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PROCEEDS OF WEBHEADS IN ACTION ONLINE CONVERGENCE: VOLUME 2

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

PROCEEDS OF WEBHEADS IN ACTION ONLINE CONVERGENCE: VOLUME 2

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My colleagues and I are grateful to the editor of Teaching English with Technology both for this opportunity to publish a proceeds of our recent Webheads in Action Online Convergence and also for his interest in the project brought about by his conviction that presentations at that convergence made such significant contributions to the field of educational technology brought to bear on language learning that it would be worthwhile for these proceeds to fill not one but two issues of TEWT.

The current issue follows on the recent Vol. 6, Issue 2 (May/June 2006). This Special Issue of July/August completes our representation of this conference through its written proceeds. The completed proceeds in these two volumes comprises written renditions of 13 of the 46 presentations made over the three days of the WiAOC, November 18-20, 2005.

There is a complete record of all 46 presentations linked from the conference schedule at http://schedule.wiaoc.org. Many of these presentations were recorded and the recordings are in many cases available online at links provided on the portal. This is therefore one great advantage of an online conference presented digitally: its digitalized artifacts can be easily and faithfully preserved and proceeds from it generated in formats other than print media, such as the audio and video recordings you find linked from the portal. The full-length text proceeds in this present volume are a follow-on to the artifacts created at the time of each original presentation, and in many cases you will find recordings of some sessions linked at the bottom of its corresponding article in these proceeds.

These articles run a gamut of issues which will likely remain pertinent to the development of educational technology in language learning for some time to come. To start us thinking on the topic, we had in the last issue a 'keynote' article by Joy Egbert on "The end

of CALL and how to achieve it" to put the current state of practice in perspective with its larger context which was once most widely known as CALL (*computer-assisted* language learning) but which has more recently moved through permutations such as TELL (*technology-enhanced*, not just computers, although computers are a component of most modern technologies, but not always *the* salient component) and is now widely subsumed under 'ed tech' or IT (*instructional technology*).

What forms these technologies include has been addressed in several of these articles. In the last issue, Elizabeth Hanson-Smith and Michael Marzio wrote an excellent examination of online video resources for language learning in their article "Video online". In the present issue, Ton Koenraad describes how current technologies are utilized in adapting the Webquest concept and refining it for language learning, in "LanguageQuest design and telecollaboration" and Tom Leverett has produced an article on blogging in an ESL context: "This is your class on Weblogs". In an interesting twist on blogging and how language learning can be optimized through authentic communication, Barbara Dieu, Aaron Campbell, and Rudolf Ammann draw on metaphors from biology to suggest the efficacy of configuring learning networks on the peer-to-peer model, in their article "P2P and learning ecologies in EFL/ESL".

This collection of papers includes several case studies of successful applications of learning networks including many of the elements noted above. In the last issue Anne Fox described a project she was involved in where interaction in an online environment was used to prepare face-to-face interaction in a host country, in "Teaching culture! A multi-national blended course for teachers of adults across Europe". Peggy Patterson and Susana Trabaldo noted many cross-cultural outcomes as well as the target linguistic ones in their article "Negotiating for meaning across borders with CMC". Dafne González and Leticia Esteves presented research to identify discourse patterns likely to produce desired target language outcomes in "Enhancing collaboration through chat in ESP: A conversation analysis" and Christina Jones explained specific techniques for accomplishing these outcomes in "Live interviews in voice chat with intermediate ESL students".

In the present issue we have two more case studies. Ismail Fayed describes a remarkable global collaboration effort designed to identify in various cultures their common denominator altruism through the "good deeds" of participants, in "Using online facilitation to encourage students' participation in collaborative projects online". Rubena St. Louis elaborates on technology-based techniques she uses to develop autonomy in students, in "Student autonomy and the Internet".

Finally, there are two articles in the present issue focusing on communities of practice and how they work in teacher professional development. Both cite the example of Webheads in Action (http://webheads.info), the CoP which organized the conference which in turn produced these proceeds. In this vein, Moira Hunter reflects generally on the rationale behind the efficacy of CoPs in teacher professional development, in "Are you on the PD Cybertrain or still hesitating?" Teresa Almeida d'Eca on the other hand documents how participation in Webhheads in Action has impacted her in particular, and extrapolates to how others might benefit from participation in such online communities, in "Going global with the Webheads in Action".

We hope you enjoy these articles and invite you to visit http://schedule.wiaoc.org to in effect 'replay' the conference (or as we called it, convergence, to signify how it brought together several events taking place at the time). We also invite you to 'stay tuned' to http://wiaoc.org for news of the next one slated for May 2007. We hope to meet you then and that the present proceeds stimulates your contribution as a presenter and/or online participant at this free and open source online event.

ARTICLE

P2P AND LEARNING ECOLOGIES IN EFL/ESL

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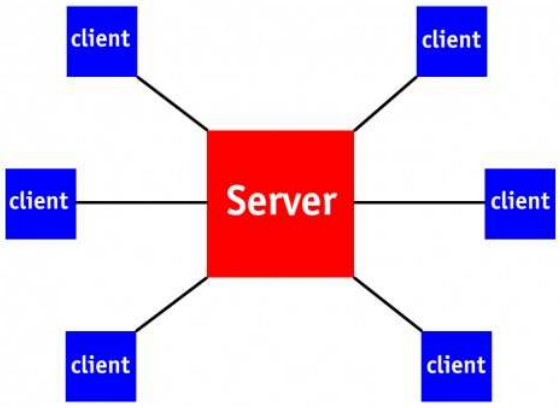
Abstract

This article briefly introduces the peer-to-peer (P2P) concept and applies it to an educational context. It argues that a pedagogical approach based on P2P can support learning ecologies that both complement and transcend conventional classroom structures and practices, ultimately benefiting learners. The authors discuss both the pedagogical and technological prerequisites for peer-centered learning to occur, suggest possible tools, and provide examples of EFL/ESL projects. Personal Web-publishing in language learning contexts is described as an attempt to bridge the gap between the learners in the classroom and potential conversation partners on the Internet at large, resulting in a network of support and encouragement.

The Background of the P2P Concept

The quality of human interaction is influenced strongly by the social structure in which that interaction occurs. We can gain insight into this relationship by examining the two extremes of network architecture. How the server is configured largely determines how its clients interact. On the one hand is the structured hierarchy of the client/server model, where communication and transaction between any two nodes on the network are mediated through a central server.

On the other hand is the 'peer-to-peer' model (P2P), in which each node in the network functions as both client and server simultaneously, resulting in a decentralized, fluid system of "equipotent members" (Bauwens, 2005). Interaction in P2P networks, then, obeys the dynamics of cooperative participation, where relationships arise organically to meet mutual need and last only as long as that need remains. As Bauwens explains, P2P is not anti-hierarchical or anti-authority, but it mediates against *fixed*-hierarchies and authoritarianism. The hierarchy that arises in P2P is natural and flexible, and is based on quality of contribution and communal consensus. Both models can and do co-exist.



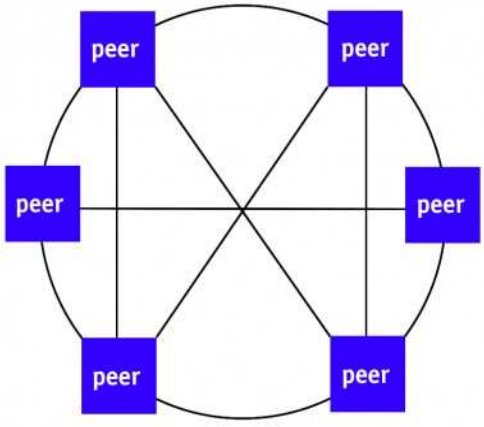


Figure 1. Structured Hierarchy mode: http://dekita.org/gallery/wiaoc/slides/sc1.png and Distributed Peer to Peer mode: http://dekita.org/gallery/thumbs/141-peertwopeer2.png

Historically, the structure of our educational systems has been overwhelmingly of the client/server type, reflecting an industrial capitalist model of production. A rigid administrative and instructional hierarchy (the server) was set to deliver standardized knowledge to its students (clients) on a mass scale to meet the demands of society at large. Opportunities for P2P forms of interaction have been limited. The Internet, however, presents us with unique opportunities to practice P2P in more formal educational settings.

To better understand how a peer-centered approach can benefit language learners, it is helpful to examine more closely the teacher-student dynamics of the traditional model. In many institutions, classes are usually large, while time to implement the syllabus is limited, resulting in minimal communication between teachers and students on subjects other than those prescribed by the syllabus. Interaction in the target language generally occurs through classroom simulations, while listening and reading material is selected and presented by the teacher. Very little, if any, interaction occurs with people outside this closed environment. Therefore, students exposed to the target language through contacts at home or work, or those who can afford to travel abroad, are miles ahead of those who have to rely solely on the classroom.

When it comes to implementing technology in such institutions, the pedagogical approach often does not change. Language learning software is purchased, integrated into the curriculum, and delivered to students. Learning management systems are designed to replicate the conventional top-down, controlled transmission of the traditional classroom mode, where learners perform simulated, structured activities in a passive/receptive mode. The use of the Internet in such a model results in materials that are downloaded to complement the textbook or other classroom activities. Real-life participation in authentic modes of communication is rarely attempted, and therefore the communicative and expressive potential of the Web is diminished.

Our world – physical and virtual – is not homogeneous, structured, and standardized; but rather it is complex, diverse, heterogeneous, fluid, and unpredictable. Learners have varying abilities, different skills, and unique personal goals, and yet in the traditional

classroom, they are rarely encouraged to show their talents, create their own content, take control over their own learning, and reflect on the process to gain further insight. Deep learning occurs when they put their knowledge and skills into action, when they utilize their creativity and inventiveness, and when they learn from one another through cooperation, striving to gain new insight, knowledge, and skills. Instead of forcing standardized knowledge upon learners in a strict curriculum, how can we guide our students to acquire what they need so they can express their thoughts, share them with others, and negotiate meaning in self-directed ways? How do we move from dependence towards greater independence and inter-dependence? How do we adopt a more process-oriented approach and interact in a more open and decentralized fashion which allows for self-directed participation, informal communication, inter-cultural and inter-linguistic development? Although there are no simple answers available, we can gain insight into possible solutions by examining the concept of learning ecologies.

Learning Ecologies

In the biological world, the field of ecology concerns itself with the study of the patterns of interrelationships between organisms and the environment in which they live. Ecology is a holistic science, and one of its fundamental principles is that of interconnectedness in complexity. No one given organism or environmental factor can ever be isolated and treated as if existing apart from the ecological system, since what happens to that organism affects the ecosystem, and vice versa. Relationships in an ecology are never fixed, but rather self organizing and fluid, shifting in response to ever changing environmental factors. A healthy ecosystem is one in which balance is maintained in the face of these changes. Maximum adaptability and flexibility are keys to its survival and ability to thrive. The structure of a biological ecosystem is not unlike that of the P2P structure of network architecture as described above, which hinges upon the free cooperation of unique participants in a fluid network. What arises then, in a P2P model of online interaction, is an Internet-based ecosystem, which in an educational context, results in learning following an ecological model.

In his talk “Learning, Working & Playing in the Digital Age," John Seely Brown (2000) offers some guidance on how to best learn in an environment supported by technology. Instead of isolating learners in artificial and rigidly structured courses in which the teacher and selected print media are the main source of knowledge, we should guide our learners towards more fluid and dynamic “learning ecologies” in which “navigation,

experiential learning and judgment all come into play *in situ*," where they can learn through discovery and experimentation, creating and sharing their own content. George Siemens (2005) adds that in these environments "learners can forage for knowledge, information and derive meaning … acquiring and exploring areas based on self-selected objectives", while Martin Terre Blanche (2005) suggests "transitional ecologies that ease learners' entry into the 'real world', ecologies where seasoned practitioners work and learn." Learning ecologies are "a collection of overlapping communities of interest, cross pollinating with each other, constantly evolving, and largely self organizing." (Siemens 2003)

The advent of the Internet with its open networks of cooperating users and an increasing number of tools and platforms has brought new opportunities for educators to guide learners into such learning ecologies and put them in touch with other speakers of English, so as to develop their communicative competence through authentic interaction.

