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ASSOCIAÇÃO PORTUGUESA DE PROFESSORES DE INGLÊS

eJournal
Spring/Summer Edition 2022

3 Educational resources (still) worth using in the Blended classroom

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"Anything worth doing is worth doing well."
— Hunter S. Thompson

In my previous articles, I have encouraged teachers to consider using social media such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter as mediums to engage students and augment learning scenarios in and out of the classroom. This article will look at more conventional educational resources that are worth using to involve learners, monitor their progress formatively, and help you run a blended classroom, while further promoting digital literacies in the 21st century classroom.

Introduction

Blended learning just might be next big thing in education. Not that it is new, but it is undoubtedly one of the things that got a leg up through the COVID-19 pandemic. In simplistic terms, b-learning is all about using current strategies, such as the use of digital media, and combining it with conventional methods/ approaches of teaching. While technological advancements, particularly the internet, have made tremendous contributions to almost every field, in the education sector, teachers are now using teleconferencing technologies to attend webinars, conferences, seminars, from anywhere in the globe and contact learners that have been confined due to COVID related infections or run staff meetings in busy school clusters. Blended learning statistics show engagement is higher when we use the techniques and methods that keep up with the students' interests instead of the slow-paced traditional lecture-based approach.

According to Mark in Style:
- 73% of teachers say blended learning increases engagement.
- 60% of teachers notice blended learning improves academic ability.
- 59% of students are more motivated when using blended learning models.

While there is no specific data regarding the Portuguese context, teachers and students are now closer than ever. Following the ordinary face-to-face lesson, student and teacher interactions and assignments can be sent and revised online through various platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Padlet, or Wakelet, which increase the opportunities for formative assessment and allow the teacher to further provide personalised feedback, something we are not always able to do in the physical classroom.

The following resources are not new to the 21st century teacher, but I have found that they keep on providing an important source of motivation with younger and older learners alike and can easily be used to flip the classroom as in having the students design the game-like material to be presented to the class. In fact, given the current context, running a blended classroom is not only a possibility, but somewhat of a necessity.
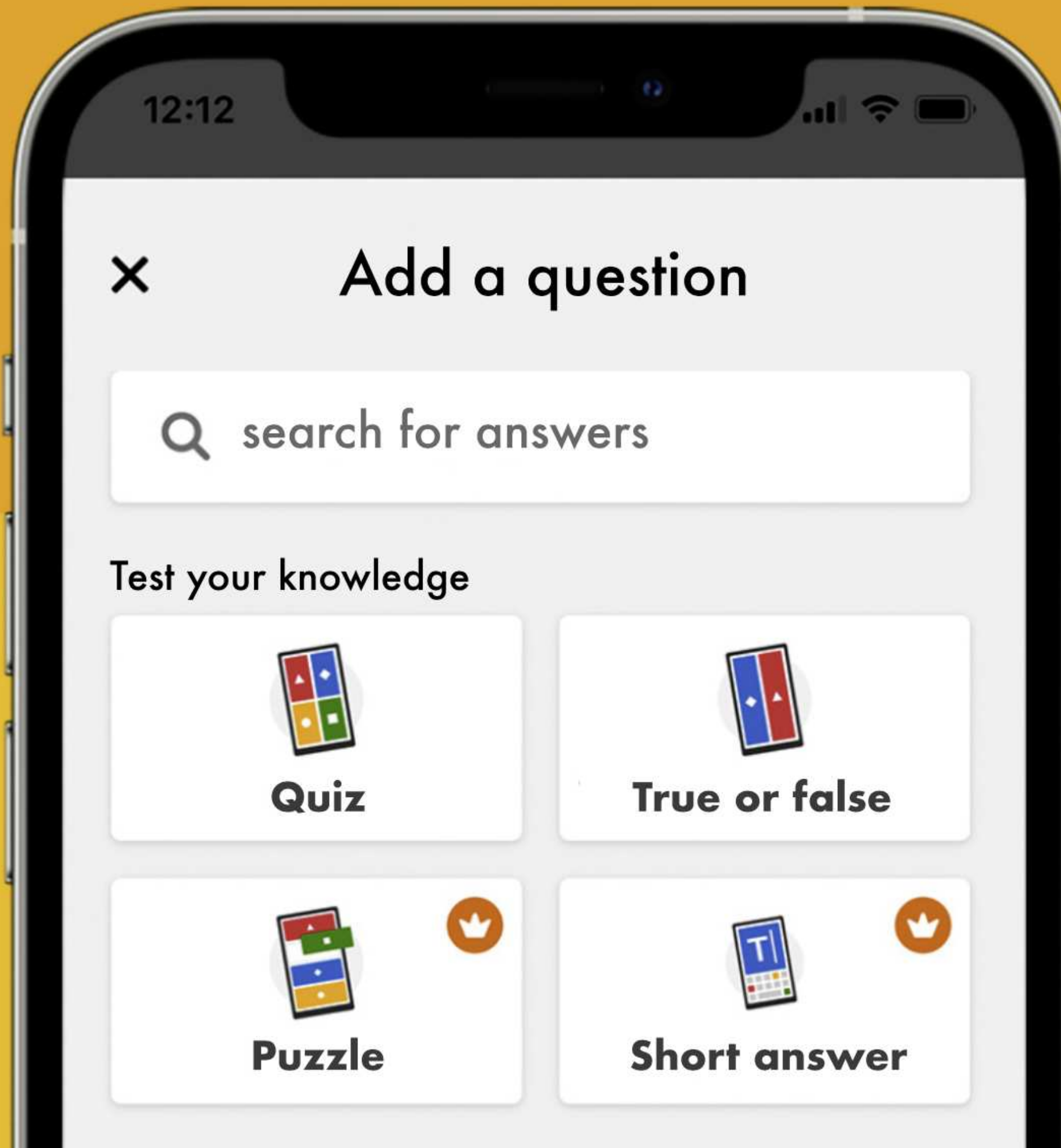
Let's consider 3 essential apps for the blended classroom:

