



## BLOGS AS A TOOL IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS: Tumblr - a study case

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**Abstract:** The English language became one of the most spoken languages in the world, being known as *Lingua Franca*, which means a language that allows communication between people with different mother-tongues. For this reason, people started to want to learn English, and when the teaching-learning process starts, they need to feel motivated to succeed at it. Technology and the Internet are powerful motivational factors to engage students and arouse their interest in the learning process, mainly because it is present in their lives. Blog is a very common tool and highly available on the Internet, for this reason our aim is to check if it brings benefits to the English teaching-learning process. To achieve our aim, our paper was based on Harmer (2004), Ur (2009), Dudeney; Hockly (2008), Paiva (2008), among other authors who gave us the theoretical references and support to evaluate and compare the developed activities on *Tumblr*, by the students of a language school in Franca, with an activity thereafter developed in class to check if students benefit from it.

**Keywords:** Tumblr. Blog. Writing. Teaching-learning process. Internet.

**Resumo:** A língua inglesa tornou-se uma das línguas mais faladas no mundo, sendo reconhecida como *Lingua Franca*, ou seja, a língua que permite a comunicação entre pessoas com línguas-mães diferentes. Por esse motivo, as pessoas começaram a querer aprender inglês, e quando o processo de ensino-aprendizagem começa, elas precisam se sentir motivadas para obter êxito no mesmo. Tecnologia e a Internet são poderosos fatores motivacionais para engajar os alunos e aumentar seus interesses pelo processo de aprendizagem, principalmente por serem fatores constantemente presentes em suas vidas. O Blog é uma ferramenta muito comum e altamente disponível na internet, por esse motivo nosso objetivo é verificar se o mesmo traz benefícios ao processo de ensino e aprendizagem da língua inglesa. Para atingir esse objetivo, nossa pesquisa foi baseada em Harmer (2004), Ur (2009), Dudeney; Hockly (2008), Paiva (2008), entre outros autores que nos deu o referencial teórico e suporte para avaliarmos e compararmos as atividades desenvolvidas no blog *Tumblr*, por alunos de uma escola de idiomas de Franca, com uma atividade desenvolvida em sala de aula posteriormente e verificarmos se os alunos se beneficiaram do uso do mesmo.

**Palavras-chave:** *Tumblr*. Blog. Texto. Processo de ensino-aprendizagem. Internet.

### 1 Introduction

Living in such a globalized world as we live nowadays the urge to communicate is increasing more and more. In order to make this communication possible, people need to have a language that enables it. The English language,

which is one of the most spoken in the world, has come to facilitate this exchange of information, in consequence, English is known as a *Lingua Franca*, which means a language that enables communication between people who do not share the same native language.

Being a *Lingua Franca* justifies the fact that recently more and more people want to learn English. Concerning the teaching-learning process, it is clear to notice that technology besides of being part of students' lives nowadays, it is also a motivational factor when dealing with learning.

Usually, when we talk about technology, the internet is one of the words that comes to people's mind. It is a tool, besides other benefits, that integrate resource and help stimulate students' creativity. It is well known that blogs are websites that are frequently updated and can be used in the classroom as a motivational tool to support the learning.

Therefore, our aim is to verify whether blogs can be a beneficial tool in the teaching-learning process, especially dealing with the writing skill. To do so, we developed a bibliographical research, based on the authors such as Harmer (2004), Ur (2009), Dudeney; Hockly (2008), Paiva (2008), among others, who gave us the theoretical support to talk about it. Firstly we mentioned the relevance of English in the world, and in which ways language can affect people's lives including the learning process. Afterwards we discussed the use of technology in the teaching-learning process, as nowadays it can be used as a resource to facilitate the learning through its different aspects.

Finally, we wrote about the use of Blogs as one resource technology expose people to which is also a tool that can be used in the teaching learning process.

The investigation process was developed through a project on the *Tumblr* blog that we named *Let's Write*, in which we, the teachers, posted instructions for the participant students to develop paragraphs following the guidelines given, to check its benefits concerning the writing skill.

## 2 The relevance of English in the world

Globalization means the connection among the countries and people in the world and it happens because of the trade of information involving the market, technology, economics, entertainment, culture and language. Nowadays it is widely discussed as an influential factor in people's lives. This influence exists due to communication. Communication is a worldwide interaction and happens through the Internet, television, international calls etc. Because of that, we are exposed to foreign languages all the time, especially English.

Understanding globalization is a necessary step to proceed to a discussion on educational matters. Broadly speaking, it can be seen as the international economic order regulated by diplomatic negotiations. It rose with the internalization of markets, the lowering of production, transport and communication costs resulting from the technical and technological revolution challenging current concepts of space and time (REIS, 2000, p. 10).

As a result of globalization, people with different native language started to look for new ways to gather information of the whole world such as technology, scientific facts, other cultures etc. Being one of the most spoken languages, English is the main link to enable the gathering of information due to its use in the entire world, and it has become a *lingua franca*, which "[...] can be defined as a language widely adopted for communication between two speakers whose native languages are different from each other's and where one or both speakers are using it as a 'second' language (HARMER, 2004, p.1)." Today, English has reached a point that the number of non-native speakers and second language speakers has overcome the number of native speakers (JACOBS, 2001).

A language becomes international or global for one reason only – the power of the people who speak it. But of course 'power' means different things at different times. In the case of English, the language has spread as a result of a combination of political/military power (The British Empire), scientific/technological power (the Industrial Revolution), economic power (pounds and, later dollars), and cultural power (broadcasting, travel, films, pop songs, internet) (SCHOLES, 2010, p. 10).

It is believed that English is one of the main languages of communication in the world, as a result of this, there are words known even by non-English speakers such as *bank, chocolate, computer, hamburger, hospital,*

*restaurant, taxi* etc (HARMER, 2004). Because of the presence of English in our lives and being one of the most widely spoken languages today, people can find themselves in need to learn it.

According to Harmer (1994), the search for English learning is based on some factors, such as the target language community, specific purposes, culture and school curriculum. The target language community refers to the place “where the inhabitants speak the language which the student is learning” (HARMER, 1994, p 1). In other words, it applies for exchange students, if they are willing to have a new experience living in another country and studying there, they will need the language in order to survive.

As Harmer (1994) says, there is also the need of English for specific purposes: for occupational purposes (EOP), for example, to be able to work as air traffic controllers, business executives, waiters, and so on. For Academic Purposes (EAP) students who want to study at a university in the USA, Canada, Australia, or any other country in which the L1 is English, will need to be able to communicate, write essays, understand the subject, etc. Also for Science and Technology (EST), which is for scientific students, such as physicists, biologists that will need to read and write articles, if they want to have a wide range of their work, it has to be written in English. As an example, a scientist would only be a well-known one if his discoveries are published in English.

Another factor mentioned by Harmer (1994) is culture, which is appealing to some students who want to study a foreign language in order to learn about the people who speak it, the place where they live, the written works and so on.

Moreover, there is the popular culture, which also helps to increase the search for English learning. English has a significant presence among music in general, thus many people that do not speak English can sing the words of their favorite songs; and people get in touch with the language by watching subtitled movies and TV programs.

School curriculum, as mentioned before, refers to English as a subject at school, and the students will have to study it whether they like it or not; it is the first step and usually the first contact with the language. Learning English at school can

be extremely enriching for students' development even in other subjects, concerning that learning a language involves practicing different abilities such as reading and interpretation, which is useful in every subject as Harmer (1994) suggested. We can see it is important to motivate students to use in English the language knowledge they have built in their mother tongue. It enables the student to be an English discursive learner by getting involved in the process of building meaning of the language (BRASIL, 1998).

## 2.1 Learning English

Once the student finds a reason to study English, he/she needs to be involved and willing to learn. It will only happen with motivation, which is a feeling that makes people want to do something.

The abstract term 'motivation' on its own is rather difficult to define. It is easier and more useful to think in terms of the 'motivated' learner: one who is willing or even eager to invest effort in learning activities and to progress. Learner motivation makes teaching and learning immeasurably easier and more pleasant as well as more productive: hence the importance of the topic for teachers (UR, 2009, p. 274).

