these young learners’ development of writing skills, students were asked to individually write me an e-mail (the students were asked to write individually given that the purpose was to have each students’ opinion) stating their thoughts and opinions about the most positive and negative aspects of the writing workshop, and how they believed the use of blogs and e-mail had helped them to develop the writing tasks set. This open form of feedback, already used in the Tai Po Old Market School action research (2003), allowed students to write about which features of writing and ICT were more relevant and, at the same time, this task contributed to the general spirit of the writing workshop: using e-mail to write for an authentic audience (the teacher) with a real purpose (give their opinion about whether the use of ICT had or not improved their writing skills).

5.3.2. Writing for an audience with a real purpose

Writing a text for an audience and with a real purpose to communicate was the underlying objective of creating the blogs and e-mail accounts for these young learners to work with during the writing workshop.

In order to understand how these factors were important when developing writing tasks, drafts and final texts written by the students, as well as feedback comments posted to their peers were analysed. These feedback comments produced by such young students, giving advice, asking for clarification about specific aspects of the text or simply praising, can demonstrate how important it is for students to direct their writing pieces to an audience and how students, right from an early age, can interact and critically assess a piece of writing to help improving it.

In order to focus on the importance of this interaction between students, whether sharing pieces of writing, reading drafts and published texts from other peers
or making comments about them, a counter was installed on each blog to provide information about the number of visitors to each blog, showing how many times students accessed the blogs.

5.3.3. Content and language use in writing tasks

In order to assess whether these primary school students’ writing skills were indeed improved by the use of the blogs and the e-mail, it was essential to analyse the students’ progression in terms of content and mechanical and language errors over the four writing tasks developed throughout the writing workshop.

To analyse the content of each piece of writing - the ideas presented, their development, how these ideas relate to one another, cohesion and coherence of the text - students were asked to use checklists (see appendix 5) based on the ones presented by Tompkins (2008). After writing a first draft, students read their text and ticked the descriptors that they had included as a self-assessment strategy. These students’ peers also read the draft and ticked the descriptors included in the text (peer-assessment). When the students were ready to redraft their text, they resorted to the checklist and tried to include the missing content – the descriptors that hadn’t been ticked - in their new draft.

The analysis of these checklists filled in by the students and their matching to the different drafts posted by the students on the blog can reveal how much these drafts changed from one version to another and whether there was significant improvement on the content within each task (from the first draft to the final text). Improvement on a wider scale, from task to task over the writing workshop sessions, can also be analysed.

Although mechanical and language errors, as they are described by Tompkins (2008), were not regarded as essential as long as communication was not disrupted, they were also given some attention through the use of a correction code. Analysing the most frequent errors and how often these errors appear in the students’ drafts enables clarification of whether progress was actually made between drafts.

The analysis of the different rubrics used by the students and the teacher to assess published texts (see appendix 7), can offer a global view of the improvement of
these students’ texts given that they were used to assess the published texts. These rubrics, adapted from the ones presented by Tompkins (2008), used for self, peer and teacher assessment, included descriptors related to content, mechanical and language errors, and allowed a more concise overview of the progression of the students’ writing skills, focusing on strongest and weakest elements of these primary school students’ published texts, as well as which features show further improvement.
6. FINDINGS

The action research cycle here presented was developed in order to understand whether the use of blogs and e-mail can contribute to the development of the students’ L2 writing skills at primary school level. Providing an answer to the research question *Can the use of blogs and e-mail enhance primary school students’ writing skills?* implied reflecting on the data collected and focusing on the role of blogs and e-mail, the importance of having a real audience to write to and, in particular, how were content and language features affected by the use of these specific tools.

6.1. Developing writing skills through the use of blogs and e-mail

6.1.1. Students’ previous experience

Considering these students’ age, it was necessary to start by evaluating their attitude towards learning English and writing in L2, as well as clarifying exactly what kind of previous experience they had had with blogs, e-mails and the use of computers in general. To address these issues, a first questionnaire (see appendix 8) was presented to the students between October 11th and 18th 2010.

The results of this first questionnaire demonstrated that all students presented a high level of motivation to learn English and attend the English Monday Club (see appendix 10). 68% of the students displayed good predisposition to write, 95% to use computers and 84% to use the internet (see appendix 10). However, although 84% of the students indicated that they had already used a word processor to type a text in the past, only half of the students (53%) reported having already written an e-mail and most of them admitted they had never had any contact with a blog or with Twitter (2006) (see appendix 10).

Regarding their experience with process writing, this first questionnaire showed that the students were not familiar with the process or the process stages. Nevertheless, 32% of the students said that they always planned what to write, 53% stated that they always read their text after finishing it, 68% always looked for
misspelled words, 47% checked if all ideas were organised and 42% were used to correcting mistakes after getting the text back from the teacher (see appendix 10).

6.1.2. Using a word processor

Using a word processor to write instead of pencil and paper was something new to these primary school students, just as it was writing under a process writing methodology. This methodology, more focused on the process of writing rather than the final product, can be difficult to handle by students from this age group, who are not used to reflect on their own writing or having to rewrite their texts in order to improve them. After completing the second, third and fourth writing tasks, students were asked if they thought it was easier to write a text on paper or on the computer, in order to infer whether the use of the word processor was having a positive influence on the students’ attitude towards writing according to a process writing methodology.

After the second task, 79% of the students stated that they thought it was easier to write on the computer, 16% stated that writing on paper was easier and 5% did not know (see appendix 11). However, after both the third and fourth writing tasks, 95% of the students claimed it was easier to write on the computer and only 5% answered that writing on paper was easier (see appendix 11).

As we will observe later in the language errors section, the number of spelling mistakes made by the students was very small, which could lead to the conclusion that these students did not have many problems with spelling. This, however, was not true. The small number of spelling mistakes was in fact related to the use of the spell checkers installed in the word processors used by the students, which underlined any misspelled words. Nevertheless, the spell checkers did not provide the correct form of the word, and the students, although aware that they had misspelled a word, had to think or look up the word in an English dictionary, traditional or online (www.dictionary.reference.com) for the correct spelling.
6.1.3. Using of Twiducate

Twiducate (2009), the private forum for educational purposes inspired by Twitter (2006), was the first internet tool presented to the students and the first challenge in terms of accessing a private online site, where students had to write a username and a password to enter, and where they could post messages and reply to one another.

The percentage of students that affirmed to have liked very much using Twiducate (2009) was 68% when finishing the first task and 84% when finishing the fourth task (see appendix 12). In terms of ability, only 16% did not show confidence in posting messages on Twiducate (2009) and 2% claimed not to feel very comfortable commenting posts on Twiducate (2009) at the end of the first writing task. At the end of the fourth task, 100% of the students stated they were very much able to post a message on Twiducate (2009) and able to comment a post on Twiducate (2009) (see appendix 13). The use of Twiducate (2009) helped the students to become familiar with online tools, which was important to train the student to use blogs later, but it was also important for the students to experiment at sentence level free writing in L2, a preparation for the feedback comments that students wrote on their peers’ blogs about their texts.