In order to decide which tools to use and how to best use them, we should first examine where we stand between the extremes of hierarchical structure of traditional institutions and the fluid, *ad-hoc* learning ecologies. We should then look for ways to bring peer-centered approaches and tools into the curriculum to complement the learning goals. When adopting a tool, we should consider the larger purpose it should serve: how its nature can best support the learners' diverse needs. Some learners need more guidance, while others will need to be encouraged to leave their comfort zones and experience the open spaces before them.

Pedagogy

In EFL/ESL, a peer-centered approach guides learners in a situation where they can use and improve their language skills in self-directed ways while conversing with peers. It gives them access to a distributed network and familiarizes them with the available tools. It also requires teachers to provide assistance: technical, educational and moral.

What are the building blocks of such an interactive process? Brian Alger (2002) mentions people, places, and things as three primary sources of design for learning and puts narrative, interactivity, and mobility at the core of the learning process.

Narrative offers students the opportunity to record their observations, talk about themselves, their interests, and events that that have marked their lives, and reflect on how this experience has changed them. Storytelling is creative self-discovery. It develops awareness and encourages them to voice their experience and ideas. It provides a realistic context for communication and interaction, facilitates language practice, develops fluency,

and stimulates imagination. Adding voice, photos, and video to the text is a powerful and creative way to illustrate these personal stories and bring them to life.

Language is social and a meaning-making activity. It is through language that we reflect our thoughts, identities and selves. In the dialogical exchange with others and with ourselves we interpret, gain insights, and modify our perspectives constructing meaning and understanding, in different contexts, at different times. Our culture and background (past-me), our project and perspectives (present - I), and the projection of ourselves (future-you) come into play when we connect to people, places and things and act in the world of which we are a part. And it is through this interaction, unfolding and intertwining of processes together with the friction that results from it, that we become more aware of our ambiguities and question our assumptions while learning a foreign language experientially.

If language learning happens in different contexts, with different people at different times, educators should not confine it to the classroom alone. The world outside does not speak the language of the classroom so we must venture outside its walls. Guiding learners into uncharted territory (learning situations over which neither teachers nor students have complete control) gives them exposure. Letting them interact with whoever they choose according to their interests and needs will allow them to own the words though which they express their identity and voice their thoughts, thus relating the language to their individual selves.

Narrative, interaction and mobility will help learners "develop ecological and interpersonal perceptions in the language, on the basis of which they can construct trans-lingual and trans-cultural selves" (van Lier, 2004).

As for the role of the teacher, Kramsch says (1993, p. 31), "a dialogic pedagogy is unlike traditional pedagogy – it sets new goals for teachers – poetic, psychological, political goals that…do not constitute any easy to follow method…such a pedagogy should be better described, not as a blueprint for how to teach foreign languages but as another way of being a language teacher."

Tools

A range of new different web-publishing and social networking tools nowadays allows people to improve the quality of their learning experiences and help them become more self-directed learners. Among these tools are weblogs (also known simply as 'blogs'), which due to their ease of use and low barrier to participation have made it possible for individuals not only to voice their points of view, keep a record of their learning process, and share their

personal reflections with others, but also to engage in conversation with peers and tutors worldwide on topics of mutual interest. While broadening their perspectives and negotiating new meanings, learners also monitor their individual performance and verbalize their intentions with increasingly greater fluency. Besides supporting multiple modes of interaction (text, audio, photos, video), these tools enable a truly peer-centered form of communication to arise.

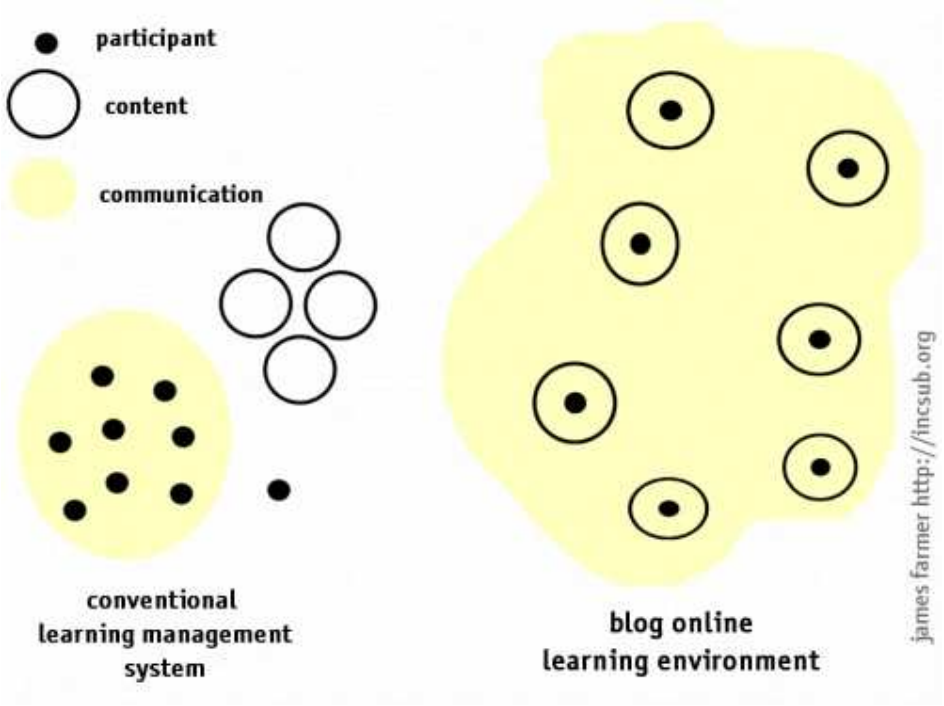


Figure 2. Conventional LMSs and blogging systems (after Farmer, 2005, retrieved from http://dekita.org/gallery/wiaoc/slides/blogenvironment.png).

There are a number of different weblogging services and tools available (see the comparative chart at http://writing.berkeley.edu/tesl-ej/ej35/m1.html). Free hosted services such Blogger and Wordpress (see list of URL's at end of article) count among the most widely used and least challenging to novice users. Experienced users who are familiar with Web technology might prefer a self-hosted application that gives them more control over their weblog.

In addition to weblogs, social networking sites can help foster interaction and communication between students. Sites such as 43 Things, 43 Places, and Flickr allow learners to move beyond their classroom, express their interests and share their experiences while connecting with people from around the world. The use of such tools complements the

blogging process nicely, helping students to build personal contacts and construct a personal learning network through social networking features like profiles and tagging.

Tagging is an open-ended labeling process (see Folksonomy at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folksonomy) which enables users to categorize content through freely chosen labels (tags). For example, 43 Things brings people together who share the same goals, which are represented in various ways: in tag clouds that correlate a tag's fonts size to its popularity (the more popular the bigger), that can be sorted alphabetically, represented in proximity to related tags, etc.

Who does not draw a list of resolutions hoping to achieve them in the short, mid or long run? Students choose goals from the home page list or add their own. They can then describe or justify goals to be accomplished and give advice to others about the ones they have attained while making use of tags to find and skim the goals and profiles of other people, engaging them in conversation using the available commenting features. Making public one's passions, goals, and interests, and discussing them with other people, is much more engaging than learning from a disembodied character in a language textbook.

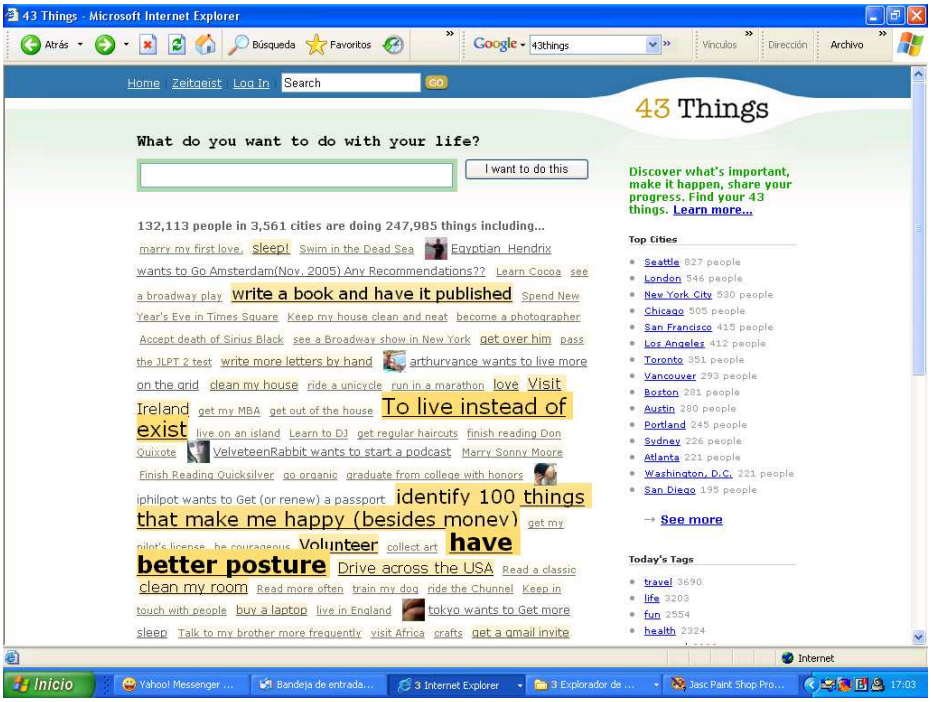


Figure 3. Front page of 43 Things showing most popular tags for what you want to do with your life. From http://dekita.org/gallery/wiaoc/slides/43thingsb.png

Similarly, at 43 Places, students can describe their hometowns, talk about places they have visited, and share the destinations they would like to visit in the future. They can also provide travel recommendations and encourage people to explore new places. Through its system of tags and photos, they can also find the most popular spots other people have visited, ask locals for suggestions, or interact with people who want to go to the same places that they do. In this way, students can broaden their horizons by visiting places around the world and interacting with people from different cultures.

Digital cameras and mobile phones have broadened the reach of digital photography. Through photography, we tell stories and talk about previous experiences, many of them personally meaningful. In the process of sharing, we also discover different perspectives, alternative views of the world, unique glimpses of a culture, and insights into humanity through everyday scenes.

Flickr is a social networking site based on photo sharing. Its users post photos to a "photostream" that displays these photos, blog-fashion, in reverse chronological order. Every photo receives its own archival page with a blog-style comment form, and comments can be inscribed below the images and right into the images themselves using "notes". In addition, Flickr offers very sophisticated tools for sorting and classifying photos, including sets and tags.

Flickr can be used with learners of any level who can start by filling information about themselves in the profile section. Then they search for others who share the same interests by clicking on the tags of their choice. After viewing the photos, they can add contacts. Three levels of privacy are offered: contacts, friends and family.

Flickr users can recognize each other as "contacts" and will have their contacts' most recent photo uploads referenced as "thumbnails" on their personal homepage whenever they log in to the site. Each of these photos, of course, is an invitation to comment, an activity Flickr users avidly engage in. The site's conversational nature is further underscored by the Group feature, the ability of every user to start a group about any topic, and have fellow users either contribute photos to a common group pool or discuss the group's topic on a bulletin board.

Flickr is a good example of a visually rich, participatory, and socially engaging environment that can be successfully used in a language learning context. Reading the comments other people have made helps learners put together a list of expressions they can later adapt and replicate. For low level or intermediate level learners, tagging their own photos with appropriate key words, adding titles, notes, and short descriptions are the first

steps to starting conversations in writing (http://www.flickr.com/photos/17345667@N00/116329924/). A photo or set of images can serve further as an anchor for personal narratives and story telling or be associated to quotations or poems learners look for on the net and later discuss.