Therefore, a teacher has to know how to arouse the students' motivation to help them learn. One way to do so would be setting goals students would feel eager to achieve. The environment of learning is important and it is set by the teacher. The atmosphere needs to be light and engaging, the teacher has to know how to talk to the students, explain clearly, give feedback, so students understand the concepts and feel comfortable to be part of the class. Finally, the class should be interesting for the students, and then they will keep engaged (HARMER, 2004).

If students are to continue to be intrinsically motivated they clearly need to be interested both in the subject they are studying and in the activities and topics they are presented with. We need to provide them with a variety of subjects and exercises to keep them engaged (HARMER, 2004, p. 53).

We believe that the most crucial tool a teacher can use to motivate a student today is technology, especially Internet. It is in people's everyday lives and it does not seem as an educational tool. However, it can be a powerful one. The Internet can stimulate students' interest, creativity and communication.

Teaching using technological sources is not a new thing, we have been surrounded by some sorts of them such as tape records, language laboratories and videos since 1960s and 1970s, and we still use them nowadays, as technology develops, we tend to use the modern ones. The access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has become wider and wider, so CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) are moving beyond the computer programs and reaching the internet (DUDENEY; HOCKLY, 2008).

Since the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s, the use of the computer has played a considerable role in the EFL<sup>1</sup> classroom. Whereas the computer itself and its corresponding learning software (e.g. language learning programmes) were of great relevance for a certain approach named CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) in the 90s, this term lost its significance especially from the moment the internet has found its more or less widespread methodological place in the EFL classroom roughly in the 2000s. The internet became cheaper and faster and as a result, learners were not dependent on proprietary software anymore but could use free browser-based tools (i.e. websites and/or applications that can be used online) for their learning process, so called Educational Applications. (STRASSER, 2013, p.14)

Knowing that the technological resource is a powerful tool, we will discuss about it in the next chapter.

### 3 The use of technology in the teaching-learning process

Before all the current technology tools took over, people used to rely on different resources to study. The most common one was the coursebook, which is still used nowadays. It is a guide that contains the tangible language and content the student is going to learn. For a long time a coursebook together with a blackboard, would enable the teacher to explain better with visible examples and would be enough to plan a given lesson. However, as technology has developed and has become part of people's everyday lives, new technological resources were created and teachers saw themselves in need to upgrade their tools in class, besides using only *chalk and talk*.

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<sup>1</sup>EFL: English as a Foreign Language

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The education system was practically forced to integrate technology in the learning process since it took over the communication world. When technology first started to take place, the reaction to this new change was not positive and the rejection was huge, although it is a natural response and part of the self-protection mechanism humans have towards changes, and teachers were afraid of being replaced by machines. Then, as technology became part of social interaction, it showed to be a positive factor, and slowly, also part of the education system in a pedagogic role, bringing different kinds of resources as supplementary tools in the learning process (PAIVA, 2008).

Desde o início do século XXI é possível acompanhar um debate no campo dos estudos da linguagem no Brasil, particularmente na antropologia, na semiótica e na linguística aplicada, sobre as práticas de leitura e escrita à luz das chamadas novas tecnologias da informação e comunicação (TICS). Diferentes publicações indicam a necessidade de (re)pensar o conceito de letramento a partir da mudança da cultura do papel para a cultura da tela e da coexistência entre as tecnologias tipográficas e digitais de leitura e escrita na atualidade (TEIXEIRA; MOURA, 2012, p.55).<sup>2</sup>

According to Paiva (2008), the reproduction of sound and video in the 1900s was the first and the biggest breakout in the language teaching-learning process. It was possible to bring recorded material into class, so students could listen to native speakers and study their accent, pronunciation and intonation.

Com a inovação tecnológica de gravação e reprodução de som, foi possível levar para a sala de aula material gravado, reproduzindo amostras de fala de falantes nativos. Os alunos poderiam assim ouvir e tentar imitar a pronúncia sem a interferência do sotaque do professor ou de seus eventuais problemas de pronúncia e entonação. O ensino começa a focar a língua falada, sem, contudo, ignorar as descrições sintáticas. Apesar de haver um foco na oralidade, entendia-se a aprendizagem da habilidade oral como imitação e repetição de amostras de falas gravadas por nativos (PAIVA, 2008, p. 5).

New teaching methods and approaches emerged with this new discovery. Today, listening skills and pronunciation are still emphasized in the classroom – all coursebooks come with CD-ROMs containing sentences to drill, conversations or even whole recorded articles.

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<sup>2</sup>The quotation will remain in the original language.

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As for videos, they came a little further than audio, but today they are quite used as well. Videos also show language in use – accent, pronunciation and intonation, with the aid of facial expressions, gestures and body language in general.

The development of special films for language teaching was begun during the 1930's by the Walt Disney studios, which produced a series of cartoons to teach Basic English. These films were probably the first in which animated cartoons were used in teaching. In 1943 the *March of Time* series produced a film to teach Basic English using live actors (KELLY, 1969, p. 251).

After that, all kinds of videos were made with the same purpose: to be used in class as an additional factor to the teaching process (KELLY, 1969). People developed new teaching methods and approaches because of videos too, the Audio-visual methods. Therefore, some coursebooks also provide materials with audio-visual tools, cassette in the past days and DVDs in the present, containing short videos related to the subject studied in the coursebook.

However, the most revolutionary tool was yet to come. The computers were created in the 1930s during the World War II because of the American government, but the first program related to language teaching came only in the 1960s. From that time ahead, several tool of computer programs were made based on developing and correcting grammar and vocabulary, such as auto spelling etc. The personal computers (PCs) came to Brazil in the 1980s and the teaching programs came only in 1990s (PAIVA, 2008).

O acesso à rede mundial de computadores, no Brasil, aconteceu em 1991 com a criação da Rede Nacional de Pesquisa (RNP) pelo Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq). A rede interligou várias universidades e os professores universitários começaram a “falar” com seus pares no exterior, ainda de forma precária, pois o sistema Usenet, que viabilizava a interação via BBS (BulletinBoard System), ainda funcionava de forma muito semelhante às máquinas de escrever. O acesso público só teve início em 1994, com as provedoras particulares, e, em 1997, chega a WWW nos moldes que conhecemos hoje. Surgiram novas formas de comunicação e os aprendizes de línguas estrangeiras puderam, pela primeira vez, ter acesso a páginas da Internet e interagir com falantes das línguas por meio de email, listas de discussão e fóruns. Pela primeira vez, temos uma tecnologia que permite experiências lingüísticas não artificiais e a língua pode ser entendida como comunicação (PAIVA, 2008, p. 9).

After the Internet has become so popular, even using DVDs is already “old-fashioned”. Now you can find online almost all the audios and videos we used in classroom in the past days. A great range of teaching materials, books and videos



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are available to download, for free or not. Ever since the internet became available to everybody, everywhere, it is the most complete source of all.

According to Padilha; Martinelli (2015), being part of people's routine, the internet is on everybody's hands. This network is a set of tools that enables actions, services, products, processes and specially interaction which are not possible in an analogical source for example.

Diferentemente das mídias anteriores (impressas e analógicas como a fotografia, o cinema, o rádio e a TV - pré-digitais), a mídia digital, por sua natureza "tradutora" de outras linguagens para a linguagem dos dígitos binários e por sua concepção fundante em rede (web), permite que o usuário (ou o leitor/produtor de textos humano) interaja em vários níveis com vários outros interlocutores (interface, ferramentas, outros usuários, textos/discursos etc) (ROJO, 2012, p. 25).

Images, songs, and all the possible and available interaction on the internet are very appealing, so why not use digital media as a motivational factor in the teaching-learning process? "On the internet, students of English have an authentic context on which to share their lives through expressive narrative and eye-catching imagery on social media organizers like Pinterest (pinterest.com)" (CHINNERY, 2014, p.2). We believe in the possibility of integrating this resource as a motivational factor in the learning process.