Despite the fact that this online tool was important for the teacher as a way of being available outside the class to answer any of the students questions about any of the blogs activities, to post online resources for the students or to set guidelines for writing a text that the students could access inside and outside the class, Twiducate (2009) was also a relevant tool for the students as it decreased the distance between the students and made them more willing to write. In fact, these young learners were so motivated to use Twiducate (2009) that they freely experimented with second language writing both for social purposes and to develop thoughtful and critical feedback comments to other students Twiducate (2009) and blogs’ posts. Figure 2 demonstrates children interacting with each other in English. They are discussing their assemblies - profile image - choice: “I choose my assembly a smile because I like smiles” / “Do you like my assembly?” / “Luisa’s assembly is very funny”; and they are also addressing the writing tasks: “What are we going to do on Monday? Are we going
to finish the letter to our alien friends?”. This additional use of Twiducate (2009) provides evidence that these students were engaged in a meaningful writing context and were motivated to spontaneously use English as a second language, for real communication purposes.

Figure 2 – Students written interaction in Twiducate

Despite the fact that Twiducate (2009) was not initially considered to play an important role in this study, at the end of the writing workshop, in the open answer final evaluation of the writing workshop, 32% of the students mentioned Twiducate (2009) as a relevant tool during the course (figures 3 and 4). These young learners, when asked to freely assess the writing workshop, considered important to mention the usefulness of Twiducate (2009): “The thing I liked the best was going to Twiducate and going to blogger.” (figure 3) / “We liked to go to Twiducate and to the blog with you and we think is useful to have a blog or E-mail, e need to write to our friends.” (figure 4).

Students considered Twiducate (2009) an important tool for clarification and peer interaction, and also for developing their own writing skills. This kind of students’ assessment is very significant, given that these students are young learners and are already able to highlight Twiducate (2009) as a useful resource both to communicate with others and to develop writing tasks.
6.2. Writing for an audience with a real purpose

6.2.1. Impact of the blog use

Training the students to work with the blog took a long time, and this training took place throughout the writing tasks. As reported before, only 37% of the students revealed to have already read a blog and only 5% stated to have actually written a post for a blog. Accessing the blog, being able to write a post and publish it, editing a post and commenting posts on their own blogs or the other groups’ blogs were tasks to which these young learners needed guidance, alongside the development of the writing tasks. The fact that the writing workshop blogs were private added another
degree of difficulty, since the students had to be trained into writing a username and a password to have access. Time to train the students must be taken into account when using blogs in a classroom context, as well as teacher support and guidance to overcome the challenges faced by the students, especially at primary school level. The decision to have the students working in groups was also a strategy designed to have students helping each other when using these online tools.

Regarding the motivation to develop writing tasks through the use of blogs, the percentages indicated that 100% of the students liked using the blogs very much by the end of the fourth task (see appendix 14). In terms of ability, the students also showed great progress in using the blogs whether to post new messages or to comment a post (see appendix 15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teeth Planet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxanglogle Planet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square Planet</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starworld Planet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matmoney Planet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Planet</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Number of posts and messages for each blog

In table 1, it is briefly outlined the relation between posts and comments in each of the students’ blogs. Throughout the writing workshop, the six blogs achieved a total of 1660 visits, an average of 276 visits per blog. Regarding interaction, each blog brought about an average of 13 posts and an average of 11 feedback comments written by the students, showing how important the blog use was throughout the writing workshop.

The feedback comments written by the students to the texts posted by the other groups emphasise the role that peer feedback had to the process of writing skills improvement.
Throughout the writing workshop, these young learners proved to have the necessary competence to critically assess a written text and to give advice on how to improve a text, as the example from the figure 5 reveals, when a student, after reading another groups’ text, suggested “You can write more things we can do or eat or see...”. Students have also shown to have grown in their critical attitude towards their peers’ work, and there are examples, such as the one presented in figure 6, where a student asked for clarification: “Are the grey part the arms? Your alien is cool!”.

Moreover, at this age, primary school students have demonstrated that they can praise other groups’ written work and engage in real communication situations using their L2, as the dialogue between children from two different groups indicates: “This draft is great.” / “Thank you! What did you like most in this draft?” (figure 7).
As indicated before, in the first questionnaire (see appendix 10), only half of the students (53%) reported to have already written an e-mail; therefore, to use e-mail in the writing workshop, these primary school students had to be taught how to access an e-mail account, how to identify and make proper use of the features and layout of e-mail, and how to send or reply to an e-mail.

However, at the end of the writing workshop sessions, 95 % of the students revealed to have enjoyed writing e-mails, and 95% of the students stated to have enjoyed reading in the blog comments to their e-mails (see appendix 16).

In fact, the interaction developed with the e-mail writing, with a more direct audience than the one provided by the blogs, kept the students very enthusiastic. The students worked even harder to have the perfect e-mail and were anxious to send a real e-mail to the other groups. As can be seen in figure 9, these young learners demonstrated confidence when writing an e-mail mixing their own personal experiences with imaginary events, using the language in a real purpose task, knowing that their text was directed to a real audience. The fact that this was a real task to a real audience was essential in motivating the students to write and to try their best when writing an e-mail.
On the other hand, replying to the e-mail sent by the other peers was also a very motivating prompt to have the students writing e-mails. The students were thrilled to receive a first e-mail and were also very careful when writing a reply.

The interaction shown in figure 8 is an example of how real tasks with a real audience can be created inside a young learners’ classroom, motivating the students to write and to use a second language in genuine communication tasks.

In the final assessment, where the students were individually asked to share their opinion about the writing workshop and how useful it was for them, more than
half of the students, 79%, mentioned that both the e-mail and the blogs were very useful and helped them improve their writing skills (figure 9).

6.3. Content and language use improvement in writing tasks

6.3.1. Improvement of content

To assess progress on the content of each text, with the purpose of analysing the students’ ability to rewrite their own texts with richer and more complex ideas, content and structures, checklists (see appendix 5) were used by the students, their peers and the teacher after the completion of each draft.

The first writing task introduced in the writing workshop was a descriptive text about the planets created by each of the six groups. Figure 10 displays the first and the second drafts written by the Matmoney Planet group.