One possible educational use of Flickr is illustrated in a short project on the Dekita headers (http://dekita.org/weblog/rotating-headers) which involved two classes of EFL students from Brazil and Japan being introduced to the photographs of Josef Stuefer (http://www.flickr.com/photos/josefstuefer/), an Italian photographer who publishes his work on Flickr under the Creative Commons License (http://creativecommons.org/). The students chose the photos that should be used for Dekita's header graphics, justified their choices and participated in a conversation with the photographer and Dekita's designer (http://www.flickr.com/groups/dekita/discuss/49447/).

Figure 4. Example Dekita headers justification comment. Retrieved from: http://dekita.org/gallery/thumbs/140-impressions.png.

This voluntary, largely unplanned, experiential activity brought together people who shared a common interest. It arose organically and involved participants in an authentic exchange rather than a classroom simulation.

When participating in social networking sites such as 43 Things, 43 Places, and Flickr, students gain access to the English language as it is actually being used around the

world. Instead of focusing on the language in the abstract, learners become aware of the subtleties of the "living language", of existing discourses and situational needs. As van Lier mentions (2000, p. 246), "from an ecological perspective, the learner is immersed in an environment full of potential meanings". Just as organisms in a biological ecology build relationships with other organisms, students build conversational relationships with other people, thus increasing their exposure to authentic uses of the language.

Cultivating open ecologies

Although the Internet holds great potential for connecting learners with conversational partners in an expressive, self-directed way, we should be aware that by working on the Internet and using its latest tools, we do not necessarily leave behind conventional pedagogy or traditional practices. As weblogs and other tools are slowly finding their way into language courses, teachers need to understand the advantages that peer-oriented uses of the technology can offer, so as not to hamper personal expression, self-directed learning, and the movement toward greater learner autonomy.

Ideally, weblogs give learners a place on the Web to call their own, allowing them to post their links and publish their thoughts, opinions, and feelings to a worldwide audience, thus permitting a wide range of authentic communicative interaction to occur. Yet learner blogs can be easily mishandled, as shut off from the world at large as is the conventional classroom. This usually happens when teachers fail to understand the kind of open ecologies weblogs thrive on and instead treat the medium as a vehicle for online homework submission.

Educators who ask their students to blog might wish to consider questions such as these: Do the posts originate from interests and passions intrinsic to each student, or are they responses to blanket assignments such as, "This week, please write a letter or story following the model we studied in class?" Is reading other blogs, linking, and the building of social networks encouraged? Can outsiders who do not know what happened in class read the weblog, participate, and feel included in the conversation?

In an excellent post on the basics of blogging, Anne Davis (2005) stresses that students need to learn by exploring what others have written, make connections, and strive for writing that matters, and she poses questions that will make a reader think and want to comment:

> Some of our best classroom discussions emerge from comments. We share together. We talk about

> ones that make us soar, ones that make us pause and rethink and we just enjoy sharing those delightful morsels of learning that occur. You can construct lessons around them. You get a chance to foster higher level thinking on the blogs. They read a comment. Then they may read a comment that comments on the comment. They get lots of short quick practices with writing that is directed to them and therein it is highly relevant. Then they have to construct a combined meaning that comes about from thinking about what has been written to them in response to what they wrote. It's such a good way to begin the process of teaching reflective thinking. (February 2, 2006)

In ascribing such a crucial role to comments, Davis implicitly highlights the central importance of learning ecologies. Educators should help language learners become part of such ecologies by taking a peer-centered approach when deciding how to structure learning activities. Once learners develop online relationships with people outside the classroom and become more proficient with the tools that enable them to do so, they are better positioned to attend to their own learning needs beyond the physical and temporal confines of the institution.

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URLs of tools cited

- 43 Places - http://43places.com
- 43 Things - http://43things.com
- Blogger - http://www.blogger.com
- Flickr – http://www.flickr.com
- Wordpress - http://www.wordpress.com

Editor's notes

This presentation was made as a regular session at the Webheads in Action Online Convergence on November 19, 2005. The session took place in the Alado Webheads presentation room. Recordings were made and can be heard at http://www.digibridge.net/webheads/beeDekita1119.htm. The presentation transcripts and illustrating slides are located here:

- Aaron Campbell's - http://dekita.org/articles/the-p2p-concept
- Barbara Dieu's - http://dekita.org/articles/p2p-eflesl-pedagogy-and-technology
- Rudolf Amman's - http://dekita.org/articles/delicious-and-p2p-efl-esl-x

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THE INTERNET AND ESP

HELPING STUDENTS BECOME AUTONOMOUS LEARNERS: CAN TECHNOLOGY HELP?

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Abstract

One of the most important challenges facing foreign language teachers is that of making students self sufficient, autonomous learners who can manage their own learning and survive outside the sheltered environment of the classroom. Student perception of needs, knowledge of individual learning styles, ability to set goals, monitor the learning process, and carry out self-evaluation are all needed for independent learning. Technology can deliver the pedagogical support students need. This paper discusses autonomy, student empowerment, and the use of learning styles and strategies in language learning and will show how these can be implemented through a classroom methodology which makes use of tools available through the WWW.

Introduction

Teaching reading skills to EFL undergraduate students in an English for Science and Technology course at Simón Bolívar University in Caracas has always been a challenge, especially as many of the students there have a low proficiency level in English. Their inability to understand texts of a scientific and technological nature written for native speakers often leads to feelings of inadequacy and frustration, which are sometimes reflected in a lack of motivation and a hesitation to take risks. There is a need to make students aware of the hidden potential within each and to find ways in which this can be exploited. When students become more involved in their own learning, taking an active part in making decisions, they might feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the process, and learning might be more meaningful, resulting in better classroom performance. Therefore, teachers need to help students find and develop the skills which will allow them to manage their own learning and survive outside the sheltered environment of the classroom, when the teacher is no longer there for support.

Research done in the area of second language acquisition suggests how this might be achieved. Work in language learning in the last half of the century, has brought us closer to understanding the complex nature of this process and of the learner. Research in areas such as multiple intelligences, individual learning styles and learning strategies (Reid, 1998; Cohen, 1998, O'Malley and Chamot, 1990), motivation (Dörnyei, 2001) and cognition (Schmidt, 1990; Gass, Svetics & Lemelin, 2003) have given us insights into the ways in which different factors influence learners and the way they learn. Added to this is the move toward learner-centred rather than teacher-centred classrooms (Nunan, 1999), giving students

the opportunity to become active participants in the learning process, making decisions with regard to the learning objectives and materials to be used, and helping decide the evaluation process, thus moving toward becoming independent and autonomous learners.

Autonomy and second language learning

But what does this "autonomy" and "independence" imply and how can it be achieved? Holec (1981) defined autonomy as "… the ability to take charge of one's learning…" while Little (1991) sees it as the learner's psychological relation to the content and process of learning, his or her capacity for critical reflection, detachment, decision making, and independent action. Breen & Mann (1997) add that autonomous learners must want to learn and develop a metacognitive capacity that allows them to handle change, negotiate with others, and make strategic use of the learning environment. This entails assessing wants, needs, and interests and choosing the best way to obtain these. This can best be attained in an environment in which teachers help students to discover and use effective learning strategies.

However, this about-face in paradigm, from teacher-dependent to teacher-independent is sometimes difficult for students who have been immersed in an educational system which has been predominately controlled by the teacher, who must now give up control and help these students become independent, self sufficient, individuals. Autonomous learning, however, does not mean that the teacher's input and support is not needed (Little, 1991). On the contrary, the teacher's role may change, becoming more of a facilitator than an expert, or "holder" of knowledge who transfers information to students, and it is precisely through classroom interaction that teachers can help them become conscious of and learn to make use of, this independence. Dam (2000) speaks of autonomy in terms of creating an atmosphere conducive to learning within the confines of the educational system where learners are given the possibility to be consciously involved in their own learning. Nunan (1997) mentions achieving "degrees of autonomy" which range from making students aware of the learning goals and materials, to making links between the content of classroom learning and the outside world.

Autonomous learners can be characterised as:

- willing and have the capacity to control or supervise learning
- knowing their own learning style and strategies
- motivated to learn
- good guessers
- choosing materials, methods and tasks

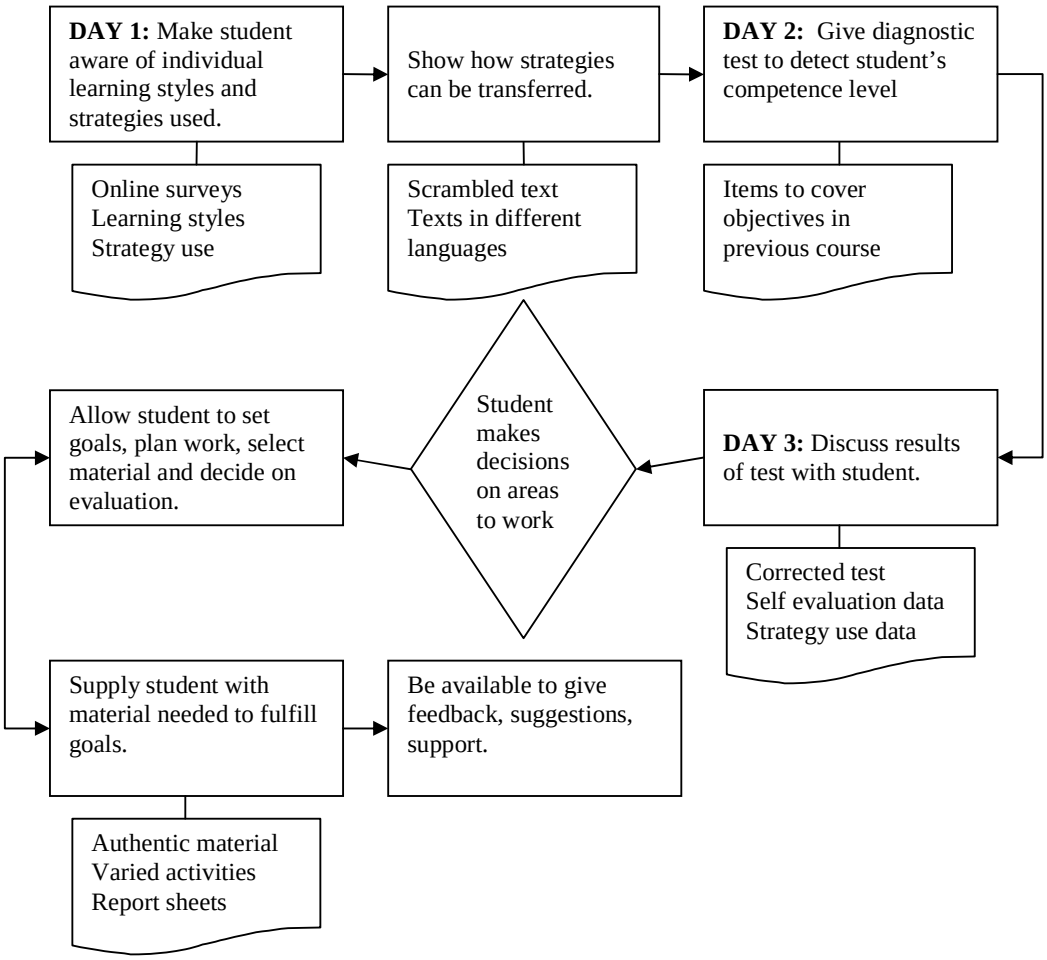
• exercising choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen task
• selecting the criteria for evaluation
• taking an active approach to the task
• making and rejecting hypotheses
• paying attention to both form and content
• willing to take risks (adapted from Dam, 1990, Wenden, 1998).

Making students aware of these strategies, as well as incorporating their use in activities done throughout the term, is perhaps the first step toward learner autonomy. This might be achieved through learner training or learner development (Sinclair, 1996), where students learn about the factors which affect their learning, discover the strategies needed to become more effective learners, and in so doing take more responsibility for this process (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). However, knowing about strategies is not enough, for students should know when, why, and how these should be used in order to select the most appropriate according to their individual needs. The route to student autonomy can therefore be initiated in the classroom by incorporating Nunan's (1997) degrees of autonomy with a raised consciousness of strategy use (Oxford, 1990, 2002).