As a tool, the Internet can be used for a deeper level of student engagement and interactivity by helping stimulate Creativity; it can also foster communication and collaboration. (...) Even if learners lack advanced levels of proficiency, they can produce creatively in English on a number of sites At Draw a stickman (drawstickman.com), pair of students can collaborate on a picture dictation activity, in which one orally paint a picture that the other attempts to reproduce. At Make Beliefs Comix (makebeliefs.com), students can create basic comic strips, with dialogue (CHINNERY, 2014, p.3).

Implementing the internet in the classroom brings a range of different opportunities to students and teachers, it is important that the teacher gives the necessary support to the students, so that they will be constantly motivated.

Knowing that motivation is a very important factor in the result of learning, people have to be very motivated to do something in order to succeed at it. Consequently, lack of motivation can lead to failure. If motivation is that important, it makes sense to understand and use it in our favor. "Increasing and directing student motivation is one of a teacher's responsibilities" (HARMER, 2004, p. 53). We believe

that by using the Internet, students will be intrinsically motivated, considering that they spend such a big period of time browsing it.

As Dudeney and Hockly (2008) say, even though the use of technology in the classroom is not total, it is turning into a very important engine, and will be of common use in a few years, for many reasons. One of the reasons for that is the fact that the access to internet is becoming more and more available every day, as we have already said. Another reason is the fact that younger learners are growing up surrounded by the technological environment, so they are part of it, as for them the technological resources integrate the outside world to the classroom. Moreover, technology offers many ways of practicing the language and it enables students to assess their performance and check the answers, for this reason, improving their learning. It has also become increasingly mobile, so today it is not extremely necessary to be in a computer room, for example.

Along with the advantages mentioned above, Strasser (2013) reminds us of a significant one: interaction. By using forums and blogs, for example, we enable students to work on their creativity, for instance, to create online cartoons, podcasts etc. Besides being generally free, it is collaborative, so students can share ideas and finally write their essays together by using the target language.

The contexts in which teachers are working with technology can vary widely, and the access that teachers have to computers – the so-called digital divide – will affect what we can do with our classes in terms of implementing technology. A general lack of ICT training for teachers also means that we still have some way to go until the normalization of technology in language teaching, where the use of technology in teaching becomes as natural as the use of books or pens and paper (DUDENEY; HOCKLY, 2008, p. 8).

As we can see, this is a period of transition, in which the access to computer and the internet is growing but it is not totally available, we still have a way to go. Now, we will further discuss in which ways blogs can be used in the learning process.

#### **4 The use of blogs in the English language learning**

As we have seen, the internet has revolutionized the world we live in, either through social media, or as a working tool. It is a quick and easy way to

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disseminate information, for instance, if a company wants to be popular, the more its name appears online, the more people will know about it; for business negotiations, the internet can facilitate the communication via Skype, emails, and other online means of communication. Concerning studies, it can be a very successful aid to researches.

Also as entertainment there are no doubts that it is extremely appealing to people of all ages. They are exposed to a wide variety of social medias, for example, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, which are growing faster, and reaching more and more people, different kinds of blogs. Besides being used as a media entertainment, blogs, also have educational purposes. They are defined by the oxford dictionary: “A regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group that is written in an informal or conversation style”. So, even though “blog” is a well known term nowadays, it is worth reading the details provided by Schmidt (2007, p. 9):

Weblogs or “blogs” are frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, sound files, etc) is posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order. Readers often have the option to comment on any individual posting, which is identified by a unique URL. Through such comments and references to other online sources in the posting as well as through links to favorite blogs in the sidebar (the “blogroll”), blogs form a clustered network of interconnected texts the “blogsphere”.

According to Chapman (2011), the first recognized blog is “Links.net”, which was created by Just Hall, a college student in 1994. At that time, this type of website wasn’t called blog, only in 1997 the term “weblog” was created by Jorn Barger. Later in 1999, weblog was shortening to blog. At the beginning, different types of blogging platforms appeared, the most famous one of the early sites was Live Journal. The decade of the 2000 was the big growth of blogs.

O uso dos blogs evoluiu ao longo dos anos criando diversas possibilidades, como videolog, fotolog, entre outras possibilidades. Há necessidade dos educadores explorarem as possibilidades das ferramentas digitais (blogs ou outras), como instrumentos envolvidos nas práticas de letramento contemporâneas. Neste sentido, são apoio ao ensino, mas principalmente, são objetos de ensino (LORENZI; PÁDUA, 2012, p. 53).

Besides showing multimodal content, blogs seem to have great interaction, in addition to stimulate communication and collaboration among the

people involved. We believe that bringing blogs to the classroom can add a lot to the learning process, specially writing.

Blogs afford and expand audience and give both teacher and students the opportunity to bring into their teaching and learning practices more opportunities for language use. Blogs have proved to be an efficient support for academic literacy practices (PAIVA; BRAGA, 2014, p. 82).

According to Prata; Marcondes (2011), blogs had shown to be a modern and interactive tool, they provide authentic material for reading and writing besides being a dynamic way to produce and check language.

Blogging can improve students' writing skills and build their confidence as writers. By blogging, students can take ownership of their siting, become better observes of others' writing, and develop a more immediate and powerful understanding of audience. Blogs encourage experimenting and risk taking, seriousness and play, and they foster and increases awareness of private and public writing. Blogging blends both the freeing aspect of short pieces that can be written in a relatively low-stakes environment with the sense of claiming one's own voice and learning how to develop analysis and articulate ideas to a larger public. Guided by clear expectations of what is required in a class blog, students can see their writing develop over the course of the term (MORRIS, 2013).

As we can see these are different ways in which students can benefit from blogs; this is what we will expand a bit more on the next item.

#### **4.1 Blogs and the teaching of writing**

Writing is one of the four essential language skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing to achieve a good result in the learning process. Writing is a productive skill, which means it involves producing the language instead of receiving it.

To write we need to have something to communicate, and usually someone to communicate it to. We also need to be able to form letters and words, to join these together to make sentences or a series of sentences that link together and to communicate our message on such a way as to get our message across (SPRATT; PULVERNESS; WILLIAMS, 2012, p. 37).

Therefore, knowing that writing is what we produce, we have a range of types of texts. Each type of text involves different types of writing, concerning different purposes and characteristics such as level of formality, different layouts, kind of structures etc. It is the teacher's role to teach the student "how to produce

these characteristics for each text type we write and to know how to vary the characteristics within text types depending on who we are writing to” (SPRATT; PULVERNESS; WILLIAMS, 2012, p.37). That means, also teaching the students register and vocabulary according to different situations.

[...] the objective of the teaching of writing in a foreign language is to get learners to acquire the abilities and skills they need to produce a range of different kinds of written text similar to those an educated person would be expected to be able to produce in their own language (UR, 2009, p. 162).

As Spratt; Pulverness and Williams (2012) say, when teaching writing, it is important to mention writing approaches. One of them is accuracy such as spelling correctly, punctuation, layout, and paragraphs; the other writing approach is how to communicate their ideas such as organizing ideas and appropriate functions, e.g. requesting, complaining, summarizing, concluding etc. Another factor that is worth mentioning is cohesion by using reference words, topic sentences and linking words.

According to Spratt; Pulverness and Williams (2012), writing involves some stages and it is crucial to go through them with learners. Students have to develop their ideas, organize them, write a draft, edit and improve the context of the text, proofread to check mistakes, and re-draft which means writing the final version of the piece of writing. The stages are as part of writing as the actual act of writing itself.

In addition, there are several types of writing, such as Descriptive, Expository, Persuasive and Narrative. The descriptive text “is used to create a vivid picture of an idea, place or person. It is much like painting with words” (MORIN, 2015), that means it describes something. An Expository text is the one which includes definition, instructions, directions, and other basic comparison and clarification. It does show the writer’s opinion and gives many details. As for a Persuasive text, it is based on more expressing ideas, and supporting an opinion in such a way to convince the reader. And finally, the Narrative is the type of text that usually tells a story, it is commonly used for fictional stories, plays, or a personal story, usually written in the first person. The Narrative text is the most common one in blogging.