**Planets-Draft1**

```
Our planet is named “Matmoney Planet”. Our planet is localised in the “Creative Universe”. The most part of the planet is like the natural world. The other part of our planet is with houses, cars and coins. The gravity of our planet is heavy because it is very big. In our planet is very, very sunny. Our planet is very special because it has a half ring. The aliens in our planet are not nice.
```

**Planets Draft 2**

```
Hello,
We are going to tell you some details of a planet named “Matmoney Planet”. Our planet is in the “Creative Universe”. Most of the planet is like the natural world. The other part is with houses, cars and coins. The gravity of our planet is heavy because it is very big. In our planet is very, very sunny. Our planet is very special because it has a half ring. The aliens in our planet are not nice. Thank you to read our text.
```

Figure 10 - First and second draft of the descriptive text

The improvements highlighted in red show that after filling in the checklist and assessing their own first draft, these young learners were able to improve it in terms of
both content and language errors. Comparing these two drafts, the second draft shows improvement in three aspects included in the checklist: the students added an interesting beginning sentence, features that show that the authors are thinking about their audience - “Hello, we are going to tell you...” - and a summary sentence to end the text - “Thank you to read our text”.

Another example of content development can be seen in figure 11, which presents the description written by the Square Planet group.

---

**Planets - Draft 1**

Square Planet

The square planet is yes system, size big and gravity is 30 kg.

Aliens are square, blue, red and yellow.

---

**Planets - Draft 2**

The square planet is located in Yes System.

- It’s a big planet and 1 kg on Planet Earth weighs 30 kg here.
- It’s very sunny and has lots of volcanoes to visit.

Aliens are square, blue, red and yellow.

---

**Draft 3**

This planet is great!

The square planet is located in the Yes System.

It's a big planet and 1 kg on Planet Earth weighs 30 kg here.

It's very sunny and has lots of volcanoes to visit. Aliens are square, blue, red and yellow.

Come and visit us!

---

Figure 11 – First, second and third draft of the descriptive text
This example shows a first draft written after brainstorming and focusing, a second draft after filling in the revising checklist and a third draft after having their checklist filled in by their peers and the teacher, providing evidence that the use of the checklists for self, peer and teacher assessment was relevant for process writing. In the first draft, these students wrote only two sentences; in the second draft, the information about the planet’s location and the gravity effect was clearer - “The square planet is locate in Yes System. It’s a big planet and 1 kg on Planet Earth weights 30 kg here.” instead of “The square planet is yes system, size big and gravity is 30kg.”. This second draft also presented improvement by including other special features about the planet “It’s very sunny and has lots of volcanoes to visit.”. Moreover, after having their checklist filled in by their peers and after reading descriptive drafts from other groups in the writing workshop blogs, these primary school students were also able to recognise the importance of a good beginning and ending of a text and decided to include “This planet is great!” and an invitation addressing their audience: “Come and visit us!”.

From the first to third drafts, the authors progressively started using more complex sentences, included an interesting first sentence, described the planet with more detail and added significant and original features. They also wrote the information in an order that made sense and there was a summary sentence to end the text. All of these features were topics of the checklist (see appendix 5) and the fact that the students could resort to it definitely helped them to make these improvements.

In general, the progress made between the first and the third drafts was noticeable in all groups, given that at the end of the third draft almost all groups accomplished the features considered to be important when writing a descriptive text. The table 2 shows how many groups ticked each specific feature in the checklist after each draft. This progress between drafts shows that these young learners were able to improve their texts resorting to the checklist after each draft.
The authors use complete sentences.
There is an interesting beginning sentence.
The planet is described with lots of details.
Special features added are significant and original.
There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.
Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.
Information is in an order that makes sense.
There is a summary sentence to end the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First writing task – Descriptive text</th>
<th>1st draft Self-assessment</th>
<th>2nd draft Peer-assessment</th>
<th>3rd draft Teacher-assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The authors use complete sentences.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an interesting beginning sentence.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The planet is described with lots of details.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special features added are significant and original.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a summary sentence to end the text.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – Number of groups who ticked each descriptor in each stage of the first task

The analysis of the second writing task, a diary entry written by the alien that each group of students imagined for their planet, recounting a visit of a human child to their planet, shows evidence that the students were more careful with the text features than they were in the first task. As can be seen in figure 12 many of the groups started their texts with interesting beginning sentences (“Dear fantastic diary, This day it’s the best day in Planet Oxanglole!!”), finished their texts with a summary sentence (“Then he goes to Earth Planet.”), and some groups were very creative in adding details to their story, playing with the language when creating words for alien objects that would only exist in that specific planet (“buy one pizza, one lupops and one blike”/“to see the hussy and the boneirt”/“so we decided to buy on sdavbe, three vfagud and two gheilk”). This feature was soon replicated by other groups in the following tasks, demonstrating that publishing the drafts on the blog, thus facilitating the students’ access to them, allowed students to learn, not only from the teacher, but also from their peers, using other students’ texts as models for their own writing.
Progress can therefore be seen between the first drafts of the descriptive text and the diary entry. However, even when analysing the development of the second writing task per se, improvement can be seen from daft to draft, as the students continued to produce further developments by using the checklist (see appendix 5) to revise their text between drafts. In figure 13, the students exhibited improvement by
being more careful with significant and original details and revealing opinions and thoughts about the events. When these young learners wrote the third draft, they still found new ways to improve their work. They added a location “Starcity 10:30 hours”, and an adjective was also included in an attempt to enrich the text – “a big smile” in the third draft, instead of just “a smile” from the second draft. The use of the blog or the word processor to write allowed the children to make these very small changes that can make a text more complete, richer and more structured without having to rewrite the whole text – which would happen if they were using paper and pencil. The fact that these young learners could make these changes to their texts so easily allowed them to be more willing to make improvements.

Diary Draft 1

Dear diary

Today a human child came to visit the planet “Starcity world planet”. The human child visit Mr. aliens. After that, the human child visit the Museum of aliens to have more information of aliens of Star world. On the evening he goes have his dinner at pizza he is cold. After that he goes to the aliens Hotel, when he lives aliens Hotel he was very happy. When he live the Star world planet he lives with a smile face.

Patrik

Diary Draft 2

Dear diary

Today a human child came to visit your Planet “Star world planet”. The human child visited Mr. Aliens because he was hungry. After that he visited the Museum of aliens to have more information about aliens of Star world. On the evening he goes have his dinner at pizza he is cold. He says the pizza is very good. After that he goes to the aliens Hotel, when he lives aliens Hotel he was very happy because the bed is very comfortable. When he live the Star world planet he lives with a smile face.

Patrik
Diary - Draft 3

Dear diary,

Today a human child came to visit our Planet “Starworld Planet”. The human child visited Mo Aliens because he was hungry. After that, the human child visited the Museum of Aliens to find out more information about the aliens of Starworld. In the evening, he went to have his dinner at Pizza Cold, he said the pizza was very good. After that he went to the aliens Hotel. When he left the aliens Hotel he was very happy because the bed was very comfortable. When he left Starworld Planet, he left with a big smile on his face.