Context

The class and the procedure described here are part of a compulsory reading program for first year engineering students where the activities are geared toward reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. However, they can be adapted for any four-skill course, i.e. the teaching of reading, writing, listening and oral production.

Flow chart for implementing student autonomy in the classroom



Day 1

Objective: Make students aware of:

- their different learning styles
- strategies that they use daily
- reflect on the way they learn

Time: 90 minutes

Materials:

- Find someone who
- Learning style inventory
- Learning strategy inventory
- Scrambled text or
- Texts in different languages

Location:

Computer lab or

Traditional classroom

Complementary skills

Basic computer skills

If the first class is done in the computer lab, students must open an e-mail account e.g. Yahoo), join the class group (e.g., a Yahoo! Group), and learn to create folders.

- After preliminary introductions are made, students are given the "Find Someone Who" handout and are asked to find classmates who can answer the questions on their sheet (http://slrubena.com/alg/Find_someone_who.pdf). The time allotted for this activity will depend on the number of students in class. This activity is used not only for students to get to know each other, but to introduce the topic of different kinds of intelligences and learning styles.
- Students are then asked to share the information they have collected. This may be initiated by the teacher, who as a participant in the activity, can volunteer information or can ask for volunteers from the class to begin. A volunteer can note the different ways in which an individual learns.
- A discussion is then started on the unique characteristics of individuals, the different ways in which each learns and the relationship between different subject matters and learning. For example, questions such as the following can be used to start a discussion:
    1. Do students study math in the same way they do English, or a social science subject?
    2. Is learning to ride a bike or drive a car different from learning an academic subject?
- The "Learning styles" inventory (http://slrubena.com/alg/styles.pdf) is then handed out and students are asked to answer the questions. If this is done in the computer lab, an online survey can be used (http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp).
- Students take the survey and then discuss the results in groups. For students in a computer lab, the discussion can be done through chat.

If this is the student's first foreign language reading course, this activity is done:

- The discussion shifts to the objective of the course – teaching reading skills and the question "How do you read in Spanish?" (the students' mother tongue) is raised. The reason for this is to make the students aware of a process that is carried out unconsciously in their first language and which must now be made conscious in the target language. A list is made and then students can be assigned

in small groups to work on the 'different texts procedure' (http://slrubena.com/alg/procedure.pdf).

If the students have already taken the first course, the following activity is done:

- Distribute a scrambled text activity (http://slrubena.com/scrambled_text_2.htm) and use the same procedure as explained above.

The main purpose of these consciousness-raising activities is to get the students to start thinking about the way they learn. Some are unable to transfer the strategies that they unconsciously use in their L1 to the L2, simply because they are unaware of them. By making students conscious of these, and by reinforcing them during the term, it is hoped that the students will eventually gain enough metacognitive knowledge to be able to use the right strategy when needed.

Day 2

Objective: Make students aware of:

- their strengths and weaknesses
- collect data on student's perception of academic strengths and weaknesses

Time: 90 minutes

Materials:

• diagnostic test	http://slrubena.com/alg/diagnostic1.pdf http://slrubena.com/alg/diagnostic2.pdf
• welcome survey	http://www.quia.com/sv/52494.html

- Students are given a survey designed to obtain their perception of their academic performance, the areas they believe require more attention and work, and their suggestions for the coming term (http://www.quia.com/sv/52494.html). The survey also asks about their reading strategy use.
- They are then given a diagnostic test to determine which of the objectives of the previous course had been met. This test is not timed and students can leave when they have completed it. The online version of the test can be programmed so that feedback is given. Data can be collected through the use of rubrics.

Day 3

- The quiz is returned to the students, who are asked to make the corrections.

- Students have a private session with the teacher where they discuss the quiz (can be done in an online chat).
- Based on this information and the data obtained from the surveys, the students decide what areas need work, the percentage of their grade to be assigned to each area, and the time for evaluation (http://slrubena.com/alg/workplan.pdf) .
- Each student decides the type of material and the activities to be done. The teacher can also give handouts to help students with their work (http://slrubena.com/alg/gencompwksht.pdf).
- A progress report sheet is started where the activities done, what has been learnt, and the areas that still need work are tracked (http://slrubena.com/alg/control_sheet.pdf).

The process described above is very important because it gives students the cognitive and metacognitive tools they need to be able to work with the material during the term. We will now focus on how technology can help students become more autonomous.

The use of technology

Communication

To begin with, as Little (1991) has noted, autonomous learning does not exclude the teacher's input, which I consider important for guiding students, especially those who have had little opportunity to make academic decisions previously. The Internet, through chat and e-mail, or voice mail such as Skype (http://www.skype.com/), or any messenger service such as Yahoo Messenger (http://messenger.yahoo.com), gives them the option of communicating with their teacher or with other classmates, outside of classroom and consultation hours. The knowledge that someone is near with advice or suggestions, or just to listen, provides a physiological boost for the student who needs feedback on his/her performance.

Good source of authentic materials

The Internet is an excellent source of authentic input for students. As the table below shows, there is a wealth of information to be obtained.

Tool	Site address	Advantages
Search engines	• http://www.yahoo.com • http://www.lycos.com • http://www.google.com • http://www.webcrawler.com	Give students up to date information on any topic of interest in a matter of seconds.
	• http://www.ctv.ca/ (Canada)	Authentic audio and video

News sites	• http://abcnews.go.com (USA) • http://www.abc.net.au (Australia) • http://news.bbc.co.uk (U.K)	material can be used for working on listening comprehension skills. Students are exposed to different accents.
Dictionaries	• http://dictionary.cambridge.org/ • http://www.m-w.com/ • http://www.pdictionary.com/ • http://whatis.techtarget.com/	➢ Especially for learners ➢ Pronunciation given ➢ Visual representation ➢ Special terminology.
Resources	• http://www.pbs.org/ • http://www.discovery.com/ • http://www.sciencenewsforkids.org/ • http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/ • http://syndicate.com/	Activities geared towards developing thinking skills ➢ Especially for FL learner ➢ Vocabulary learning

An essential part of making students independent learners is to help them become aware of their needs, know their learning styles, maximize their strengths, and work on their weaknesses, which is done through interaction with specific tasks and materials. However, this can only be achieved if the learners are willing to work. Interest and motivation are therefore two important factors in learning, and the Internet offers a wide variety of different topics suited to individual tastes and learning styles, as the information can be received through text, audio or video, images and graphics. Students can use any of the search engines to find topics which interest them and the teacher can design generic worksheets to work on special areas.

Students have a choice between working with material designed for native speakers where the student would have an opportunity to receive input beyond their present level, as suggested by Krashen (1985) (http://slrubena.com/alg/Building_an_aqueduct_graphic.pdf) or those especially geared toward foreign language learners with progressively increasing levels of difficulty where learners can work at their own pace, in areas that they consider need to be improved (http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-grammar-test-landing-page.htm). By choosing what they consider to be the best option given their perceived needs and goals, the learners are in position to take control of their learning process.

Apart from content, the Internet also offers the teacher many tools that can be used in creating activities for individual student learning. The table below gives some examples of different types of such software available on the Internet.

Software	Site	Purpose
Discovery	http://school.discovery.com/	Puzzles, quiz maker, worksheet generator.
Quia	http://www.quia.com	Interactive activities, quiz maker, score tracker.
The Study Place	http://www.thestudyplace.org	Ready-made lessons, class page, score tracker
Hot Potatoes	http://hotpot.uvic.ca/	Interactive activities.
Question Tools	http://www.questiontools.com/	Online lessons, surveys
Headline Makers	http://lang.swarthmore.edu/makers/	Interactive activities.
Complete Lexical Tutor	http://www.lextutor.ca/	Vocabulary analyzer, list builder, cloze maker

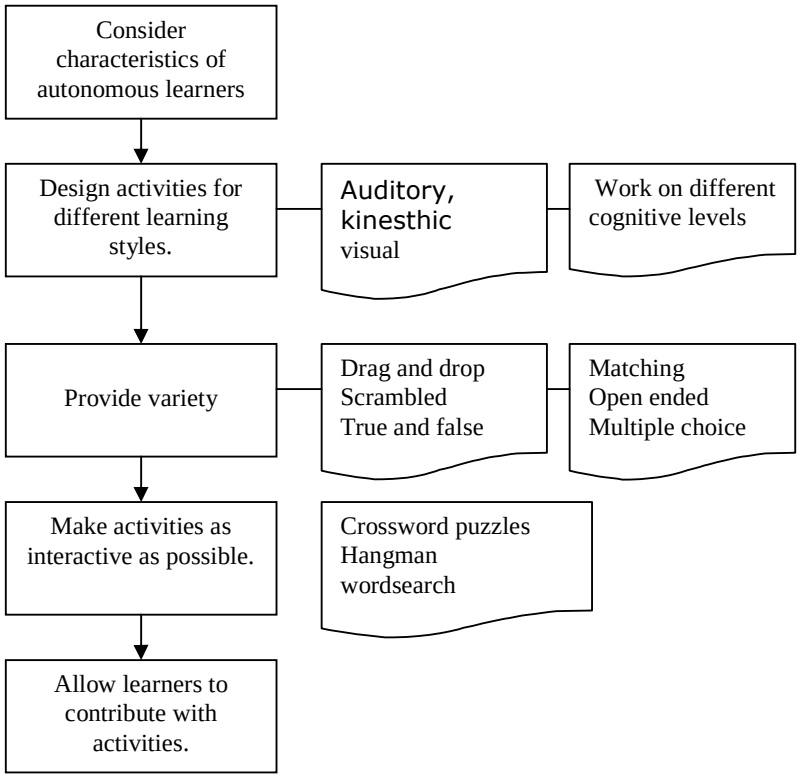
Through the use of sites such as Quia, Discovery School, and The Study Place, teachers can create an online class with materials that can be accessed by the learners at any time. Students enroll in the class and do the activities, and their progress is tracked by the software. They can check on their progress at any point and time and can so monitor their learning, deciding where more work needs to be done. Different types of exercises, besides the traditional True and False, multiple choice and multiple correct, short answers and cloze can be generated by software and new twists to old exercises maintain student interest (e.g. multiple-choice questions changed to “Rags to Riches”, and a sequencing exercise now called “Picture perfect”).

Java scripted software, used in Hot Potatoes, Question Tools or Headline Makers, can create drag and drop, scrambled words or sentences exercises, and crossword puzzles and flashcards for vocabulary learning, Many of these programs also include options for uploading audio and image files. In the area of vocabulary learning, the Complete Lexical Tutor not only has a vocabulary profiler to find the lexical density of the text and enumerate the words found on a frequency-based wordlist, but can also be used for checking spelling and creating a cloze. This software can be used by the teacher who needs to determine the level of difficult of an article that may have been selected by the students, in order to help them make decisions with regard to the texts they should read.

Some of these programs also give teachers the option of including clues, multiple tries and instant feedback in their exercises. Through these, learners can have several attempts at solving the puzzle or use the “clue” option either to activate other schemata

which might help them or to check their hypothesis before giving the answer. With instant feedback, teachers can either give the correct answer or ask questions that will lead the student to use other strategies and to process the information at a deeper, more cognitive level (St. Louis, 1999). Once more, the use of different types of activities, with input being received by the learner through a visual, aural or kinesthetic medium, not only caters for individual learning styles, but may also lead to the information being processed on different levels in the learner's cognitive system and so increase the likelihood that it will be stored in memory. Learners can also use software to create their own activities and in so doing participate actively in their individual learning process by setting their goals, choosing the material, designing the activity, and evaluating their knowledge. In this sense, learners will have achieved the different degrees of autonomy mentioned by Nunan (1997).

When designing activities teachers should look at the following:



Designing work for autonomous learning within the classroom

The following is an example of how software can be used to create activities, which are incorporated into a lesson within the constraints of the classroom and the objectives of an official language program. The texts were chosen because they illustrate rhetorical functions which should be taught in this course.