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Blogging can offer opportunities for students to develop their communications skills through meaningful writing experiences. Such projects not only motivate students to write, but motivate them to write well (CURRAN, 2012).

Moreover, blogging gives students the opportunity to practice their written English in a “real-world” tool. This is the reason why we decided to check blogs real usefulness, especially, linked to the teaching of writing. Our choice is the one called *Tumblr*.

## 4.2 Tumblr

The blog we chose and we believe is the most appealing to students is *Tumblr*. It is a social networking website that allows the users to create profiles and then post texts and multimedia content such as images, videos, links, quotes, audios, etc. Users can follow each other, read comments and share users’ posts in the platform. It was founded by David Karp in 2007 and owned by Yahoo! Inc in 2013. It is widely recognized and used, *Tumblr* hosts over 252 million blogs and more than 116.9 billion posts in total according to the official website of *Tumblr*. It is also more popular with teenagers and “college-aged” users and half of the visits on the website are made by people under the age of 25.

And Tumblr is growing — it’s now one of the top 10 websites in the United States, with 20 billion pageviews a month. The tremendous user engagement is enabling the company to quietly and discreetly build a powerful Interest Graph of things its users actually like and want to share. Tumblr still has a long road ahead with monetization, but the Interest Graph will be crucial to making sure anything Tumblr does is targeted and relevant to its users (RIFIKIN, 2013).

*Tumblr* is different from other kinds of websites that hosts blogs because of its ability to connect and share, in a visible way, other people’s posts, consequently, it has become a very popular social network.

Being this popular, it is an engaging tool to use with students and arouse their interest, especially in writing. Students will be able to see writing in a real-life context and produce their own, besides, it is an out of classroom activity and they might enjoy it and feel stimulated to write even when not required (PRATA; MARCONDES, 2011).

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Some researchers have claimed that students' writing skills improve when they blog. A study conducted by Kavaliauskiene&Vaiciuniene (2006) indicated that the experience of writing on blogs (for an audience) provides opportunities to help students improve their knowledge of English. Nadzrah (2007) also found that blogs let students compose writing with specific purposes that can encourage them to enhance their writing in the language constructively (YUNU; TUAN; SALEHI, 2013).

We believe that joining something students are used to doing and also enjoy doing, such as using *Tumblr*, with the practice of writing will consequently improve their skills and maybe make them feel pleased about it (AAMOTH, 2013). Based on this, we developed a *Tumblr* project to check if students would really benefit from it.

#### **4.3 Analysis**

We created a Tumblr account and named it *Let's write* with the aim of gathering the writing skill to the world of technology, specifically, blogs.

With the purpose of checking how technology, mainly the use of blogs, can influence and/or benefit the students' learning process, we created a project to be developed in a private English language school in Franca to cope with writing.

It was done in a group called *Basic 2*. The group consisted of six students, however, only three of them took part of the project. The other three pupils had normal classes as all the others students in the school usually have. Therefore their performance would not be affected at all. The decision of dividing the classroom in two groups would help to compare the results later on.

The syllabus students were dealing with was Present Continuous and Simple Present, so the writing project was based on it.

We randomly chose three students, who will be called student A, B and C, to take part of the project and they gladly agreed with it. They were already familiar with *Tumblr* and knew how to use it. The learners demonstrated interest in using the blog as a tool to improve their writing abilities in a different context from the classroom environment, as Prata; Marcondes (2011) said.

Five different activities were prepared, focusing on Present Continuous and Simple Present as we have already said, and approaching topics such as being in a party, spending the weekend in a hotel, going on a trip, being on a farm and

being on a camping trip (see Appendix A for the whole instructions). Together with the topics, there were some questions to guide students and a vocabulary bank to help them with appropriate words. After the three students had completed a task, the feedback of their answers was given in class throughout a discussion.

As we can see in the learners' posts (see Appendix B), they initially made some grammar and spelling mistakes concerning the structure that had been taught, however, their improvement throughout the other tasks is noticeable. They could move from a very simple sentence to more elaborated ones as we can see in Student A's examples: *I'm dancing now; We are loving the park. Jennifer wants to see Mickey and I want see Minnie; Heloisa is making a campfire because is cold.*

Student B also has a better performance throughout the tasks: *My father is talking to my grandmother; My father is walking in the grass, he likes to walk; Now, Lucas and Leo are playing volleyball and the girls are talking about a famous actor.*

Another example we can mention comes from Student C sentences: *[...] my brother is drinking soda; My father is swimming in the river with my brother all day; Bruna is relaxing and I'm waiting to Fernando finish the book.*

Although there are some inaccuracies in the learners' contributions, the texts are cohesive and coherent, which makes the pupils convey the message. We could also notice that their paragraphs were longer each time they had another task which matches Morris (2013) utterance that students become more aware of their production. Most of them used the vocabulary bank but others did not need it. The fact that some students did not use the vocabulary bank reminds us of Strasser's (2013) words when he referred to blogs and forum as ways of enabling students' creativity.

On the whole, it sounded that they were motivated and interested in doing the activities and that the subject/topic of each task kept them engaged as Harmer (2004) mentioned before.

As soon as the *Tumblr* activities were over, we decided to ask all the students from the group to write an essay on a similar content to check if by using new technologies, in this case blogs, in the classroom, learners would really benefit



from them. At this point it was important to consider all the group production to have a reliable corpus analysis. Again, we would like to emphasize that the students who did not join the blog activities, were not in disadvantage concerning their learning at the school as they were exposed to the language as all the other students from the school were. The blog activities were an extra task with the aim of checking its viability.

The essay was a guided composition (**see** Appendix C) with some vocabulary suggestion as it was done with the blog activities. The vocabulary suggestion is always there so that students can rely on them if they are not creative enough.

By analyzing the essays (**see** Appendix D), we noticed that Students A, B and C, who were the ones that participated in the blogs activities could have a better production than Students D, E and F, who did not do the blog activities.

Students A, B and C could fulfill the task appropriately even when there were minor mistakes. As Yunu; Tuan; Salehi (2013) mentioned before, because of their constant practice of grammar in different situations applied on the *Tumblr* page, the students had the opportunity to improve their English and they were eager to enhance their compositions. Some examples can be: Student A – [...] I'm relaxing on the beach; Student B – Rafael and Pedro are playing volleyball and Letícia is eating ice cream; Student C – I'm writing this letter to tell you about my vacation here in Rio de Janeiro [...] and Pedro is playing beach volleyball with Felipe.

The sample sentences shows that students did not have any problems to deal with the present continuous structure and that they could transfer some basic knowledge from the post to the essay such as the conjunction and used to add the last item mentioned in a sequence. Something that also caught our attention was that Student C changed the first sentence of the composition, instead of keeping the place that was Brazil, he was more specific adding his own contribution: Rio de Janeiro.

On the other hand, we could notice that Students D, E and F faced some difficulties in dealing with the task. Student D and E could not write the sentences using the Present Continuous structure correctly, for instance: [...] *i'm drink coconut milk*. Student D also wrote the pronoun *I* using small letters as we have

written in the previous example. Sometimes they did not even use the structure at all: *Pedro and Jean play beach volleyball; Tamires, read on the beach; Fernanda drink coconut milk.*

Student D also had problem with paragraphing organization. He/she started writing the letter just after the salutation: *Dear igor, I'm writing this letter [...]*. Student F was not consistent regarding the correct use of the structure, sometimes he/she wrote it well and sometimes he did not.

Students D, E and F did not have the same variety of topics and composition practice as students A, B and C had through the *Tumblr* project. As Harmer (2004) suggested, it is important to provide students with different activities to keep them engaged.

It is unquestionable that the students who took part of the project were able to handle the situation better than the ones who did not. According to Chinnery (2014), using the blog engages the students and stimulates their creativity. Furthermore, Morris (2013) suggested that blogging can build their writing confidence, they experience taking risks and develop writing awareness. Therefore, students became well-prepared and could easily adapt in a new task given in the letter composition.