Patrick

Figure 13 – First, second and third draft of a diary entry writing

Table 3 displays self, peer and teacher assessment from different drafts of the diary entries, between the first and the third draft. Data from this table, when compared to the data from the first writing task (table 2), reveals that more features from the checklist are included in the students’ texts right from the first draft.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second writing task – Diary entry</th>
<th>1st draft Self-assessment</th>
<th>2nd draft Peer-assessment</th>
<th>3rd draft Teacher-assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The layout of the diary entry is respected.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors use complete sentences.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an interesting beginning sentence.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The events are described with lots of details.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors show opinions and thought about the events.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a summary sentence to end the text.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Number of groups who ticked each descriptor in each stage of the second task
The third and fourth writing tasks were a note and an e-mail. Three groups wrote an e-mail to the other three groups, inviting them for a trip to Planet Earth. At the same time, the other three groups wrote a note to each other listing house sitting chores to be done in their absence.

In the note writing task, all groups showed improvement, not only between drafts, but also in terms of progress between tasks. When writing the note, some groups followed the example from the diary entry earlier described in figure 12 and imagined their own special objects or animals that would only exist on their planets, as the example shown in figure 14, where they included a “robot tree” and a kind of plant called “musilowres”.

Moreover, the attempt to improve the texts written by the students with the support of the checklist (see appendix XXX – note checklist) was clearer, as the example in figure 14 demonstrates. From the first to the second draft, the children from the Music Planet group improved the layout of the note and added an interesting first sentence (“I’m going to earthplanet in Easter and can you housesit my house? Is very friendly of your part!”). In terms of content, the text was almost perfect but, when reading other groups’ texts on the blogs and receiving peer assessment in the checklist, the students decided to finish the note by thanking the alien they were writing to, as well as reorganise the information in a better way, moving “Other arrangements” to the end of the note.

Once again, the fact that the students were writing for a specific audience and with a real purpose helped them to feel more engaged with the task and more motivated to write. Another important aspect that was also referred by the students was that when rewriting texts using a word processor or a blog, they did not have to write the whole text again, making the task a lot easier and faster to accomplish, which is ideal for young learners who have a shorter attention span and can feel discouraged when asked to rewrite the same text from the start all over again.
The e-mail writing task included two stages. Three groups (Teeth Planet, Oxangloogle Planet and Square Planet) were asked to write an e-mail inviting the other three groups to spend Easter holidays on Planet Earth; these last three groups (Starworld Planet, Matmoney Planet and Music Planet) wrote e-mails after the holidays thanking the invitation and addressing the most relevant aspects of the holidays on Planet Earth (see appendix 16).

The responsibility of sending this e-mail to their peers made these young students feel motivated to write the most perfect text possible. The attention that the students put on the content of the text of this interactive writing task, as well as the ability to improve it by editing the texts already posted on the blog with the support of the checklist (see appendix 5), is quite noticeable. In the example shown in figure 15, the second draft of the text included a negative but very creative event regarding the holidays: “The only thing that I didn’t like was when we went to the bank. They kidnapped me because I am a note!” and the information “I would like to go on
holidays again with you”. From the second to the third draft, these young learners decided to add details to their sentences, making the text richer: students added an ending “See you soon!”, a compliment “I will never forget these two tours.”,
and an explanation “I would like to go on holidays again with you because you’re very cheerful and you know many things about Planet Earth.”.

Figure 15 – First, second and third draft of an e-mail writing
When comparing how many groups achieved the total of features established for writing the note and the e-mail (tables 4 and 5), the progress made between the first and the third draft is also notable. When writing the note, for example, only one of the features was accomplished by all groups in the first draft, whereas five features were accomplished by all groups in the third draft.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third / Fourth writing task – Note</th>
<th>1st draft</th>
<th>2nd draft</th>
<th>3rd draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>Peer-assessment</td>
<td>Teacher-assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The layout of the note is respected.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors use complete sentences.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors present tasks to be done</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors present details about how to complete the tasks.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 - Number of groups who ticked each descriptor in each stage of the note writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third / Fourth writing task – E-mail</th>
<th>1st draft</th>
<th>2nd draft</th>
<th>3rd draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>Peer-assessment</td>
<td>Teacher-assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The layout of the e-mail is respected.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors use complete sentences.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors provide suggestions of what to do in Planet Earth. / The authors refer what they did in Planet Earth.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors show opinions and thoughts.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Number of groups who ticked each descriptor in each stage of the e-mail writing

However, when comparing the features achieved by the students in the first draft of the first task (descriptive text) and the features achieved in the first draft of the third and fourth tasks (note and e-mail), the progress is also patent. In the first task, as shown earlier in table 2, seven out of the eight features of the descriptive text
were addressed by half or less than half of the students (three or less out of six groups). When writing the note (third or fourth task, depending on which group), four out of six features were achieved by four or more groups of students. When writing the e-mail (third or fourth task, depending on which group) five out of seven features were also addressed by four or more groups of students.

Summing up, data collected from the students’ pieces of work and revising checklists reveal a clear improvement in the quality of writing achieved by these students in terms of content.

**6.3.2. Improvement of language use**

A correction code (see appendix 6) was used by the teacher to mark language errors (spelling, wrong word, wrong order, extra word, missing word, tense, punctuation, paragraph, unclear) and analyse the work of each group, from the first to the fourth task. The analysis of these data (see appendix 18) revealed that progress was made in all four tasks and in all of the drafts written by the students for each task.

According to what the data demonstrate, the most common errors concerned wrong words, meaning that the students exhibited some difficulties in the process of choosing appropriate words to fit the context of what they were trying to write. In some cases, first language interference may have led to the wrong choice or use of words. However, they did not reveal difficulties with punctuation, paragraphing or confusing sentences.

Data also suggests that these students did not have difficulties with spelling; however, as stated earlier, this may be deceptive, given the fact that these young learners had spell checkers installed on their computers that monitored their writing.