People and colour (http://slrubena.com/alg/colour.htm)

Materials:

Two texts taken from the internet:

- Psychology of Color, at http://www.factmonster.com/spot/colors1.html
- What colors mean, at http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0769383.html

One reading taken from an ESL reading text:

- People & colour - taken from Sonka (1981, pp. 26-33)

Tutorial on adjectives

Objectives:

- reviewing adjectives
- skimming for main idea
- scanning for specific information

Reading tasks:

- students scan texts to find the different meanings of colours, and predict if the meaning of these colours will change in the future.
  Meaning of colour (http://slrubena.com/alg/meaning_colour.pdf)
- students scan text to find what different colours symbolize to different cultures throughout history: Compare what the same colour means in different countries.
  Colour symbols (http://slrubena.com/alg/coloursymbols.pdf)
- students use information from the texts to advise clients on the best colours to be used in certain situations, and give reasons to support their choice:
  Colour advisor (http://slrubena.com/alg/Colour_advisor.pdf)

Vocabulary tasks:

- students look up the meaning of adjectives that describe emotions.

Interactive activities:

- Crossword puzzle (postreading for What colours mean)
- Drag and drop vocabulary activity (What colours mean)

In this example, students were given a choice of readings and activities. Images were used to introduce vocabulary and students were asked to look up the meaning of emotions whose meaning they wanted to know in English. They were also supposed to use the new

knowledge they had obtained from the text to advise clients thereby voicing their views on the topic.

Conclusion

For the past two years, students in my English for science and technology reading class have been making use of the immense amount of information available on the Web and developing their reading skills through computer-based exercises that capture their interests and motivate them to interact with the text. Here are some of their comments, taken from http://slrubena.com/alg/comments.pdf.

What students think about choosing their own activities:

- me parece q esta bien porque asi ellos escogen sus ejercicios y logran tener varias oportunidades durante el curso. En fin... Muy aprovechoso

I think that it is good because in that way they can choose their exercises and have several opportunities during the course ...

Their thoughts on using computers:

- I think it's very dynamic and faster, first because we don't have to write like always on a paper, we have everything in only one place... we get our score immediately in the case of the quizzes... I like this way to learn and enjoy my class.. it's better and easier to do things when you like them and I like to work on a computer .

And on the activities:

- El mecanismo utilizado mediante las computadoras es efectivo pues me permitio realizar las actividades sin aburrimiento y con mas dinamismo, ademas de aprender de acuerdo a imagenes y actividades q ofrecen facilidad de retencion, me parece q es el mejor mecanismo para entender el ingles.

Using the computer is effective because the activities are not boring, they're more dynamic and the images and activities help me to remember…I think it's the best way to learn English.

As can be seen, using the approach described here, student exposure to the language is greater than with printed material and there is more opportunity for them to practice different kinds of exercises outside of the classroom. They have started to take control of their learning by participating in decision making with regard to materials, activities and

evaluation. It is expected that they will soon be contributing their own activities to the class and in so doing reach Nunan's (1997) final level of autonomy.

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Editor's notes:

This presentation was made as a regular session at the Webheads in Action Online Convergence on November 19, 2005. The session took place in the Alado Webheads presentation room. A recording was made and can be heard at http://home.learningtimes.net/learningtimes?go=1042165.

INTERNET IN THE CLASSROOM

LANGUAGEQUEST DESIGN AND TELECOLLABORATION

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Abstract

This paper reports on the development, use and dissemination of the LanguageQuest Assessment Tool, one of the deliverables of the Dutch, state-funded 'LanguageQuest' Project. The instrument is meant to support teachers in assessing the potential effectiveness of a particular WebQuest in terms of second-language acquisition and to guide the design process for WebQuests for language learning. We present the background to the project and its results and describe the way wider dissemination in Europe is being promoted through workshops at the European Centre for Modern Languages and the EU project 'Moderating Intercultural Collaboration and Language Learning' (MICaLL).

1. Why a Dutch Project 'LanguageQuest'?

The Dutch National Bureau for Modern Languages is an initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Its mission, since 1996, has been to improve the quality of modern language learning and teaching in the Netherlands. The bureau's activities not only concern the school sector (primary, secondary and higher education), but also include foreign language teaching in trade and industry as well as some general language policy issues. One of the bureau's current concerns is the promotion of the use of ICT in modern language education: http://www.nabmvt.nl/english/.

Since the Internet itself provides a powerful digital learning environment for language learning, the members of the ICT Expertise Centre of the National Bureau on Modern

Languages believe in presenting learners of modern languages with challenging tasks to be solved by exploring the Web. The WebQuest model (Dodge, 1995) is appealing in this respect because it is based on learning theory concepts that relate to developments in Dutch education emphasizing learner centeredness, and active on-site learning with a focus on learning strategies. Also, the WebQuest model relates well with modern Second Language Acquisition (SLA) views and approaches in modern foreign language (MFL) pedagogy.

The WebQuest concept is seen to have the potential to help MFL teachers to relate learning to the real world, enhance and replace textbook-based learning activities, and support transdisciplinary curriculum activities. Rüschoff and Ritter (2001), who, among others, point to the relevance of constructivist or, in this case, constructionist approaches for foreign language learning, refer to 'template-based learning'. Another consideration for a dedicated project for MFL was the observation that modern languages were under-represented in the database of the WebQuest Page. A quick, impressionistic scan of other Anglo/American and European Web-based resources such as WebQuest repositories, professional e-zines and discussion lists showed that the language teaching community was still relatively unfamiliar with the concept and that MFL WebQuests were comparatively scarce at that time (for the results of this survey, see http://www.koenraad.info/CALL/scan). Accordingly, the potential of the WebQuest format was recognized but it was felt that to disseminate the concept nationally, discipline-specific theoretical underpinnings for this model were needed. Furthermore, it was expected that the provision of dedicated design tools and explanatory text materials would facilitate the production of MFL WebQuests and contribute to their instructional quality.

Inspired by the WebQuest Page (http://webquest.sdsu.edu/), the advisory board of CALL specialists of the National Bureau for Modern Languages consequently defined the LanguageQuest project and acquired funding from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Its main goal was to develop the concept 'LanguageQuest' as an innovative approach, targeted at adapting the WebQuest idea to the specific requirements of instructed SLA, based on theoretical insights from SLA research, resulting in:

- improved task design and methodology for realistic, content-oriented, functional, task-based foreign language learning
- a set of support instruments:
    - quality criteria based on an SLA Model;
    - clarification of task features that trigger useful and effective language learning activities;

- a template, customised for the production of TalenQuests;
- a rubric for the assessment of the pedagogical qualities of TalenQuests.

2. The LanguageQuest Project Results

2.1. Deliverables realised so far

During the two life cycles of the project a number of results have been achieved. The term 'TalenQuest' ('Talen' is Dutch for 'Languages') is defined as follows: 'A TalenQuest is a WebQuest with a focus on foreign language learning. It is a venture that leads to a product and, in the process, triggers, in a natural way, a variety of effective learning activities.' The project has developed a website (http://www.talenquest.nl) offering a database with quality-assured LanguageQuests serving a variety of age ranges and target groups, school types (n=5) and languages (n=6), plus a number of documents that provide design support for LanguageQuest authors. For further details see (Koenraad 2002, 2005a).

One of the challenges was to find out whether additional characteristics for tasks could be defined to optimise the WebQuest concept specifically for SLA. For the underpinning of these characteristics, certain insights were derived from SLA theory and from cognitive psychology; for example schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980), constructivism (e.g. Wolff, 2002 for implications for language teaching), and connectionism (Gasser, 1990; Bereiter, 1991). These insights have led to the formulation of a multi-feature hypothesis providing a basis for a set of additional criteria for WebQuests, especially at fostering SLA.

Central to this developmental work in the *TalenQuest* project are publications by Westhoff (2001, 2004) that aim to make relevant SLA research accessible for practitioners. Based on the so- called 'penta-pie SLA model' (see below) and the multi-feature hypothesis two additional sets of criteria have been developed (Koenraad & Westhoff, 2003) that the current WebQuest model, being a generic concept, does not offer for effective language learning, and it is important that these be taken into account. An example to illustrate this point follows.

In a WebQuest about planning a visit to Disneyland, the sub-task "In which restaurant can you order a hamburger?" elicits a much poorer learning activity than "Decide what you would like to eat in which restaurant," since in the second formulation, the menus will have to be studied more intensively and in more detail. Consequently, many more features of the input provided by the menus will be processed in various ways. The variety and depth of this processing can be further increased by adding a budget condition: "Choose a menu for three

persons. You have got € 25 and you can keep what you don't spend." The current directives for designing and assessing WebQuests do not give guidelines in this respect.

2.2. The LanguageQuest Assessment Tool

2.2.1. The essential components of a WebQuest

For the reasons illustrated above, additional criteria for WebQuests designed for language learning were developed. The instrument consists of three sets of criteria: in addition to the essential components of a WebQuest as specified by Bernie Dodge (1995), two sections address language learning in particular. As presenting the complete tool is beyond the scope of this paper, we restrict ourselves to addressing these additional components.

2.2.2. Triggering activities that realize the SLA processes

Section 2 of the instrument is meant to show to what extent the task triggers activities in all the areas that are needed to realise SLA processes. Issues related to the five components identified as vital for 'nutritious' MFL education, represented schematically as the 'penta-pie' in Figure 1. below, are addressed.

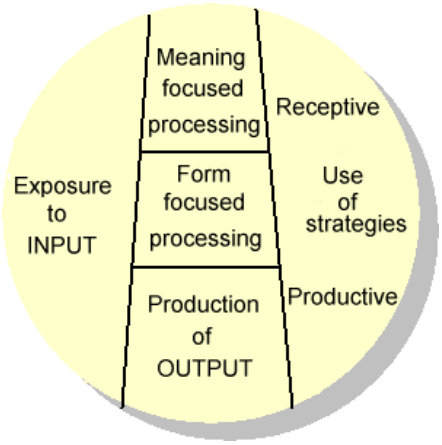

Figure 1. Westhoff's 'penta-pie' (Westhoff, 2004)

Exposure to input

Input is a precondition for language learning (Krashen, 1985). Criteria for input objects are that they are attractive, authentic, and functional (in relation to the task). In addition, the text level is preferably Interlanguage + 1 (= just above the competence of the learner) and there should be variety in the input materials, in terms of text types and modality.

Process for meaning

Tasks should be authentic and doable and based on a natural need for specific information. Furthermore, task-related progress and results cannot be realised without real understanding of the input materials. Types of effective activities include categorising, applying, repeating, elaborating, inducing, and structuring.

Form processing

The learner's attention must be naturally drawn to form aspects such as syntactic, morphosyntactic, lexical and collocational issues. Where necessary, information should also be available to help learners to reach desired insights.

Output production

Tasks should trigger L2 use. Activities should involve exchange of real information, knowledge, and expertise, and, consequently, trigger meaningful communication (e.g. involve negotiation of meaning).

Use of strategies

Activities naturally involve the use of compensatory strategies in the area of language reception and production. Explicit training of strategies is usually called for. Use of learning-strategy-based activities should promote reflection on language-strategy development and product and process (i.e. learning to learn: Did we tackle this task effectively? How did we cooperate?).

2.2.3. The ideal LanguageQuest

The third section of the assessment instrument is meant to help identify an ideal LanguageQuest. Two extreme positions describing features of a 'traditional' activity (a Web-based mini-course on the one hand and an 'ideal' LanguageQuest on the other) support the assessment activity. As this generally is not a black-and-white issue, a scale offering four positions is used. Aspects involved are design focus, task characteristics and activities, process and resources, results, and finally, presentation. We present two examples to illustrate the use of criteria for these dimensions when reviewing a WebQuest for language learning.

