



# Improving Learners' Reading Skills Using Web 2.0 Tools: The "I Read Better than You-Know-Who" Reading Platform

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## Abstract

*We would all agree that humanity has long time passed to the digital era which refers to the widespread availability of technology that provides people with enables access to data, ideas and interaction with people from all over the world at the same time (Starkey, 2010). In order to catch up with that uprising digital era, more teachers are experimenting by designing digital tools as web 2.0 applications and blog creating platforms are greatly available online nowadays. Some freshly graduated teachers are already experienced in the use of digital technologies (Starkey, 2010), while others try to self-educate themselves by watching online tutorials or online courses for lifelong learning. This essay explores two digital tools that have been developed in order to serve the educational needs of Grade 4 students at home or during remediation classes. Those tools aim to provide the students with a learning experience that will enable them to track their progress in reading as well as to encourage parents to engage themselves in the school community and actively participate in their children's education. Moreover, in order to assess the effectiveness of the evaluation activity, a third tool has been developed to demonstrate the comprehension level of the students in reading.*

**Keywords:** *digital tools, task-based learning, second language acquisition.*

## 1. Design Rationale

### 1.1 Conditions / Context of the Research

The use of the demonstrated digital tools is meant to occur out of class, such as at the students' familiar environment, i.e. at home, or during after-school courses (Benson and Reinders, 2011). For instance, many schools offer remediation classes for extra support to students with learning difficulties (Benson and Reinders, 2011). Formerly, the students have been introduced to the reading platform which contains the educational material and the teacher has demonstrated how to use the digital tools. The students are assigned to optionally use the tools in a quiet environment and complete in the activities.

### 1.2 Digital Tools

The digital tools include a platform on Weebly which is referred to as 'I read better than You-Know-Who!: A reading platform based on J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' (1997) and it can be accessed on <http://ireadbetterthanyouknowwho.weebly.com>. While accessing the reading platform one can find the rest of the digital tools on the 'Activities' section. There are two digital tools there; one made with VoiceThread (<https://voicethread.com/share/11690600>) and another made with H5P. The one with VoiceThread is an audible version of Chapter one where the students are requested to submit an audio comment by recording their voice while reading each page. The second one made with H5P is a Multilingual Glossary with vocabulary that the teacher found possibly troublesome for the students. It consists of pictures, audio and text.

### 1.3 Audience

The digital tools that this essay demonstrates, refer to Primary School students of Grade 4, aged 9-10. The classroom consists of 15 students with intercultural background from Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mexico, Turkey, Afghanistan and Greece.



## 2. Learning Objectives

### 2.1 Objectives related to language learning

- To listen to Chapter One from 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' using the Voice Thread in a quiet environment. (digital tool 1)
- To read effectively and compose an audio recording while reading on VoiceThread in a quiet environment. (digital tool 1)
- To underline on their books unknown words while listening to the audible slideshow and use the Multilingual Glossary to find out their definitions. (digital tool 2)
- To listen carefully to their audio recordings on VoiceThread and recognize any mistakes regarding the pronunciation and intonation of the words and the use of punctuation. (digital tool 1)
- To track their progress in reading by listening to their audio recordings on VoiceThread carefully and compare their performance from the beginning to the end of Chapter One. (digital tool 1)

### 2.2 Objectives related to technological literacy

- To employ VoiceThread in order to record their own audio comments and listen to other ones. (digital tool 1)
- To evaluate and measure the level of their comprehension by responding to the quiz of the Interactive Video. (assessment tool)
- To navigate themselves through the reading platform and practice using the website. (Weebly platform)
- To employ the comment section on Weebly and sent and read comments from their classmates and teacher. (Weebly platform)

### 2.3 Objectives related to personal values, beliefs, attitudes and stances

- To assume responsibility and active participation in their education in an online environment. (digital tools 1, 2 and assessment tool)
- To acquire the experience of how words are translated into other languages and raise interest in other languages learning. (digital tool 2)

## 3. Educational Material, Activity Flow and Added Pedagogical value

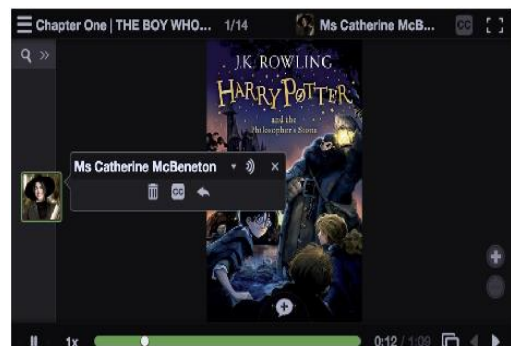
### 3.1 Educational Material

Looking closely at the educational material, as mentioned above, the VoiceThread was created based on the concept of an audible book. However, with this tool, the users are enabled to work collaboratively and submit their work given different options, such as video and audio commentation. In the one I've created, I start by