Kahoot

Kahoot is a well-known game-based learning platform that allows the instructor to create learning games such as trivia quizzes in a matter of minutes. Each quiz presents up to four multiple-choice answers. In a physical classroom, a teacher can project the quiz and have learners reply using their own devices. For each correct answer, learners gain points. Nevertheless, the app can be used remotely as it was done in countless classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. It could be used, for instance, to test learners' knowledge on vocabulary or grammar or quiz them on more specific issues that require additional attention. Kahoot reports can be used for formative assessment or even to introduce new topics. Learners can also be challenged to create their own Kahoot and share it with the class. It presents a vast library of ready-made quizzes, which is valuable especially when teaching multiple levels. This particular tool has attracted much research in recent years, such as Alamanda's (2019) *Kahoot!: A Game-Based Learning Tool as an Effective Medium to Improve Students' Achievement in Rural Areas*, which concludes that Kahoot positively impacts student academic achievement as measured by student motivation, enjoyment, engagement, and concentration or Atherton's (2018) contribution regarding *Kahoot and Formative Assessment*, which explores links between educational technologies and learning.

Deck Toys

Deck Toys is an online classroom platform that allows the user to teach and engage learners interactively. By gamifying the learning experience, the lesson path is presented to students as a lesson adventure. The teacher can drag and drop materials already designed for a given topic, taking advantage of the time already invested in material design. Student progress is recorded in real-time and allows the instructor to identify the strengths and potential areas of improvement for each learner and by the end of the activity, the teacher may download a class report that summarises the completed activities and answers submitted by learners providing a valuable source of information and a viable form to conduct formative assessment. Unfortunately, Deck Toys runs on a freemium business model, so if you use the free version, you cannot keep your decks private, which might be problematic if you're not willing to share your materials.

Wordwall

Wordwall is a very useful web tool that allows the user to create both interactive and printable activities. The interactive activities are compatible with the majority of web-enabled devices which are suitable for in-class work as well as homework assignments. It provides numerous templates to facilitate the design of activities, such as *match up*, *quiz*, *random wheel*, *group sort*, *find and match*, *missing word*, *unjumble*, *wordsearch*, *labelled diagram*, *matching pairs*, *open the box*, *whack-a-mole*, *anagram*, *random cards*, *gameshow quiz*, *true or false*, *maze chase* and *flip tiles*. Overall, Wordwall is very useful when designing remedial activities on a given topic.

Final thoughts

While you have probably used these 3 resources in your lessons, I have found that they still bring a sense of engagement and wonder to the classroom. If you are still trying to figure out how to navigate the blended classroom, allow me to share a suggestion: regardless of the app and the task you want your learners to complete be sure to keep it simple, keep it action orientated and keep it connected! (Vázquez Cano, Marín-Monje and Castrillo, 2016) Following these three tips will surely help you deliver great lessons, grade your learners fairly and release you from the limitations of running a coursebook centred classroom.

Remember: engaged students pay attention!

deck·toys

Words with tion and ture

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