The extreme positions for the design focus are “Conceived with objectives like learning/practising language items (e.g. past tense) or functions (introducing oneself) in mind” vs. “Conceived with a product in mind (e.g. a report, menu, video, webpages, play, exhibition, holiday plan, project proposal)”. In other words, to meet LanguageQuest criteria, designers are invited to think of outcomes and products that are more lifelike and challenging than the standard artefacts and activities of the traditional language classroom.

Our second example deals with the contrasting criteria for the dimensions ‘task characteristics’ and ‘results’: “Task is closed with convergent solutions. Results consequently are either correct or incorrect” vs. “An open task with explicit criteria that allow a variety of feasible and acceptable solutions. Products are evaluated on the basis of criteria: various results are acceptable”. In this case, the LanguageQuest criteria aim to promote ownership and creativity, cf public competitions for architects where specifications for the deliverable (bridge, building, park) are given but varied solutions are expected.

In 2004, a user-friendly tool was produced to encourage and professionalize assessment activities among practitioners. The minimum quality requirements have also been defined and layout elements have been added to support scoring and ranking, thus making it suitable for self-assessment of personal products. The current version and future updates of the assessment tool can be downloaded at the project site or at http://www.koenraad.info/CALL.

The LanguageQuest Consortium

One of the objectives during the second phase of the project was to develop a sustainability strategy. This has led to the formation of a consortium dedicated to the maintenance and further development of the project’s results. The original partnership has been extended, with some key players and stakeholders in the MFL domain of the Dutch educational infrastructure. Results, products and expertise are shared. In addition, where feasible and practical, partners collaborate, e.g. in the area of consultancy activities or the development and running of courses. Collaboration with *Kennisnet*, the Dutch national Schoolnet commissioned by the Ministry of Education to actively mediate in the distribution of quality-assured instructional materials for schools, has led to the integration of the LanguageQuest website in the *Kennisnet* content repository.

The consortium is open to additional parties interested in membership (including international ones). Also, in order to make more fundamental developments possible, the consortium defines follow-up projects. In this context, a state grant was acquired in May

2005 for a project targeted at the further validation of the assessment instrument. Results from field trials and feedback from focus groups have been collected and will lead to transformation of the instrument to a fully rubric-based tool in 2006. The production of an online version has also been planned.

3. Dissemination of the LanguageQuest project results

With the adoption of the project results by *Kennisnet*, the national educational network and content provider for Dutch schools, project targets at a national level have been realised and wider dissemination in Europe is being promoted through workshops at the European Centre for Modern Languages (http://www.ecml.at) and the EU project 'Moderating Intercultural Communication and Language Learning' (MICaLL - http://www.micall.net).

3.1. The ECML LQuest Workshop

The European Centre for Modern Languages is one of the instruments to realise the Council of Europe's mission: "to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress". To support the improvement of communication within the EU, the Centre offers workshops and conferences that address various aspects of language teaching and learning in general, plus the training of language teachers (http://www.ecml.at/activities/intro.asp). Individual EU member states and affiliate countries are invited to recruit and select one representative from their national professional communities such as materials developers, teacher trainers specialized in second language acquisition, teachers, and other multipliers to attend these workshops. The dissemination of ideas and best practices relating to foreign languages is given particular emphasis.

The LanguageQuest project was selected to coordinate the Workshop "Task-based second language acquisition with the help of Internet resources" in the strand "Innovative approaches and new technologies" of the current four-year projects programme the Centre runs. The 2006 LQuest workshop (http://www.ecml.at/mtp2/LQuest/html/LQuest_E_pdesc.htm) aimed to familiarize the 23 participants from 21 countries with the LanguageQuest concept and the underlying SLA principles and raise competence and skills levels enabling them to:

- estimate the effect of a LanguageQuest on SLA
- improve existing LanguageQuests in terms of better SLA outcomes
- design and construct an effective LanguageQuest

LQuest Net

The participants of the LQuest Workshop committed themselves to disseminate their acquired insights in their home countries. To support them in their endeavours to jointly develop a European community of LanguageQuest professional assessors, developers, and practitioners the international project team will host a website in addition to the ECML services mentioned. In addition to an online tool for the assessment of future LanguageQuest products and the accompanying workflow for the publication of the results of the assesement procedure, it provides facilities for hosting and locating LanguageQuests (http://www.lquest.net).

3.2 LanguageQuest and the MICaLL Project

Another dissemination channel is the project "Moderating Intercultural Communication and Language Learning" (MICaLL). This EU project is supported by the Socrates grant programme (http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/socrates_en.html). The main goal of the MICaLL project (2004-2007) is to contribute to the innovation of teacher education in general and the training and professional development of (student) teachers of modern languages in particular. To this end, a Web portal and project course materials are being developed that offer both student teachers and experienced practitioners experiential learning opportunities to develop competencies relevant for network-based language teaching. The course materials production is based on experiences from experiments and intercultural school projects that the project partners run using the customised web portal at http://www.micall.net/. In the preparation and co-teaching of self-designed classroom projects, student teachers and teacher practitioners develop competencies such as choosing appropriate technologies for specific tasks and adapting existing instructional materials.

The project web portal to support the MICaLL community of teachers is based on 'Plone', a Content Management System (CMS). This role-based, Open Source platform is supported by a global community of users and developers (in business and academia). The use of open standards and its modular structure make this platform highly customisable. On registration, members get individual workspaces with homepages that currently provide options to activate and use content objects such as an online WebQuest editor, and personalised communication and publication tools such as weblogs, forums, wiki, and chat. Trainers and (student) teachers can create virtual class and project rooms for starting and managing telecollaborative projects. Members can choose to keep the content they develop in

their workspaces private (e.g. a concept version of a LanguageQuest or a personal blog) or make items accessible or even editable for other portal members. In addition, a publication option is available to present personal content to the Internet public at large. In this way, with the help of the related URL, a finished LanguageQuest can also be reached by non-members.

All published weblogs are presented to the general public in a 'portlet' on the front page of the portal. Next to standard functionality for communication and collaboration, the system has a number of features that make it very suitable for computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL). The availability of a large collection of so-called add-on products makes the portal software highly flexible and allows plug-and-play experimentation. Even more importantly, this provides the user with a consistent interface across the various web editors; e.g. for WebQuests, blogs and wikis. Another crucial feature is the language-versioning facility. All this, plus the fact that the system is scalable and affordable, makes its use attractive in education, in EU projects, and particularly in countries or regions with less widely used languages.

In the MICaLL project, the LanguageQuest project results are being used and expanded in a number of ways. Intercultural collaboration is organised by setting tasks for distributed teams involving formats such as blogging and WebQuests, both at the school and teacher-education levels. Furthermore, in teacher-education methodology courses, students are trained to apply the LQuest design criteria when developing WebQuests for the language classroom. They learn how to create tasks for distributed learners' teams and try out materials and practise moderating with their classes during school practice.

Where feasible, project partners also align curriculum tasks with a view to organising this design process as a transnational activity for student teachers. Deeper learning and opportunities for development of intercultural communicative competence is targeted through having student teachers co-design a LanguageQuest for a specific target pupil group, as they will be using the target language and discussing design choices and the application of SLA principles in the process of completing this type of task. Where whole-class or student-cohort experiments are not convenient due to scheduling or curriculum constraints, small-scale intercultural projects between organisations and individual arrangements at the student and teacher levels are offered. Finally, the project partners use the LanguageQuest design criteria as a basis to develop additional criteria specifically for project work with distributed learners.

For technical support of portal-based LanguageQuest use and production, a dedicated WebQuest editor (see Fig. 2, below) has been developed in line with the MICaLL standard interface and portal workflow specifications.

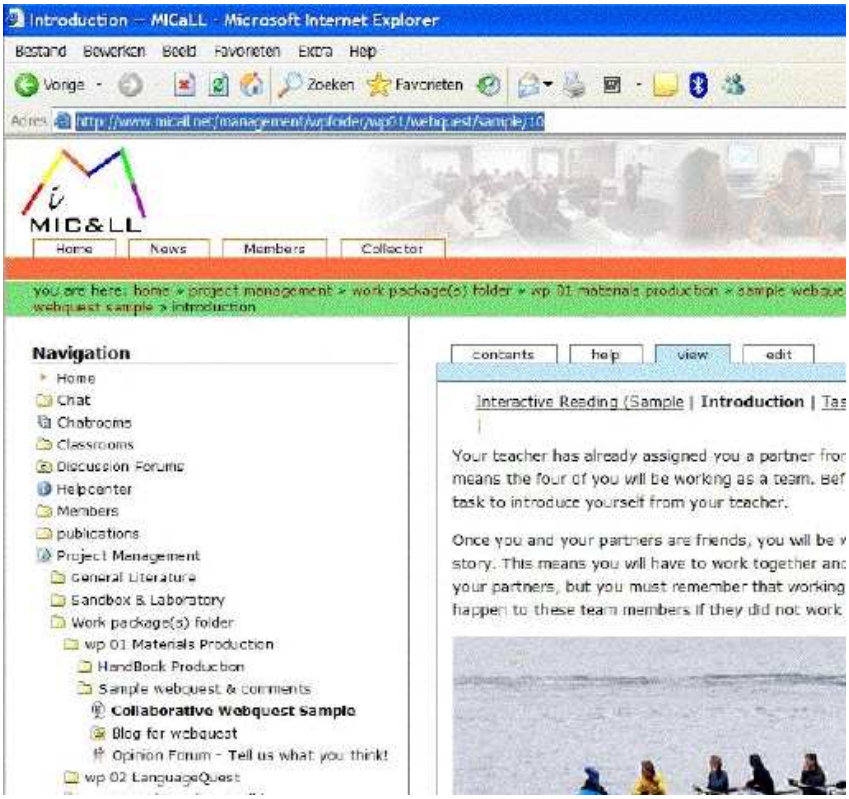

Figure 2. MICaLL WebQuest Editor (Designer's View: Editing Mode)

As the initial phase of the project was dedicated to the professional development of the actors involved and most school-based activities have only recently started, evaluative data on LanguageQuest activities by transnational teams are not yet available. However, lessons learned in the first year suggest that to get professional dialogue on new pedagogical approaches and methods going among the inservice teachers and student teachers involved, a 'blended learning' model is needed where f2f sessions led by local teacher-educators are combined with independent e-learning activities and peer-to-peer student events such as participation in international LanguageQuest teams or shared blog writing. For more information on the evaluation of the first project year and a full description of the project design, see Koenraad (2005b).

Teachers and teacher educators interested in using the portal facilities for telecollaborative projects or to support local courses on methodology and/or CALL are invited to contact the author.

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Editor's notes:

This presentation was made as a regular session at the Webheads in Action Online Convergence on November 19, 2005. The session took place in the Alado Webheads presentation room. Recordings were made and can be heard at http://www.digibridge.net/webheads/ton.htm and http://www.micall.net/Members/TonK/News/wiaocreport. The presentation materials are located here: EU project 'MICaLL' - http://www.micall.net/publications/ and LanguageQuest Project - http://www.koenraad.info/CALL/ .

ON THE WEB

USING ONLINE FACILITATION TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS ONLINE: *GOOD DEEDS IEARN PROJECT IN ACTION*

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"The smallest good deed is better than the grandest intention." – A Proverb

Abstract

Encouraging student participation in meaningful online collaborative projects is important in the learning process since it involves students in practical, hands-on experiences and raises their awareness of issues related to their local societies and/or educational needs. Although the use of online educational interaction still poses many challenges, it also provides outstanding learning outcomes.

This paper describes the outcomes of an ongoing iEARN (http://www.iearn.org/) project that uses a variety of blended learning techniques. Included are summaries of technical requirements, pedagogical and technological methods, and achievements, plus comments on feedback and expected outcomes for future action plans.

Introduction

Technology in education can be a challenge which poses a dilemma for teachers who are willing - or obliged - to use it in their classes. It gives rise to the question of how teachers can involve themselves and their students in more dynamic learning opportunities through use of

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and blended-learning technologies in general.