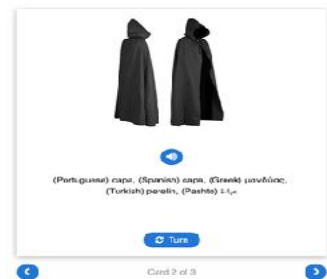
welcoming the students to the tool and explaining them in detail what their task is as well as guiding

them on how to use the tool. Moreover, in order to encourage the Harry Potter-ish theme of the entire project I have created my account by using a Hogwarts inspired name and an avatar. As the VoiceThread slides forward,



the audio is played automatically so that the students can follow either by reading from the slides or from their books. After having listened to the Chapter they are requested to record themselves reading at least two pages by clicking on the audio recording icon that appears in the middle.

Secondly, the Multilingual Glossary is a tool that combines the ideas of a picture dictionary and translation not just in one but five languages - Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Turkish and Pashto. The selection of these languages is not a coincidence, as they represent the first languages of the target students, as well as the teacher's one. That is done in order to raise a feeling of community and an interest in different languages. Apart from the written translation, this tool enables the students to listen to the different translations in the same order as the text by clicking on the speaker icon.

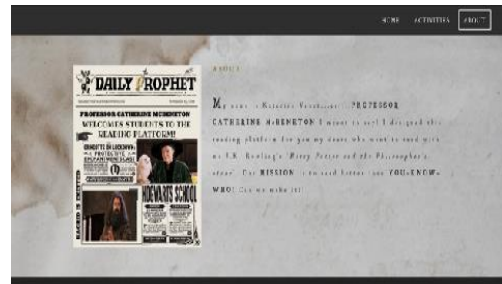


Last but not least, there is the reading platform, a blog-looking website where all these tools are gathered together making it easier for the students to catch up, send and receive comments from their teacher or even from their peers. As Zhang (2012)



describes successfully, SLA has been put in the scope through various approaches and perspectives, one of them being the tasked-/project-based approach. In the context of such a platform, the interactive perspective of the activities is an alternative, an online way to apply tasked-based pedagogy. The reading platform is built using the free editor mode by

Weebly and it consists of three pages; Home, Activities and About. The Home hosts the summary of the book as well as a section with a preview of the Activities. The final section 'About', consists of a welcoming message by the teacher in order to encourage the students and motivate them to collaborate with their contribution to the platform.



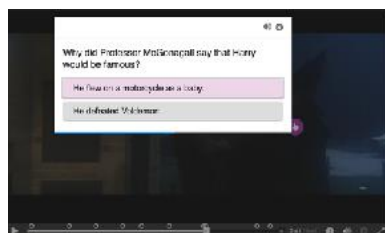
### 3.2 Added Pedagogical Value

It is strongly believed that this educational material could to the pedagogical goals and values in combination with the compatible means. As mentioned previously, this whole concept of a reading platform primarily aims to solve the problem of lacking time during the classes. Within this framework, the value that this material offers is something that reading aloud in class can't offer; the self-assessment. By recording their reading attempts the students are opted to be able to identify their mistakes while reading and track their reading progress in an extended period of time. Moreover, the Multilingual Glossary will offer a different experience to the students that is not easy to be achieved during real-time classes. It'd take five different dictionaries from English to their first languages and some time spent to find the desired vocabulary. Also, the Multilingual Glossary offers the opportunity to the students to get to know words in different languages and identify similarities between them or raise interest in learning them.

To conclude, the development of the above educational material does not aim to invalidate the value of the compatible material but to showcase the extent of the learning process that can be reached by incorporating different tools into the classroom (Zhang, 2012).

### 4. Assessment: Evaluation of the designed activities

In order to assess the students' comprehension level



as well as their participation in the online collaborative task on VoiceThread, I have created an interactive video quiz that consists of eight close-ended questions and an open-ended one at the end. To serve that purpose I





have chosen the first scene from the titular movie which represents Chapter One from the book. However, the questions are rather based on details found in the book than then clip itself. Towards the end of the video, there is an open-ended question where the students have to share their favourite part of the Chapter. The answers collected from that part could trigger ideas for further development and expansion of the reading platform for the following Chapters. In the future and after reading the entire book, I would upload on the reading platform a link where there the students could download their own Certificate for accomplishing successfully their task (see Appendix A).

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## Appendix A

The school's logo is covered in mosaic with all due to respect the protection of its data. This Certificate was created using Canva.com