## 5 Conclusion

English became one of the most spoken languages in the world and it is considered a *Lingua Franca*, which allows communication between people with different native languages. The importance of the language resulted in the search for learning it because of the need to know English when traveling, for occupational and academic purposes or school curriculum. Despite the reasons why students want to learn English, when in class, students need to feel motivated. It is part of the teacher's job to arouse students' motivation in the teaching-learning process and one way to do so is using different types of tools to keep students engaged. One crucial tool is technology, more specifically, the Internet.

Amid the many resources we can use in the teaching-learning process through the Internet, we can use blogs. Blogs are websites in which people create

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accounts and post texts, pictures, audio and video files, and you can also have a link to other blogs or internet pages. We could notice that using blogs can be extremely enriching in the learning-process as an opportunity to use English in a “real-life” context.

We held an analysis on a *Tumblr* project and selected three students to be part of it in a class of six students of Basic 2 level. We created a *Tumblr* account called *Let's Write*, and we selected some students to interact with the teacher and answer five different tasks thus, dealing with writing skill. After concluding the *Tumblr* project, all six students wrote a composition and we could compare the compositions of the students who took part of the project, to the ones of the students who did not, to check if the use of blogs would benefit them while writing.

The analysis showed that the students who took part of the *Tumblr* project, noticeably improved from task to task. Even with some inaccuracies, the message they conveyed was clear. The paragraphs were cohesive and coherent, and they became longer throughout the tasks as students felt more comfortable and creative. When the *Tumblr* project was over, the six students were asked to write a composition similar to the blog tasks and clearly the students from the project wrote better composition than the students who were not part of it.

We can conclude that using blogs benefit students not only with extra practice and better preparation, but with a different context to use the language, to develop ideas, communication skills and awareness. It is also a new source to practice English through an authentic tool which engage and arouse students' interest in writing.

We could notice that the project helped students to develop their writing skills, however when assigning the composition the task could have been a bit freer so that students could have also used language of their own, and the composition could have allowed more use of the Simple Present structure. Nevertheless, as *Tumblr* is a modern and appealing website to teenagers, students were excited to use something they enjoy as a tool in the teaching-learning process and felt more motivated to improve their writing skills.

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## **APPENDIX A – Task Instructions**

### **Task 1**

Let's pretend you are at a party with some friends.

Tell me what you and your friends are doing and make comments.

Be creative!

Vocabulary bank: dance, eat, drink, play games, chat, sing etc.

### **Task 2**

Now you are spending a weekend in a hotel with your family.

What are you and your family doing?

Tell me more about it and don't forget to comment!

Vocabulary bank: swim, play games, play sports, eat in a restaurant, read, hang out, go to a field trip, use a sauna etc.

### **Task 3**

You are on a trip. It can be a good one, or a bad one.

Tell me who you are with and describe what you are all doing.

Use your imagination!

Vocabulary bank: go to a field trip, go to restaurant, bars and pubs, go sightseeing, go to museums and art galleries etc.

### **Task 4**

Imagine you are at a farm with your family.

Tell me what you all are doing. Let's write!

Vocabulary bank: walk, relax, ride a horse, play, feed animals, swim, go hiking etc.

### **Task 5**

You are on a camping trip in a forest with your friends.

Are you having a good or bad time?

And tell me what you are doing there.

Vocabulary bank: relax, walk around, play, make a tent, make a campfire, tell stories etc.



## APPENDIX B – Students' posts

### Task 1

#### *Student A*

I'm on a good party with my friends. I'm dancing now, Ana is eating a hamburger, Julia is drinking, and Lucas and Pedro are playing video game. The party is great.

#### *Student B*

It's my birthday, my mother made a chocolate cake. My friends are playing and my family is talking of vacation, my cousins are sitting and are not liking. My father is talking to my grandmother.

#### *Student C*

I am in the wedding. I don't know the people, my mother is eating, I'm looking the people dance and my brother is drinking soda.

### Task 2

#### *Student A*

I'm in a hotel Aguas Quentes with the family. I'm reading in my bedroom, my parents are swimming and my brother is playing games. It's boring!

#### *Student B*

I'm in Guarujá in a hotel with my family. My brother playing soccer, I'm eating fish in the bedroom. My mother and my father in the restaurant.

#### *Student C*

I'm in hotel in Cancun with my mother and my father. I'm swimming, the water is cold. My mother is eating fruit and my father is reading newspaper.

### Task 3

#### *Student A*

I'm in Disney with my cousins Jennifer, Juliana, Carolina and Felipe. We are loving the park. Jennifer wants see Mickey and I want see Minnie. Carolina is talking to Felipe about roller coaster. I'm eating chocolate ice cream.

#### *Student B*

MIETTI, B.P.; MOURA, R.M.; FALEIROS, M. H. V.

I'm traveling in Paris with my friends and boyfriend, we are walking in streets. Paris is beautiful. My boyfriend is calling his mother. I'm looking in the map, Ana is talking to Júlia. Marcella is crying, she don't like cold.

### *Student C*

I'm traveling with my friends. We are in Fernando de Noronha. I'm with Fernando, Eduardo, Jaqueline and Bruna. Fernando is seeing the museum, Eduardo is in the restaurant with Jaqueline eating. Bruna is sleeping in the bedroom and I'm swimming in the beach.

### Task 4

#### *Student A*

I'm in the farm with my brother, sisters, and aunts. My parents are in my house. I like farm because is very beautiful. My two sisters are cooking in the kitchen, and my aunt is feeding animals. In the farm has cows, horses, and ducks. My family likes go to the farm on weekends, it is very fun.

#### *Student B*

My family is in my grandfather's farm. My mother is riding a horse and she likes. My father is walking in the grass, he likes to walk. I want to swim in the lake, but I don't have clothes to swim, I'm waiting the food. My brother don't like the farm, he is boring. My aunt is talking to my grandfather about the animals.

#### *Student C*

I'm in the farm with my family, but I don't like farm, because doesn't have internet. I'm sitting in the living room. My mother doesn't care of internet, she likes the animals and the nature. My father is swimming in the river with my brother all day. My sister is eating corn. I want to go home.

### Task 5

#### *Student A*

We are on a camp trip, my friends Heloisa and Geovanna are here. I like camp trips because I like the nature and the air. Heloisa likes to see the birds and Geovanna likes to relax. Heloisa is making a campfire because is cold. Geovanna is relaxing. We are having fun, and I don't want to go home because I like here.

#### *Student B*

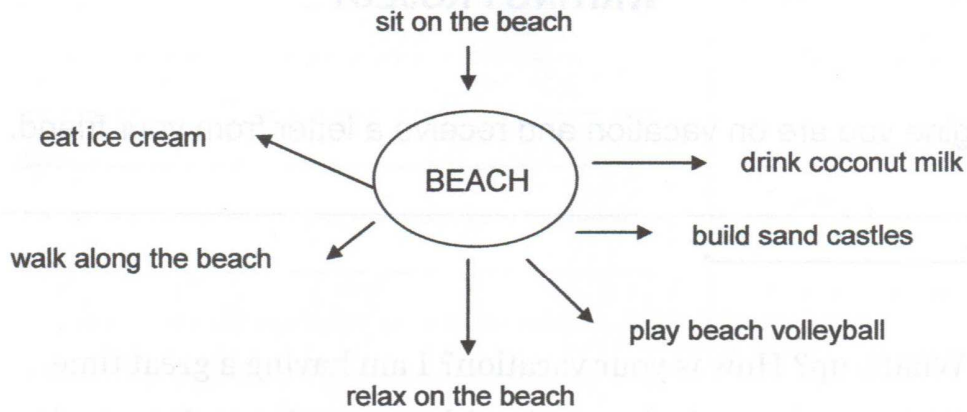
My school friends and I are camping in the forest, we are in 8 people. My friend Debora likes to tell horror stories, but I'm afraid. In the night we like to make a campfire and listen Debora tell the stories. Now, Lucas and Leo are playing volleyball, and the girls are talking about a famous actor. I'm relaxing in the grass, in the night I like to see the stars.