The use of a correction code was something new to these students and they took some time to become familiar with it. Although it was planned that the students would also use the correction code to assess their peers’ texts, the idea was eventually abandoned because these young learners, as can be seen in table 6, were having difficulties with it. After the first task, there were 5% of students who stated that they were not able to edit their texts using the correction code - “not at all”. After the second task, 14%, of the students were still feeling that they could only use the
correction code “so-so”. After the third and fourth tasks, 100% of the students stated that they were able to use the correction code to edit their texts “quite a lot” or “very much”. However, although the students were able to recognise the symbol, they relied on the teacher’s help to correct most of the language errors. The students’ were indeed able to recognise the language error made, but it was too soon to have these primary school students applying the correction code to their peers’ texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>After the 1\textsuperscript{st} task</th>
<th>After the 2\textsuperscript{nd} task</th>
<th>After the 3\textsuperscript{rd} task</th>
<th>After the 4\textsuperscript{th} task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So so</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 – Students’ perception of the use of the correction code

6.4. Overall impact of the writing workshop for the students

The experience of attending the writing workshop and developing writing tasks to post on a blog or to send as an e-mail was completely new to these students. The excitement of coming into the classroom, turning on the computers and being ready to write was difficult to manage in the first sessions, as it took too much time to calm the students down and have the computers ready to work. However, as the sessions developed, a routine was installed and the students were much faster with turning on the computers and accessing the blogs. Having the students working in groups, with more computer skilled students helping the ones with more difficulties, and the fact that tutorials on how to work with the blogs and e-mail accounts were made available in Twiducate (2009) helped the students to be more autonomous. On the other side, this also made possible for the teacher to provide the necessary support for all the students without being overwhelmed. The group dynamics were always very balanced with each member of the group contributing to the writing tasks development as they were in fact engaged in all the tasks.
Overall, the analysis of the data demonstrates that, in general, the students’ writing skills improved substantially during the writing workshop with the use of blogs and e-mail. This improvement was reflected both in content and language use.

The use of blogs and e-mail contributed to the development of these primary school students’ self and peer assessment strategies and awareness in three different ways:

i) By having the drafts displayed on the blog’s main page, these young learners had easy and direct access to them and were able to compare what they had written to the topics of the revising checklist and improve their texts;

ii) The fact that these young learners had such an easy access to the other groups’ texts provided a wider variety of models for the students to pick up ideas from and incorporate them into their own writing;

iii) The blogs’ feedback comments and the e-mail replies to the texts written by the students integrated other peers’ suggestions, questions about text clarification and praises for the content originality written by the students, in correlation to what is defended by the Council of Europe (2001).

![Figure 16 – Student evaluating the writing workshop](image)
At the end of the writing workshop sessions, the students were asked to write an e-mail stating their opinion about the use of the blogs and e-mail. The students’ opinions were all very positive and 100% of the students believed that their writing skills had been improved (figures 16 and 17).

The content of this young students’ final assessment was important to consider, given that they were individually expressing their opinion about the outcomes of the work developed throughout the writing workshop sessions and the process of developing their writing skills through the use of blogs and e-mail. In this evaluation written by the students was made clear that these primary school students have become more aware of the writing process - “I find more useful write, correct and rewrite.” (figure 16) – and have also recognised that their writing skills have improved: “I’m better at writing and I’m better with computers” (figure 16). The use of blogs, e-mail and Twiducate (2009) was addressed by 100% of the students and, more than simply expressing their motivation to use these tools - “The thing I liked most was writing on the blog.” (figure 16) –, they recognised that their writing was improved by the use of such tools - “You tell us to do some writings in the computer, and with that I learn more.” (figure 17).
7. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The motivation to write and the degree of involvement of these primary school students in the writing tasks were very good indicators that the use of the blogs and e-mail enhanced young learners’ writing skills. However, in order to provide an accurate answer to the research question of this action research *Can the use of blogs and e-mail enhance primary school students’ writing skills?*, it was necessary to analyse the improvement on the content of the texts and the improvement on the language used by the students.

Both the content (ideas, structure, cohesion) of the text and the language use were improved between the drafts and throughout the four writing tasks and this was due to the fact that the use of blogs and e-mail provided a real purpose to write, an audience for their texts and allowed the students to get feedback.

The use of checklists to evaluate the content of the text as a self-assessment tool was very effective but in terms of peer-assessment what really prompted the students to improve their drafts were the comments posted on the blog. The fact that someone other than the teacher would read their texts made the students working really hard and always trying to add original ideas to engage their readers. The correction code was also an important tool to deal with the language use, but it required more practice in order to have the students correcting their own texts or their peers’ texts using this code. Also, although students of this age group were able to identify what type of mistake the correction code indicated, the teachers’ help was essential to correct the language, meaning that improving the content of a text was much easier for these young learners than correcting their language.

According to the findings of this action research, the use of blogs and e-mail with primary school students had a significant impact on the development of the students’ writing skills which can be seen in four different dimensions:

i) The excitement of learning something new related to computer technology affected the motivation and predisposition to write, as Arslan (2010) points out in his research with tertiary level students: “blog use by students might have contributed to their motivation (...)as an appealing technological tool (...) in taking writing beyond the class walls” (p. 194) and as Ho (2000) describes in his study on the use of e-mail
“students proved to be more motivated and displayed a positive attitude towards writing”;

ii) The existence of a wider audience, other than the teacher alone, may have contributed to motivate the students to write and to improve their texts. As Arslan (2010) reports in his study “blog use will help students to improve content and organization of their writing since it will enable them to address a larger audience” (p. 186) while Ho (2000) suggests that the use of e-mail to develop writing skills “involved them in authentic tasks and situations with real life audiences as global citizens”;

iii) The convenience of having all of the drafts of each text exposed on the blogs, allowing the students to observe the different drafts of the same text, facilitated the development of noticing strategies (Thornbury, 1997) enabling the students to improve their writing;

iv) The interaction dimension of the blog stimulated the motivation to write and to read comments about the work presented to others. Campbell (2003) highlights this feature of the blogs in enhancing writing skills: “whatever they write can instantly be read by anyone else, due to the comment features of the software, further exchange of ideas is promoted”.

This was a first experience with e-mails for these primary school students that had had no previous internet training and were new to these forms of technologies. The decision of having the students working collaboratively was one of the many strategies to provide technological support to these young learners, but it proved to be more than just students helping each other accessing a blog or sending an e-mail. Working collaboratively allowed the students to share knowledge, to learn from one another and, from a teachers’ perspective, provided gainful insights of the students’ work by observing their discussions while planning and writing. It was possible to understand what their difficulties were and to help them overcome these difficulties, but also to feel how motivated they were to write in their blogs, the excitement towards each new task and the positive impact when reading a peer feedback comment to a text their group had posted on the blog or when receiving a reply to an e-mail they had written. In a future cycle it would also be advantageous to explore in what way the use of blogs and e-mail, through collaborative writing, can influence young learners’ speaking, listening and reading skills.
Although scaffolding had to play an important role and it took a serious step-by-step preparation from the teacher (creating e-mail accounts, presenting guidelines for writing an e-mail to the students, providing support both for writing and using the e-mail account) in an attempt to avoid overwhelming the students and reduce the level of anxiety or frustration for these young learners, the use of blogs and e-mail communication between students of the same class was a successful experience for these primary school students. Twiducate (2009) played an important role in helping these young learners overcoming difficulties with the use of technology and, although it could also be viewed as an excellent tool for developing second language writing with young learners in an informal but interactive way, its usage was limited when addressing the development of text writing skills.