The formation of a new paradigm in distance education was predicted by many educators before it became widely used, and the potential for facilitation of interaction in group activities has long been considered its greatest strength. For example, Mason and Kaye (1990) described computer conferencing as representing a new paradigm for online learning which can provide enhanced opportunities for dialogue, debate, and conversational learning as well as fostering a "sense of community" when students are exposed to other students' experiences and opinions.

When teachers are asked to implement technology, they often think about highly sophisticated software programs or online applications and wonder if they will be able to afford up-to-date software or the licenses for using such applications.

The process could be easier than many may imagine. Technology in the 21st century is a medium of communication, knowledge, and development. The way in which technology can be applied and adopted requires each of us to understand and make decisions based on facilities which are personally and locally available. These advances have resulted in the formation of new types of communities focused on a huge range of interests. Many researchers and social anthropologists have noted that communities of practice (CoPs) exist everywhere. We may have main roles in some of them but in other communities, our roles might be more marginal (Smith, 2003). The concept is not new Redfield (1960) discusses systems and processes for the basic human needs used by such communities: the needs for survival, nurturance, socialization and support, cosmological or ideological perspectives, and a cohesive context from which a sense of identity, belonging, meaning, and purpose can develop. One important element in CoPs is that most of the members in such communities are practitioners with diverse levels of background and expertise, each community with its unique formation of different members develops a "shared repertoire" of resources, projects, experiences, and skills in a "short shared practice" as Wenger (2006) describes it.

With the formation of online communities, new dimensions of learning, practicing and involvement are afforded in the virtual world. The involvement of practitioners from all over the world and communicating and interacting with them at any time has now become possible.

Individuals, organizations, and universities are examining the potential of online CoP "networks" to enable members of such communities to share knowledge and engage in "ongoing workplace learning and professional development" (Gray, 2004). Such

communities may include students and/or teachers operating in the same educational setting or environment.

In this paper, I share a simple personal initiative which shows one possibility of using free online tools to encourage voluntary participation in collaborative and global learning projects from students and teachers in schools and educational centers in several different countries. By global learning, I mean ongoing acquired learning that focuses on students as the main factor and target of the learning process and that enables students to develop their own learning goals based on their local needs. However, the outcome of this learning experience is global in its nature since it can be used, adopted, or implemented by other groups and communities elsewhere.

Brainstorming

I first thought of the *Good Deeds* project (http://www.iearn.org/projects/gooddeeds.html) and (http://ifayed.com/Main_Folders/Papers/iEARN_03/GDeeds.htm) after a discussion with another teacher and two high school students in which we shared ideas regarding the importance of involving students in student-centered activities to help them acquire new skills and values. The students shared ideas about what they needed to do in their community and later on in their world. They asked the challenging question "How can we, as the citizens of this new global community, change both our local community and the world?" We concluded that changing one's personality and attitude are the main keys to changing any society, and that it's best if change can come from inside when one is still young.

It was also obvious that we need to see the "goodness" in ourselves to be able to use it in our behaviors and dealings with those who are around us. For that reason, we chose "*Good Deeds*" to be the title of our project. We used simple instructions and ideas to present GD to participating students. We used the motto "*Share with us some good deeds you have achieved, even simple ones, showing the details and motives behind your acts*" to describe the project.

Project Description

Explaining the scope of the project and including members of different cultures and groups were our first goals. The values targeted were listed as well the methodology needed from facilitators and other teachers involved in the project.

Figure 1. Logo

Members were encouraged to use a variety of approaches and methods of face-to-face and virtual communication modalities to participate. Example face-to-face activities included meetings and orientation sessions, group activities, student conferences, poster productions, story writings, and field trips. Furthermore, students could share their achieved and/or planned activities with all the members in the community via virtual tools; e.g., using the online forum, publishing websites and links, attending online conferences, sending e-mail, and participating in informal chat sessions. Some of the best contributions were published on a new platform for online writing and publishing or a blog (http://ismailfayed.netfirms.com/weblog03/blogger2.html) which was used to recognize some of the posts, contributions, reports, and ideas posted by students.

The following chart shows activities that teachers and other educators could use to facilitate the teaching/learning process using the means of communication described here:

Face-to-Face (F-2-F)	**Virtual (Online)**	
	synchronous	**asynchronous**
▪ Orientation meetings ▪ Field Trips ▪ Meetings and discussions ▪ Conference presentations	▪ Chat & Instant Messaging *(MSN, Yahoo, etc..)* ▪ Virtual Reality Environments ▪ Online meetings/ conferences	▪ E-mail exchange ▪ Secure discussion forums ▪ Project website ▪ Blogging platforms ▪ Members dynamic map

Figure 2. Possible blended learning activities in online collaborative projects.

Curriculum Focus

Some of the areas we considered while developing this project were the following:

- Using English as a target language for communication and interaction

- Improving reading and writing skills
- Developing critical thinking skills
- Encouraging self-expression and other communicative skills
- Including activities focusing on the arts
- Fostering development of positive values in relationships with others

Many teachers used Good Deeds to focus on other educational areas of interest based on the courses they teach in their schools or the needs of each community. As a result, the majority of the participating members had opportunities to experience an enriched learning environment.

Planning and Organization

After writing a project proposal and gaining acceptance for the project, the next step was having our online discussion forum ready for our members to use:

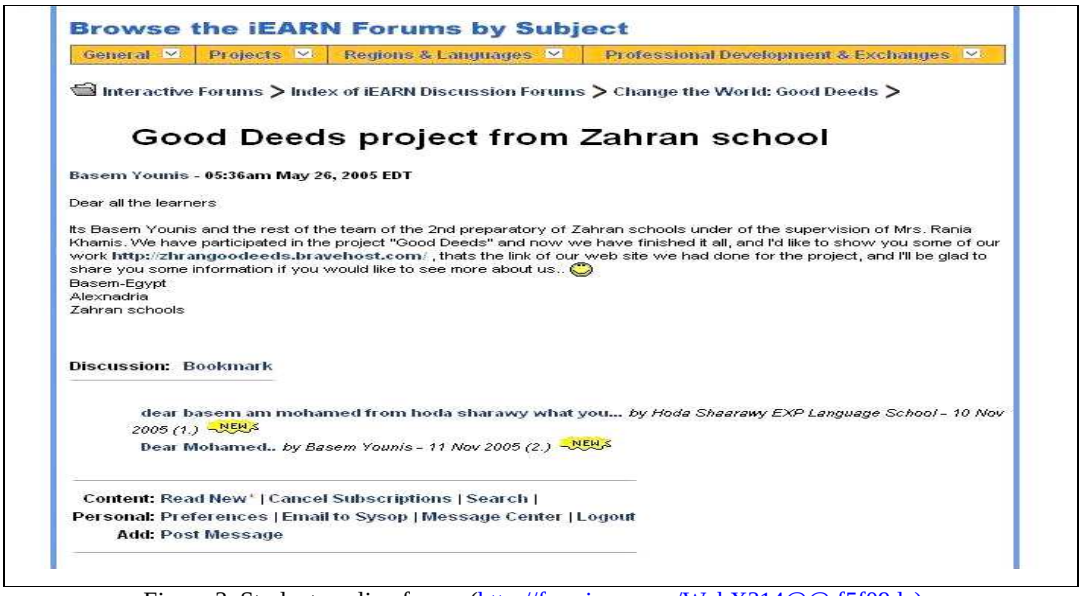

Figure 3. Students online forum (http://foro.iearn.org/WebX?14@@.f5f09de).

I also started preparing the outline for a free website to publish *Good Deeds* materials, links, and blog entries of students' best contributions, as shown below:

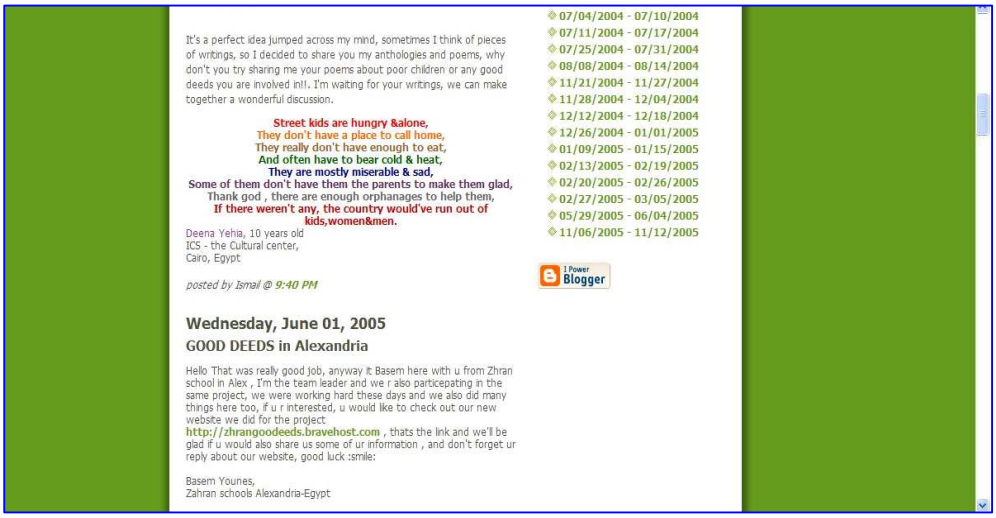

Figure 4. *Good Deeds* Student *Blog* 2005 (http://ismailfayed.netfirms.com/Papers/iEARN_03/GDeeds.htm).

When the project began, I was working as an Educational Technology Program Specialist in a large educational teacher-training program in Egypt, the Integrated English Language Program II (IELP-II, http://cit.aed.org/ielp.htm). The program's main aim was to implement and encourage life-long learning amongst students, teachers and other educators. Other goals and expected outcomes of this project included:

- raising educators', teachers' and students' awareness, skills, expertise, and educational standards;
- implementing new trends in teaching and language education in our project, such as encouraging collaborative learning opportunities made possible by video-conferencing, interactive web tools, and active, student-centered learning.

Shortly after we started the first phase of the project, I moved to Saudi Arabia to teach. However, it was not so difficult to implement the project at a distance since iEARN Egypt (http://www.iearnegypt.org/) was willing to announce the project in different schools in that country. Some teachers in Egypt took the initiative in conducting orientation sessions in the various schools and educational centers in order to encourage new members to participate in the project.

Activities and Project Collaboration

There was no specific syllabus to use. Instead, we had a collection of possible activities to be implemented with the help of other teachers/facilitators in classrooms, during break times, in community activities, and while online. The extra-curricular focus increased the amount of

interaction and collaboration and made the process more dynamic and better able to fit the local needs of each partner. Some of the first proposed activities for this project included activities with f-2-f, synchronous, and asynchronous aspects, e.g.:

- Exchanging e-mail among community members and coordinators
- Discussing topics and issues of interest to students through the online forum
- Developing a web page (which included media files, photos, and other dynamic content) for the project
- Organizing online live chat sessions to allow students to talk about their individual situations and to meet and socialize with other students and coordinators
- Presenting different formats of literary and art works, with the possibility of being compiled, edited, and published in an annual booklet
- Including other suggested activities that coordinators or students may have raised during the course of the project

Figure 5. Example 'good deeds': Zahran School students in a field trip to an orphanage, Alexandria, Egypt 2004 (http://us.iearn.org/collaborate/programs/bridge/bridge_project_highlights.php).

Collaboration, student-centered learning, and dynamic interaction were all stressed in the following activities, which combined online and f-2-f experiences that teachers and students could be involved in under the guidance of their online facilitators.