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### *Student C*

I'm on a camp trip with my friends, Fernando, Eduardo, Jaqueline and Bruna. My parents are at home. We are making a tent to sleep at night. Fernando is reading book for school, and Jaqueline is walking around. There's no internet in the camp trip, and I don't like. Bruna is relaxing, and I'm waiting to Fernando finish the book.



Imagine you are on a beach in Brazil. Write a letter to a friend telling him / her what you're doing there.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I'm writing this letter to tell you about my vacation here in Brazil.

I'm with my friends \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. We are all having fun.

Right now, \_\_\_\_\_

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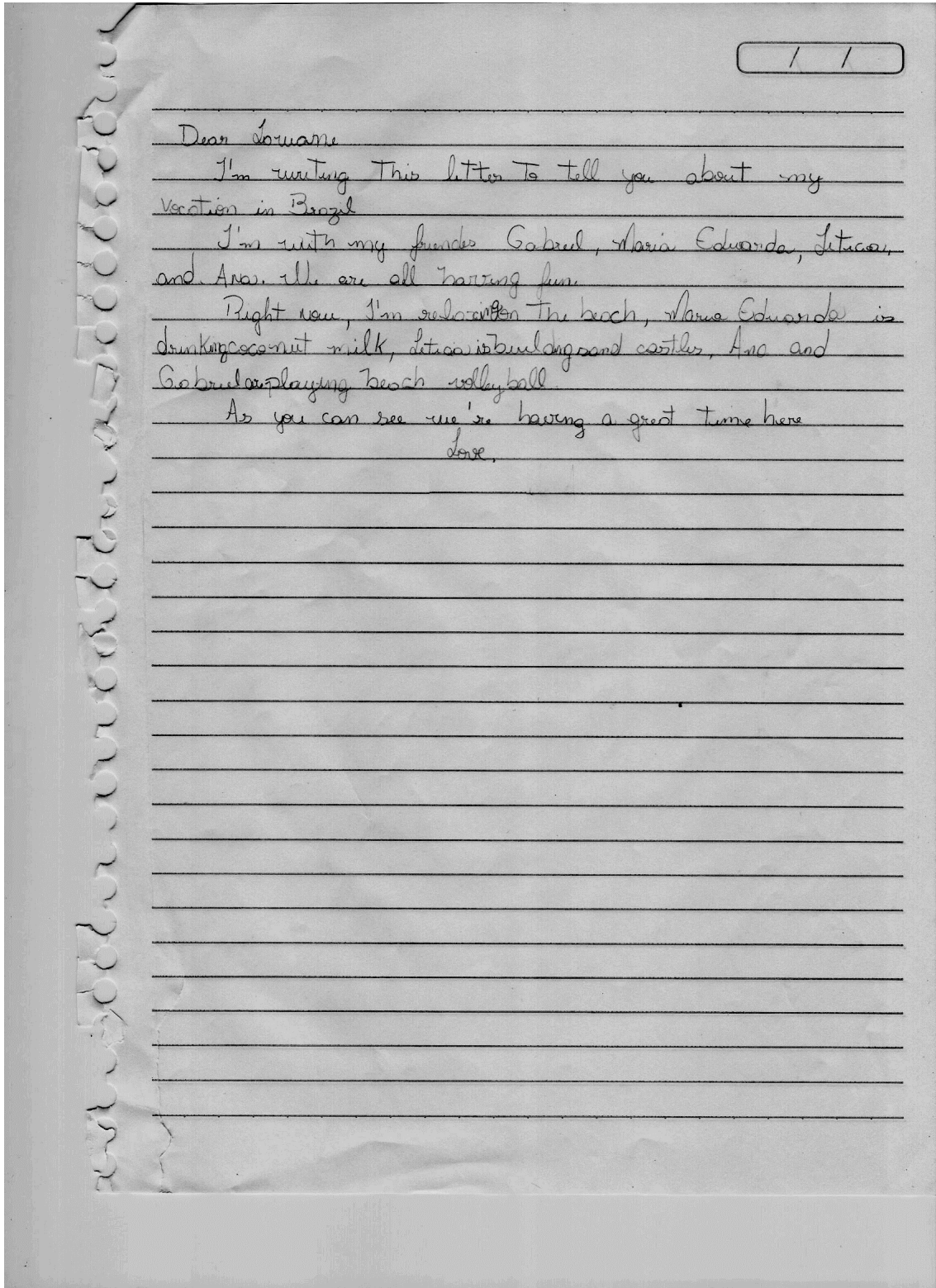
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As you can see we're having a great time here.