Another aspect to take into account is that older students, more experienced and more familiar with these technologies, may need more challenging tasks, such as communication with another school or other English students abroad, or even exploring other tools such as moodle or private social networks where they can develop writing tasks.
8. CONCLUSIONS

Over an eight-month period, nineteen primary school students, aged 8 and 9, attended writing workshop sessions (thirty minutes, once a week). Students were divided into six groups and each group created an imaginary planet as a starting point for the process of collaborative creative writing. To improve these young learners writing skills, a blog and an e-mail account were attributed to each group and the students were trained on how to use these online tools to develop their writing activities.

After reflecting on the findings of this action research cycle, with the purpose of providing an answer to the research question Can the use of blogs and e-mail enhance writing skills at primary school level?, it is possible to conclude that, throughout the writing workshop sessions, young students not only improved the content and language used in their texts, but also adopted a better attitude towards writing.

The checklists the students used to self-assess and peer-assess their drafts have indicated that these young learners were able to improve the content (i.e. ideas) and structure of their texts (in terms of organisation and cohesion) within each task and from task to task. In terms of language use (such as spelling, verb forms or punctuation), the analysis of the progress made from the original students’ drafts to the finished texts has shown a significant decrease in the number of language mistakes from task to task. Within the same task, the number of language mistakes also dropped significantly from the first draft to the finished text. According to the answers given by the students in the questionnaires they were asked to complete, the development of written tasks in collaboration was one of the main positive aspects of the writing workshop. The analysis of the results provided by the questionnaires has also shown that students were able to self and peer-assess written pieces with the use of checklists and they truly believed to have learned from this assessment. This indicates that these students not only improved their writing skills, but have also grown into more active and responsible students, who are much more autonomous and able to work towards an increasingly independent learning process. This action research cycle shows that this kind of active and independent learning can be fostered right from the early years of primary school, within the context of a second language classroom.
The use of Twiducate (2009), a closed online forum for educational purposes, blogs and e-mail was essential to the improvement of writing skills and to the development of a more positive attitude towards writing amongst students. The use of these online tools provided a real purpose and a real audience for the students to write to. Twiducate (2009), integrated in the writing workshop sessions with the purpose of providing an online support to help students dealing with any problems that they might have using blogs or e-mail, was quickly adopted by the students and used freely at home to share written information for fun, in English, with other students. This took place beyond the tasks set, and provided further evidence of how much these young learners were motivated to write in English and use their writing for communication purposes.

The advantages of using blogs can be seen in three different dimensions: first, in the purpose for writing, since the students, as authors, had the opportunity to publish their drafts and finished texts online, sharing them with other students, parents and teachers; second, the audience provided by the blog, gave the students the possibility of writing and receiving feedback comments from their peers regarding the texts posted on the blogs, praising them or suggesting new ideas; and third, the convenience of having all drafts displayed on the same page, helping the students in their process of writing, noticing differences between the drafts and learning from these improvements. The use of e-mail contributed to foster the interactivity between the students, as they wrote authentic e-mails with a real purpose for a real audience, their peers, and also received an authentic and natural reply.

The students’ lack of computer experience, given their age, must be taken into account when developing tasks that involve Twiducate (2009), blogs or e-mails. Training young learners to use these tools requires a lot of effort and time, especially at the beginning, and this time factor, in particular, must be taken into account by the teacher. The collaboration procedure involved in all tasks, along with the option of having the students working in groups at all times, can also contribute to help students overcome many of the difficulties they might face with these online tools. Nonetheless, the advantages garnered from using Twiducate (2009), blogs and e-mail to provide an authentic purpose to the writing process and a real audience for the young learners using them, clearly outnumber any disadvantages.
There are of course limitations in the overgeneralization of the conclusions of this action research, given the fact that it was carried out within a specific school context. Nevertheless, the findings of this action research cycle have shown that integrating online tools such as blogs, e-mails and Twiducate (2009) into regular English classroom practices, along with the use of a correction code and checklists, can contribute largely to the development of second language writing skills of primary school students.
9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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**9.2. Bibliography**


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Appendix 1

Blogs used by the students

Matmoney Planet

Hello, we are going to tell you some details about a planet called "Matmoney Planet". Our planet is in the "Creative Universe". Most of the planet is like the natural world. The other part is with houses, cars and coins. The gravity of our planet is heavy because it is very big. Our planet is very, very sunny. Our planet is very special because it has a half ring. The aliens in our planet are harmless. Thank you for reading our text.

Monday, 23 May 2011

Email - Draft 3

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you so much for having invited me. I loved our holidays. I think that planet earth is a good planet to live on. There are lots of interesting things and places to visit. I liked to see the film called "E.T." Do you remember it? Do you like what we went to Mars? We will never forget.

Quora website:

The only thing that I didn't like was when we went to the bank. They kidnapped me because I am a bank robber. I would like to go on holidays with you again because you are very cheerful and you know many things about Planet Earth.

See you soon.

Matmoney Planet

Monday, 16 May 2011

E-mail - draft 2

Dear Sir/Madam,

Matmoney Planet's blog
Hi there, we are the authors of Music planet and we're going to explain what is the Music planet! It is a great planet, from Music galaxy. It looks like a ball and has gravity. It has green and blue stripes. The aliens are paffes and they have wings. They’re green. They live in face cream boxes. In their holidays, the paffes play instruments and sing. At Music planet, it rains music notes all the time. Goodbye, have a nice week and thank you for reading our blog!

E-mail draft 3

Dear Google,

The Easter concert was the best! It was very, very, very cool! It was very exciting!

The thing I liked the most was Selena Gomez in Alzania. It was a dream come true! Selena is on the top in Music Planet. We did everything as planned. Everything was fantastic, but the holi day was very special. I would like to go again because it was an amazing experience!!!

Best wishes,

Music Planet 1135 0 comments

Monday, 23 May 2011

email-draft 2

Music Planet’s blog
Monday, 30 May 2011

Note - Draft 3

Dear Crazy Teeth,

I'm going to tell you what I must clean while I'm on Planet Earth.

Paws
Purrs monkey - he eats McDonald's and you usually need to clean his paws.

Nose
Nose - the nose needs to be cleaned too and you sometimes need to clean his nose.

Face
Orange flower and banana flower - you always have to wash them.

Clean
My nose needs to be cleaned every day.

Thank you for all the work.

Monday, 23 May 2011

Note - Draft 2
Planet Starworld

Our planet is 300 years old. The planet was born in 1736. The name of this planet is Starworld, the location is in a comet. The planet is orange and very big, there is no gravity. The weather is very hot and the planet has lots of stars. The planet has big and green aliens. The monsters have stars on the body, the stars are blue and red. The sky is black and grey. The aliens have big moustaches and a big t-shirt. The number of the t-shirt is XXXXX, the aliens are a very fat circle.

Monday, 23 May 2011

E-mail - draft 3

Dear Crazy Toths,

I would like to thank you for the Easter Holidays. I loved Bulgaria with you because we ate lots of pasta. Planet Earth is very small. I want to meet you another time in Bulgaria. I am very alone now. In my opinion Planet Earth is smaller than my planet.

Bye Bye!

Patrik

Monday, 16 May 2011

E-mail - draft 2

Dear Crazy Toths,
Square Planet

This planet is great! The square planet is located in the Yes System. It's a big planet and 1 kg on Planet Earth weighs 50 kg here. It's very sunny and has lots of volcanoes to visit. Aliens are square, blue, red and yellow. Come and visit us!

Home | Final Texts

Monday, 30 May 2011

Note 3
Dear Staflin,

While I'm not here, you sometimes have to clean the aquarium, you have to clean the dog, you always clean the dishes in the kitchen and clean the bathroom. Feed the dog and feed the turtle frequently with shrimp. Take care of the desk, the tulips and the room.

Thank you.

Crazy Tooth

posted by Square Planet at 9:00 AM | comments

Monday, 23 May 2011

draft 2
Dear Staflin,

When I'm not here, you sometimes have to clean the aquarium, you
Teeth Planet

Hello, we are going to explain our planet (Teeth Planet) today. Our planet is green and the name of our system is English. In our planet, the gravity is the same as on earth. The weather is sunny. The planet has three rings and has two volcanoes. Our planet is purple and is very sweet.

Home Final Tests

Monday, 23 May 2011

Note - Draft

Dear Money Money of Matumony,

How are you? Are you fine? My house is a mess and I want you to take care of it. Can you do that job? First you've got to feed any pets and here's the list:

1. Little atomic monster: feed him beedee or locahey every day and give him a bath twice a week.
2. Atomic cat: feed him redy and omuss 3 times everyday and give a bath 4 times in a week.
3. Atomic dog: feed him biko or sappake and uneyoon and gave a bath everyday, except on the weekend.
4. Tea have to give water to the plants and put pesticide.
5. You have to clean all the house and clean the garden.
6. Other arrangements: you have to sweep the garden and sweep the hall.

Eyes, see you and thank you, for doing all this.

Thanks

Anson

Blog Archive

2011 (2)
May (1)
Note Draft

Contributors
## Integrating the writing tasks into the Trinity College Exam (ISE0) syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Workshop Tasks</th>
<th>Text type</th>
<th>Language functions</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Lexis</th>
<th>Subject areas for the controlled written examination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planet description</td>
<td>Descriptive writing</td>
<td>* Describing people, objects and places; * Expressing simple comparisons;</td>
<td>* Present simple tense; * Present continuous tense; * Nouns (singular and plural, regular and irregular, countable and uncountable); * Adjectives (including comparatives and superlatives); * Prepositions of place, movement and time); * Determiners; * There is / are and has / have got / have you got?; * Link words and, and then, but;</td>
<td>* Vocabulary specific to the subject and topic areas;</td>
<td>* Places in the local area; * Weather;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diary entry</td>
<td>Descriptive writing</td>
<td>* Giving personal information; * Describing past events * Expressing likes and dislikes</td>
<td>* Past simple tense of regular and common irregular verbs; * Nouns (singular and plural, regular and irregular, countable and uncountable); * Pronouns (including possessives) * Prepositions of place, movement and time); * Determiners; * Link words and, and then, but;</td>
<td>* Vocabulary specific to the subject and topic areas; * Cardinal and ordinal (up to 31st) numbers; * Expressions of past time e.g. yesterday, last night * Phrases and expressions relating to the language functions listed;</td>
<td>* Places in the local area; * Home life; * Free time; * Times and dates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail Correspondence</td>
<td>Note Correspondence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| *Exchanging greetings and leave-taking;*  
*Giving personal information;*  
*Giving dates;*  
* Asking simple questions about everyday life;*  
*Describing future plans and intentions;*  
*Expressing likes and dislikes;*  
*Present simple tense;*  
*Going to future*  
*Nouns (singular and plural, regular and irregular, countable and uncountable);*  
*Adjectives (including comparatives and superlatives);*  
*Prepositions of place, movement and time);*  
*Imperatives;*  
*Determiners;*  
*Link words and, and then, but;*  
*Formation of questions and the use of question words.*  
*Vocabulary specific to the subject and topic areas;*  
*Cardinal and ordinal (up to 31st) numbers;*  
*Expressions of past time e.g. yesterday, last night*  
*Phrases and expressions relating to the language functions listed;*  
*Hobbies and sports;*  
*School and work;*  
*Weekend and seasonal activities;*  
*Free time;*  
*Times and dates.*  
| *Vocabulary specific to the subject and topic areas;*  
*Cardinal and ordinal (up to 31st) numbers;*  
*Expressions of past time e.g. yesterday, last night*  
*Phrases and expressions relating to the language functions listed;*  
*Hobbies and sports;*  
*School and work;*  
*Weekend and seasonal activities;*  
*Free time;*  
*Times and dates.*  
|
Using Twiducate

Twiducate’s template

Students using Twiducate for troubleshooting.
Students spontaneously using Twiducate as a closed social network.
Example of spidergram built with the students’ ideas, in classroom, for brainstorming.

Example of table used by the students in prewriting stage.
Appendix 5

Checklists to evaluate the content of the texts

Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Editors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Authors**

- The authors use complete sentences.
- There is an interesting beginning sentence.
- The planet is described with lots of details.
- Special features added are significant and original.
- There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.
- Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.
- Information is in an order that makes sense.
- There is a summary sentence to end the text.

**Editors**

**Correction Code**

- Sp – Spelling
- WW – Wrong word
- WO – Wrong order
- ? – Not clear
- X – Extra word
- A – Missing word
- P – Punctuation
- // – Paragraph

Checklist to evaluate the content of the texts – descriptive text.
Checklist to evaluate the content of the texts – diary entry.
Checklist to evaluate the content of the texts – e-mail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Editors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The layout of the e-mail is respected (e-mail address, subject, greeting and an ending).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors use complete sentences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors provide suggestions of what to do in Planet Earth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors show opinions and thoughts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correction Code**

- **Sp** – Spelling
- **WW** – Wrong word
- **WO** – Wrong order
- **T** – Wrong tense
- **?** – Not clear
- **X** – Extra word
- **^** – Missing word
- **P** – Punctuation
- **//** – Paragraph
Checklist to evaluate the content of the texts – note

<table>
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<th>Editors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>The authors use complete sentences.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors present tasks to be done.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors provide details about how to complete the tasks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
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<table>
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<td>WW</td>
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<td>WO</td>
<td>Wrong order</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Wrong tense</td>
<td>//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Not clear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Extra word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Missing word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>//</td>
<td>Paragraph</td>
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Appendix 6

Using the correction code

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>WW – Wrong word</td>
<td>A – Missing word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO – Wrong order</td>
<td>P – Punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? – Not clear</td>
<td>// – Paragraph</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correction code used to correct the students’ texts.