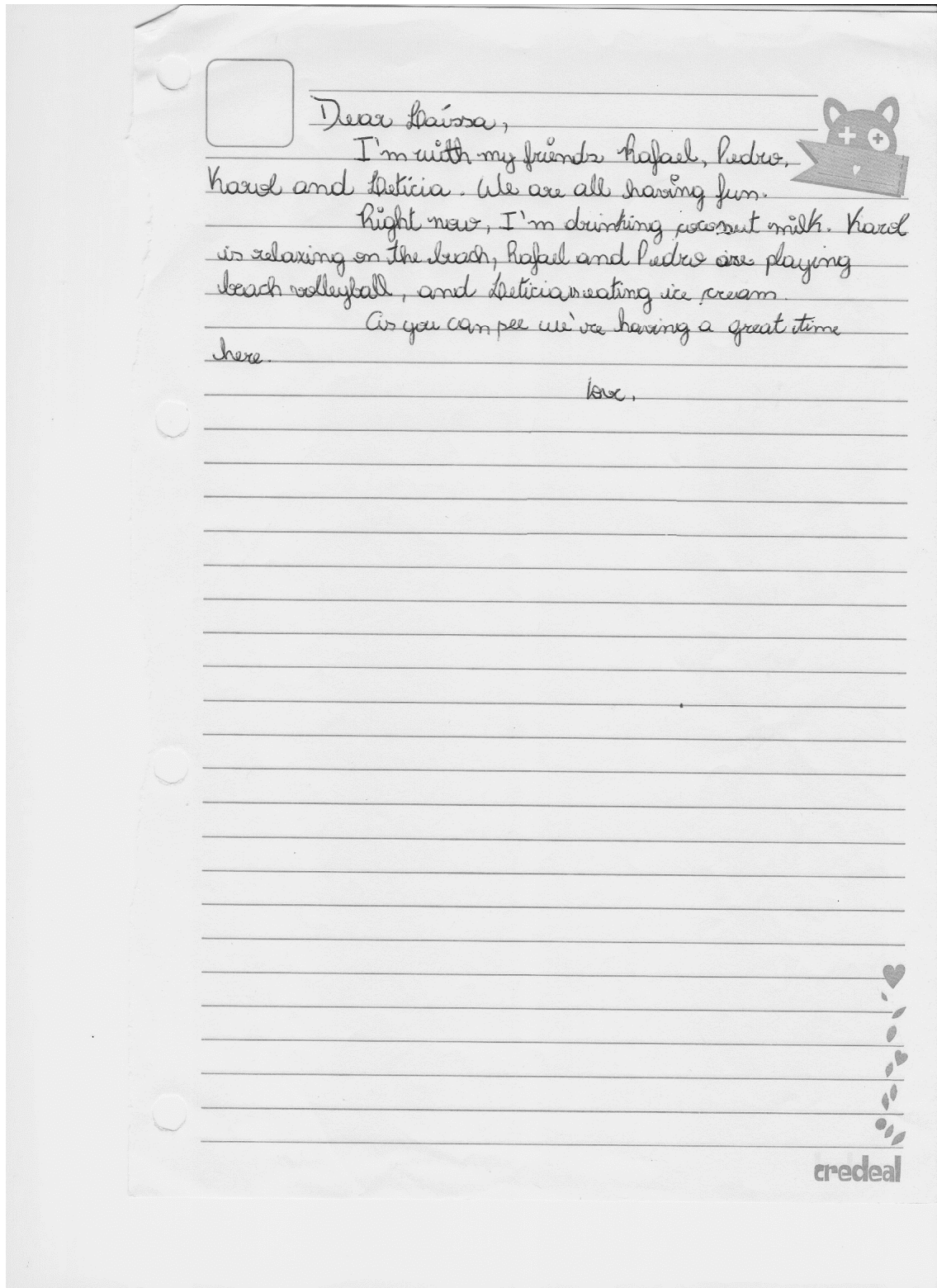
Love,

APPENDIX D - Students' Essay

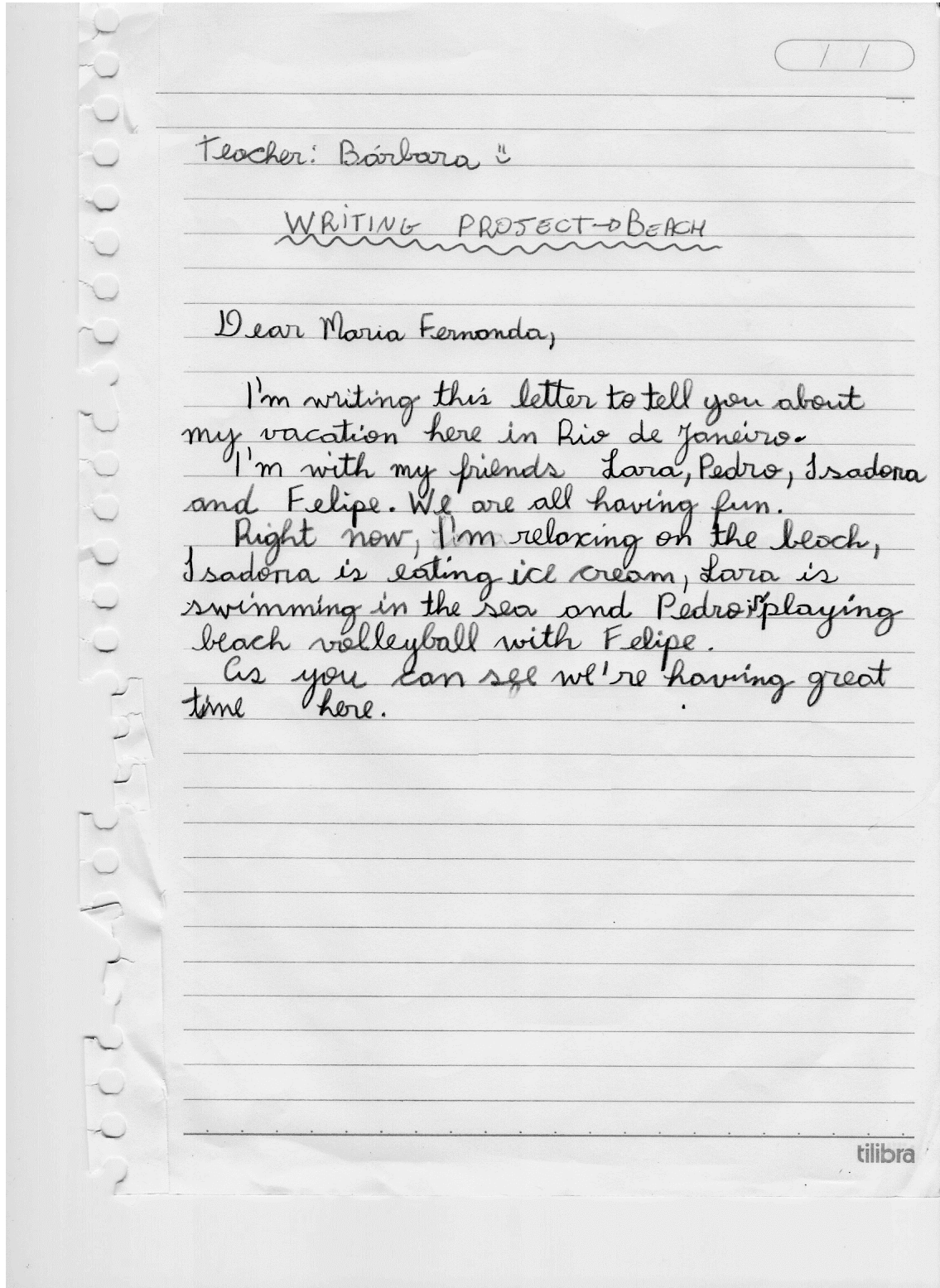
Student A



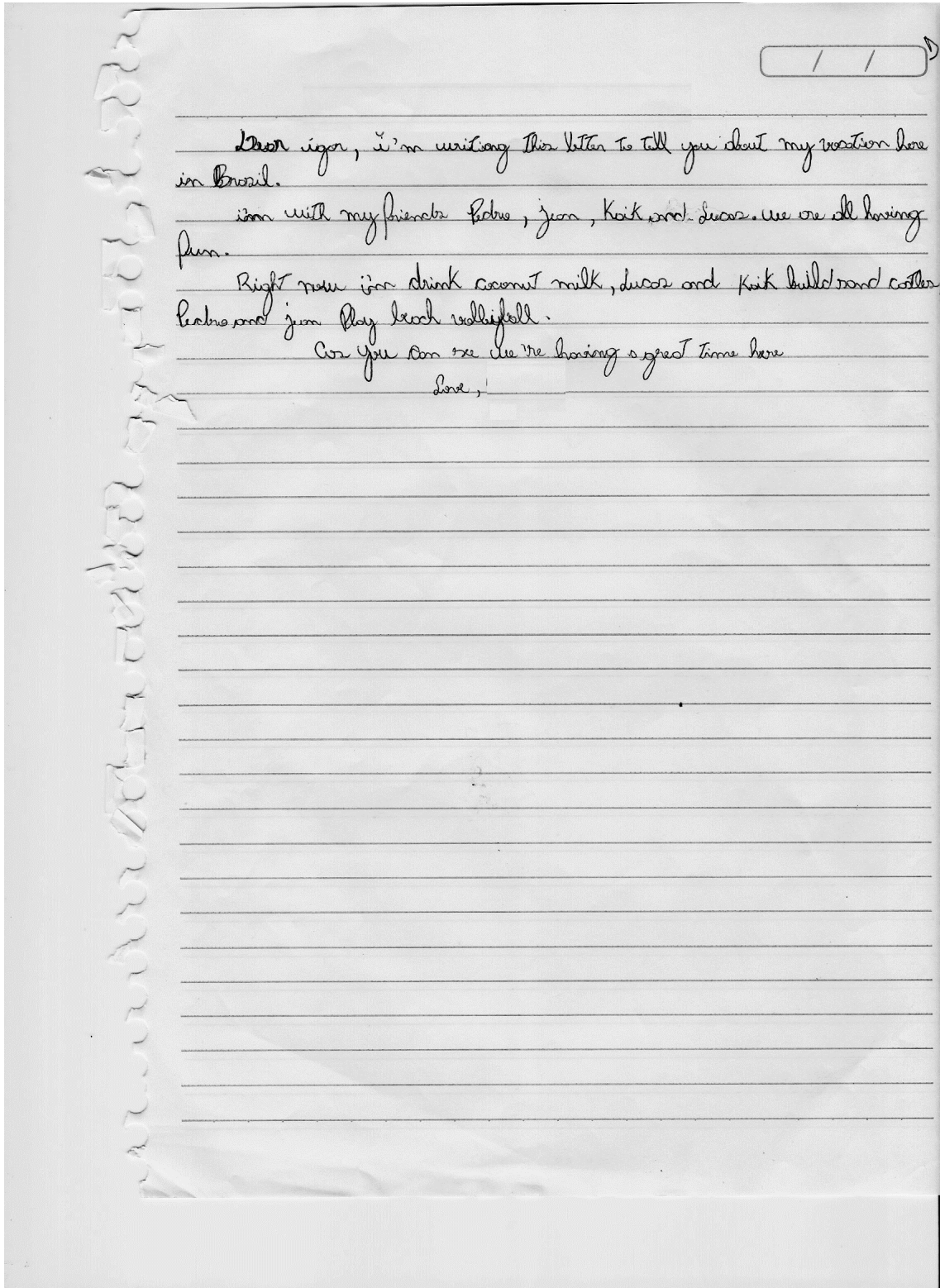
Student B