Example of a text corrected with the correction code.
### Rubrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling correction</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete sentences</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting sentence</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planet details</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique and surprising</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought about audience</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Summary sentence</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric – Diary entry</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working title</strong></td>
<td>Diary - draft</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authors</strong></td>
<td>zimworld.east</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitals are used at the beginning of each sentence.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are well punctuated.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words are spelled correctly.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use complete sentences.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an interesting beginning sentence.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The events are described with lots of details.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We show opinions and thoughts about the events.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that we are thinking about our audience.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a summary sentence to end the text.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rubric - E-mail

- Capsules are used at the beginning of each sentence.
- Sentences are well punctuated.
- Words are spelled correctly.
- The authors use complete sentences.
- The layout of the note is respected.
- The authors present tasks to be done.
- The authors provide details about how to complete the tasks.
- Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.
- Information is in an order that makes sense.
**Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1 2 3 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentences are well punctuated.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words are spelled correctly.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors use complete sentences.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The layout of the e-mail is respected (e-mail address, subject, greeting and an ending).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors refer to what they did in Planet Earth.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors show opinions and thoughts.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an attempt to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that authors are thinking about their audience.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is in an order that makes sense.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8

Assessing the students’ previous experience

The English Monday Club

* Required

Name *

Age *
- [ ] 9 years old.
- [ ] 9 years old.
- [ ] 10 years old.

Are you *
- [ ] a boy?
- [ ] a girl?

How do you feel about *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning English?</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing a text?</td>
<td>:</td>
<td></td>
<td>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using computers?</td>
<td>:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the internet?</td>
<td>:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending the English Monday Club?</td>
<td>:</td>
<td></td>
<td>:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continue »

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# The English Monday Club

**Required**

**Do you like writing:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>SO SO</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stories?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mails?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**When writing a text, do you spend time:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning what to write?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading your text after finishing it</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for misspelled words?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking if all ideas are organised?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correcting all mistakes when you get the text back from the teacher?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The English Monday Club

* Required

When using a computer, have you ever: *

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<td>Typed a text?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used a word processor?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched for information on the Internet?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read a blog?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written a post for a blog?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used twitter?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written an e-mail?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you like to: *

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>HAVEN'T USED IT YET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type a text on a word processor?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for information on the internet?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Read blogs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write posts for a blog?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use twitter?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Write e-mails?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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[« Back  Continue »]
First questionnaire to assess the students’ previous experience with computers and L2 writing tasks
## End-of-task questionnaires

### End of assignment questionnaire - Descriptive writing

* Required

**Name** *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you feel about what you’ve been doing in Monday Club? *</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not really</th>
<th>So-so</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like coming to the Club.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like writing.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like process writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like using the computer to write texts.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like using blogs.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like using Tviducate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like working with my group.</td>
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End-of-task questionnaire – descriptive text.
End of assignment questionnaire - Diary Entry

* Required

Name *

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<tr>
<th>How do you feel about what you've been doing in Monday Club? *</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not really</th>
<th>So-so</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>I like coming to the Club.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like writing.</td>
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<td>I like proofreading.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like using the computer to write texts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like using blogs.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like using Twidlrate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like working with my group.</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can you already do? *</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not really</th>
<th>So-so</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can brainstorm ideas about topics.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I can use my ideas to write a text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can edit my text using the correction code.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can use the checklist to improve my texts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can improve my texts.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
End-of-task questionnaire – diary entry.
First questionnaire results

First questionnaire results – students’ predisposition to learn English, to write, to use the computer and the internet and to attend the writing workshop.
First questionnaire results – students’ previous experience with computers and internet tools.
Students’ preference for using the computer for writing tasks

*End-of-task questionnaire – second task –*

79% of students prefer to write in the computer.

*End-of-task questionnaire – fourth task –*

100% of students prefer to write in the computer.
Appendix 12

Students’ assessment of the use of Twiducate (2009)

End-of-task questionnaire – first task –

68% of students like using Twiducate (2009) very much.

End-of-task questionnaire – fourth task –

84% of students like using Twiducate (2009) very much.
Students’ ability to use Twiducate (2009)

End-of-task questionnaire – first task – students’ ability to post a message and comment a post in Twiducate (2009).
End-of-task questionnaire – fourth task – students’ ability to post a message and comment a post in Twiducate (2009).
Appendix 14

Students’ assessing the use of blogs

End-of-task questionnaire – first task – I like using blogs.

End-of-task questionnaire – second task – I like using blogs.
End-of-task questionnaire – third task – I like using blogs.

End-of-task questionnaire – fourth task – I like using blogs.
Students’ ability to use the blogs

End-of-task questionnaire – first task – students’ ability to post texts and comments in blogs

End-of-task questionnaire – second task – students’ ability to post texts and comments in blogs
End-of-task questionnaire – third task – students’ ability to post texts and comments in blogs

End-of-task questionnaire – fourth task – students’ ability to post texts and comments in blogs
Appendix 16

**Students’ assessment of the e-mail writing task**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you think about the e-mail you wrote?</th>
<th>I enjoyed writing the e-mail.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So-so</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>1 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>18 95%</td>
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</table>

End-of-task questionnaire – e-mail – Students’ assessment of the e-mail writing task
## Number of language errors, by category, in each writing task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teeth Planet</th>
<th>Planet Description</th>
<th>Diary Entry</th>
<th>E-Mail</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draft number</td>
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<td>1 2 3</td>
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<td>1 2 -</td>
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<td>//</td>
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<td>Number of words</td>
<td>42 48 55</td>
<td>116 116 120</td>
<td>47 58 59</td>
<td>71 150 142</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Teeth Planet – Number of language errors, by category, in each writing task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planet Oxanglogle</th>
<th>Planet Description</th>
<th>Diary Entry</th>
<th>E-Mail</th>
<th>Note</th>
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Planet Oxanglogle – Number of language errors, by category, in each writing task.
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<th>Square Planet</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
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<td>69 84 85</td>
<td>33 36 38</td>
<td>49 60 55</td>
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</table>

Square Planet – Number of language errors, by category, in each writing task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Planet Description</th>
<th>Diary Entry</th>
<th>E-Mail</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>102 103 105</td>
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<td>64 69 76</td>
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</table>

Starworld Planet – Number of language errors, by category, in each writing task.
Matmoney Planet – Number of language errors, by category, in each writing task.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Draft number</th>
<th>Planet Description</th>
<th>Diary Entry</th>
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<th>Note</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
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<td>133 134 154</td>
<td>55 117 117</td>
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</table>

Music Planet – Number of language errors, by category, in each writing task.

<table>
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<th>Planet Description</th>
<th>Diary Entry</th>
<th>E-Mail</th>
<th>Note</th>
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