Student C

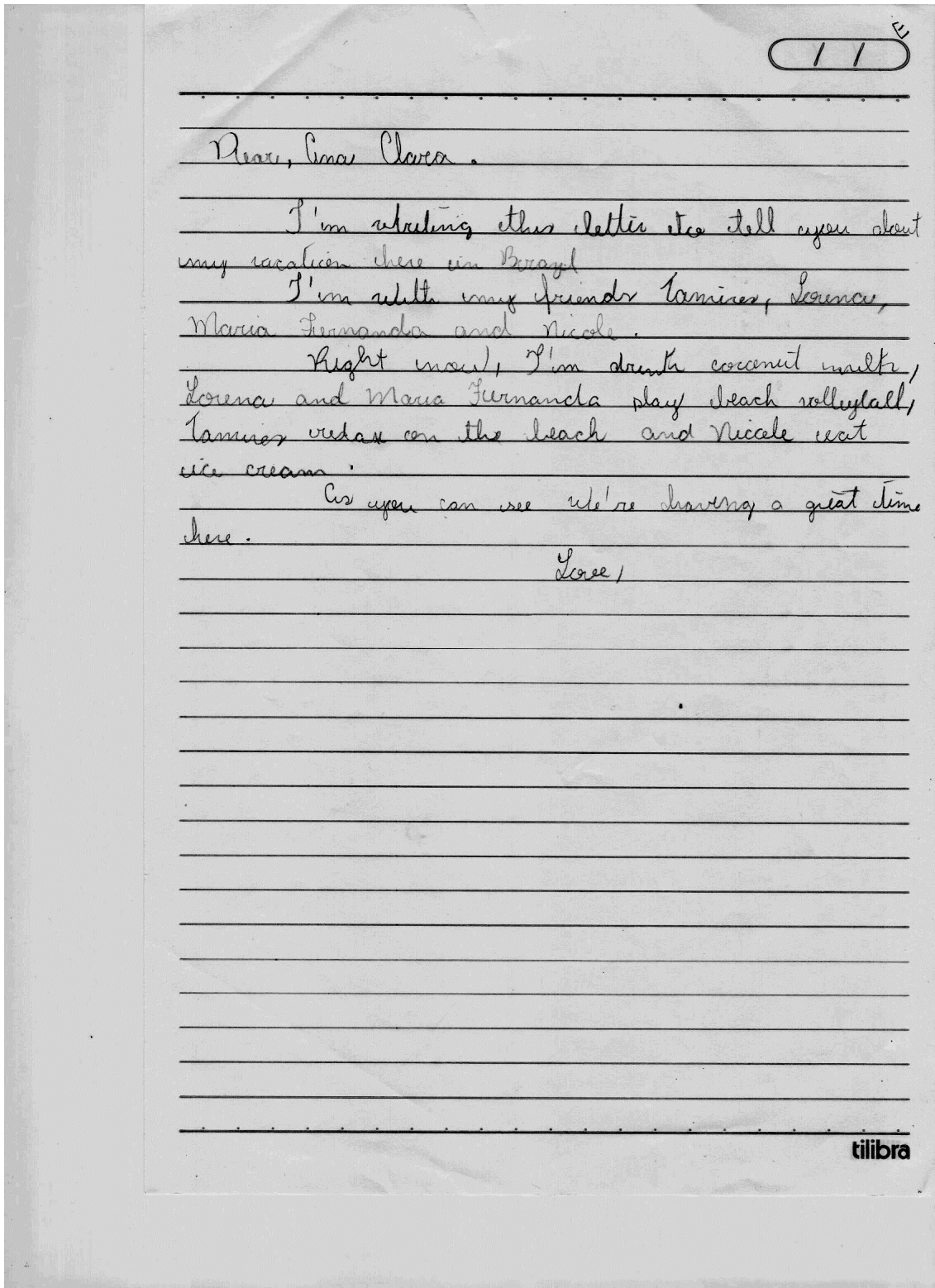


Student D

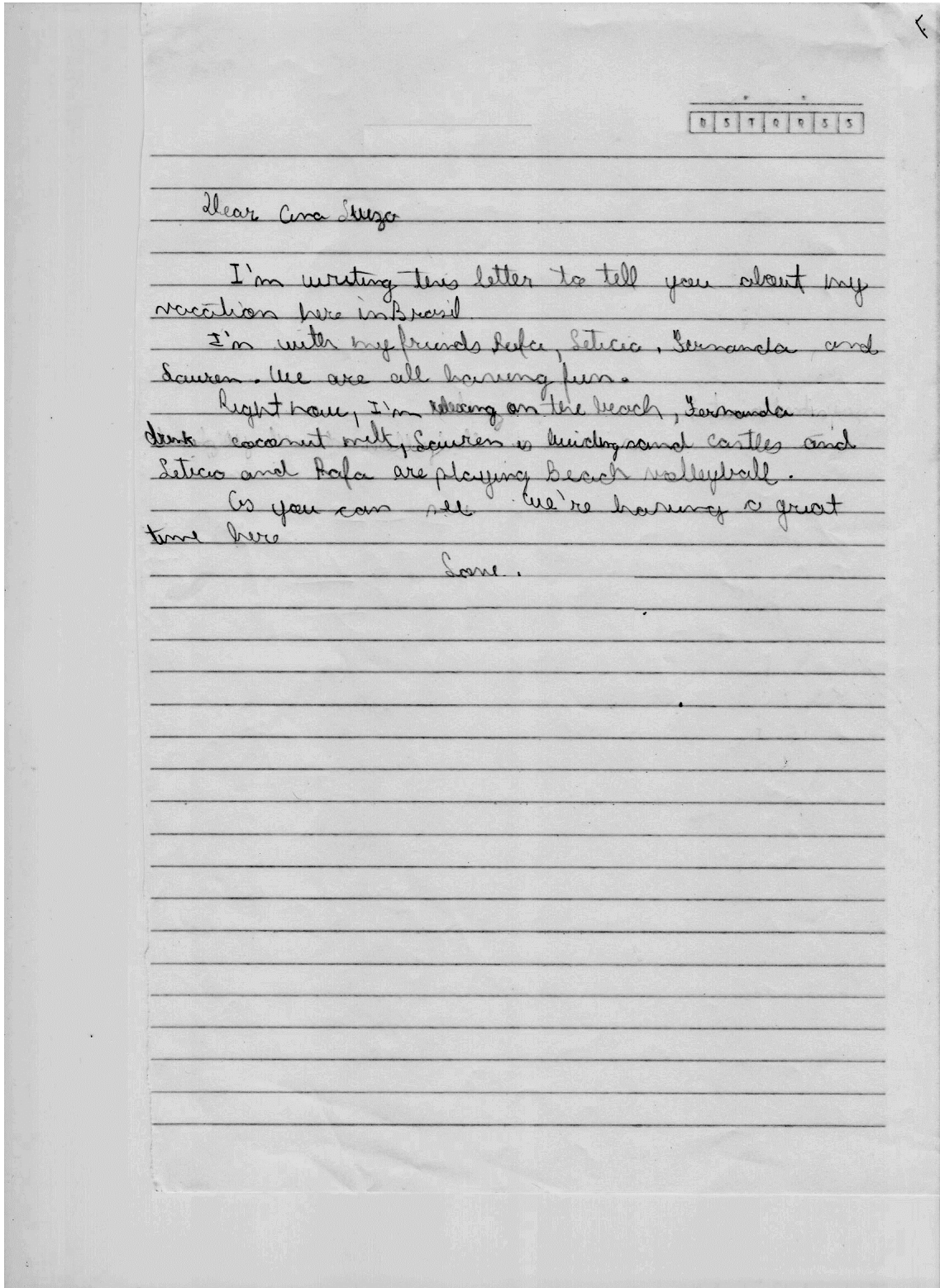




Student E



Student F





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