Activities for Teachers

- Attending workshops to develop teachers' professional skills

- Inviting teachers to present the project in other schools and give workshops about Good Deeds
- Enrolling in iEARN online educational courses
- Participating in the online forum or contacting other teachers for brainstorming and follow-up on projects taking place
- Contacting country coordinators or project facilitators for more information about the project or for future ideas related to the project
- Getting together in online meetings and conferences

Activities for Students

- Writing to the forum (using their teachers' emails)
- Contributing new ideas or initiatives with the help of their teachers, then helping to write their schools' action plans
- Writing stories and articles about the theme of Good Deeds
- Participating in field trips where they help other community members and then report the outcomes of their efforts
- Forming groups and project committees
- Developing website links, posters, or drawings about Good Deeds themes

Online Education (Teaching/Learning) Requirements

Educators in developing nations tend to talk about technology as the magic key to addressing paradigm shifts in education, but they don't explain how to make it available and user-friendly for other educators. These, new paradigms in education with their unique challenges and requirements are presenting themselves to educators worldwide in the form of new online tools and innovative methods in teaching, interaction, and even assessment. In order to be involved in a project such as this one each student, teacher, or administrator, must develop skills to meet the emerging technical requirements.

Similarly, to the old "literacy" concept, where people needed to be able to read and write in order to learn further, within the new dimensions and requirements, there are four "challenges" which any educational institution interested in the implementation of CALL and online projects in its system must meet. These challenges involve new requirements in

1. technical expertise needed
2. facilities available to educational environments

3. attitudes of the stakeholders
4. changes needed to the structure of the educational systems supporting education

Technical Expertise	Technical Facilities	Attitudes (of)	Educational Systems
- Understanding the technical facilities *(see next column)* - Understanding the educational needs of the community - Planning for course development using proper/ modern teaching methods	- Hardware - Software • Commercial • Open source • Other shareware and freeware • Web-based platforms	- Individuals - Groups of learners - Professional communities - Institutions - Governments	-Private centers - Educational institutions/ schools - Educational organizations - Universities - Governments & other policy makers

Table 7. Online collaborative projects: Four main challenges

Ministries of education, especially in the developing countries, still have doubts about the importance and outcomes of online education e.g. establishing distance education programs, incorporating online learning platforms at an official level, and accrediting the educational degrees obtained via distance programs. Professional development of educators still suffers from too little recognition given to this by the concerned partners. Prendergast (2004) draws decision-makers' attention to the fact that they need to understand certain fundamental distinctions in teaching approaches if they want to implement online training successfully. In order for teachers, administrators, and decision makers to overcome the above challenges and raise the standards and the quality of the educational process, these concerns should be addressed in all aspects of online education as new trends expand to educational institutions throughout the world.

Project Expected Outcomes

Based on the four considerations identified above, several expected outcomes were identified as long-term goals for the *Good Deeds* project. Among them, non-stop learning and development experience are the main priorities. Yet another goal is to develop professional skills in different technical and non-technical domains.

As a representative of an educational project for all educators, I have kept these goals in mind while working on this project. My vision concerning these outcomes is represented

in four main sections. The first goal, and most important for many educators, is how to develop their technical expertise and professional performance in any field of study/work. The second goal is to provide appropriate dynamic tools for that life-long learning process, as clarified in the pervious section. The third and fourth goals are concerned with people's attitude and the educational systems available in the world these days. For example, governments, and other educational institutions should provide sufficient funding for computer labs and software for online projects such as this one. Then, a final step will be granting the proper accreditation and credentials for the "graduates" of such programs.

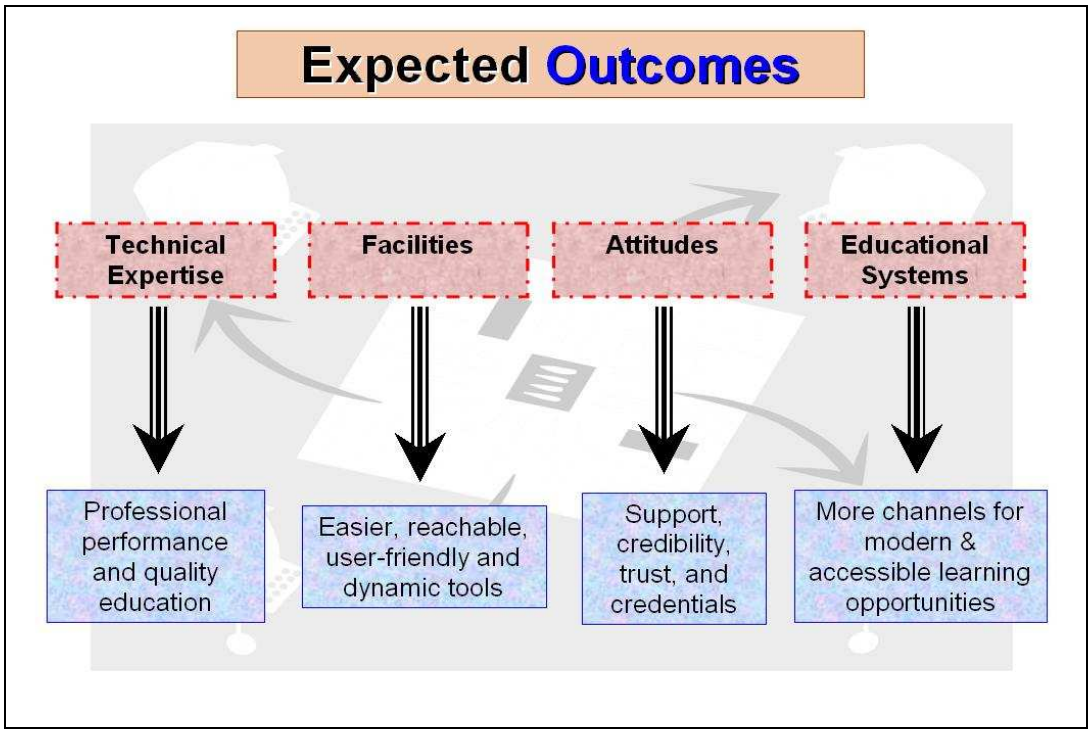

Figure 8. Project expected outcomes

Student-Centered Online Learning with Multiple Classrooms

The overall idea of online projects is not only to get students more involved in a project, but also to turn all the focus of a learning situation on the students. Student-centered collaborative learning based on projects can achieve this goal. Many students find that such an approach creates an atmosphere which is appropriate when they need to learn freely, discuss issues, raise questions, listen to others, and experience a friendly learning atmosphere while minimizing factors that may negatively affect the learning/teaching process.

Stacey (1999) mentioned that collaborative community learning was achieved through the development of a group understanding of knowledge through communicating different perspectives, receiving feedback from other students and tutors, and discussing ideas until a final negotiation of understanding was reached. She believes that the interactive communication process is facilitated through using CMC tools to establish a vehicle for socially-constructed learning at a distance.

Teachers revel in the moments when they see motivation and interest in the eyes of their students. Accordingly, virtual learning can raise student interest and motivation in a progressive way. Students can share and learn a great deal, at their own convenience, and have fun at the same time.

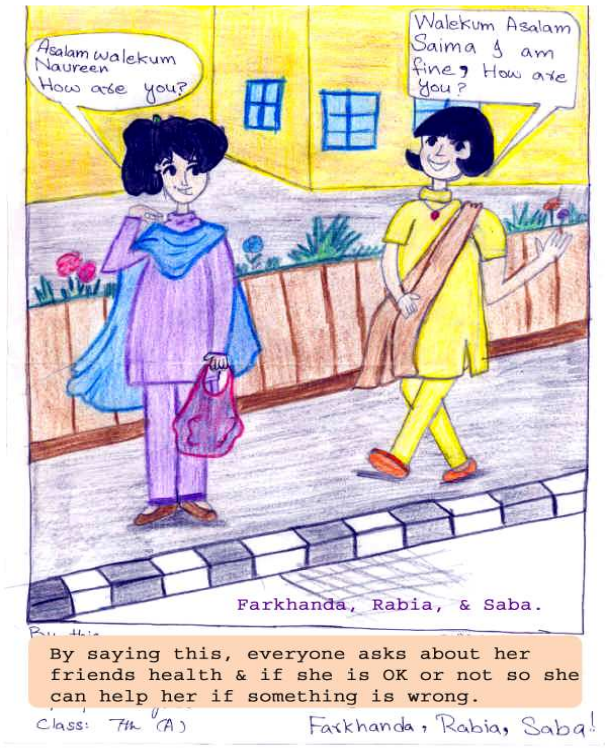

Figure 9. A picture submitted by SOS school students, Lahore, Pakistan 2005.

Getting Educators on Board

When the project was first announced to all iEARN members and schools throughout the world, teachers from several different countries showed interest in the project. It is normally difficult to proceed even after teachers/partners show interest in such a project because some (or many) drop out. In our case, making the project as flexible as possible was an advantage.

Because teachers and students might feel worried, overburdened, or even afraid of not meeting specific deadlines, we tried to make this experience an *oasis-for-resorting* rather than an *assignment-to-do* experience.

Project Current Outcomes

We cannot say that the project has met its original goals yet. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the overall scope of this project was open and could be extended to include many different learning goals and objectives, depending on each group of students, each course presented, and the local needs of the various communities in our project. In this ongoing process, we teach a value or topic, practice it, reflect on it, get feedback, and then plan for a new value or topic.

The main achievements of this project have been to raise students' awareness of the global issues and problems of their community, change their attitudes, and involve them more in leadership opportunities where they can help other members of the community or even help themselves think and act positively. The means to accomplish this are still being implemented at many educational facilities with the help of tools being trialed by many users. Excelling in using the tools is not the main goal, but being able to use them and apply newly learned values through the help of such facilities is what we are after.

Project outcomes are not necessarily planned only for students, even if students are the intended clients. Many teachers find opportunities to apply the teaching methods and initiatives offered in this project through the help of other teachers or by adapting them in a local course being taught in a certain school somewhere around the globe.

The project promotes many personal values that don't necessarily require reported outcomes or specific achievements. Rather, the groups share and learn from each other on a regular basis. This might help other teachers or facilitators while developing their educational projects or courses.

A teacher from Uzbekistan made the following comments on her experience in the project:

> *Good Deeds project is one of the projects that strongly influenced on minds of children, children had invited veterans of Second World War for lunch and arranged a little party for them with old songs that were popular at the time when veterans were young and in final presented little gifts to each veteran. For that veterans have told children about good deeds they or their friends have done during the war and their life in general.* (Natalya Amanovna, 2004)

Figure 10. Good Deed friends with veterans in Uzbekistan (http://natalya.freenet.uz/ac.html).

Project Expansion

When we started the project in 2003, we had about thirty members participating from ten schools in six countries. In 2004, almost ninety members from twenty-eight schools and six different countries had joined. The current number of newly joined participants is almost seventy from nineteen new schools. In general, this community is now growing gradually to include an estimated total of approximately 170 members, students and teachers from about forty-seven schools in fifteen different countries.

That huge number of participants and countries involved was, in the beginning, almost impossible to imagine. Now, however, connecting and interacting globally is no longer just a dream; instead, it has become an important aspect of our daily lives.

Figure 6. *Good Deeds* global map – 2006.

Implications for further development

All the processes and plans mentioned above are subject to future development, modification, and/or replacement. It is becoming a fact that many teachers learn about new computer programs and applications from their students or even their children! Because of that and because new technologies are appearing throughout the world, educators and facilitators need to be flexible and open to all forms of development, change, and exchange of new knowledge and expertise with reference to new applications, methods, and learning tools.

To conclude, this project has helped many educators and facilitators understand the nature of online projects in an educational setting. It was one of few projects sponsored by iEARN Egypt and proved to be a leading one that has captured the attention of many teachers nationwide and abroad. It is great to know about all the new students who have become interested in the project and are so enthusiastic to share their ideas by posting to the forum or organizing special events for the project in their schools or local communities in countries, such as Egypt, Russia, the USA, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and many others.

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Editor's notes

This presentation was made as a regular session at the Webheads in Action Online Convergence on November 19, 2005. The session took place in the Learning Times Elluminate presentation room. A recording was made and can be heard at http://home.learningtimes.net/learningtimes?go=1042158 .The original presentation materials can be found here: http://ifayed.com/Main_Folders/Papers/Wia2005/Wia2005/Wia2005.htm.

WEBHEADS IN ACTION – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GOING GLOBAL WITH THE WEBHEADS IN ACTION

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From local to global

My online life on a regular basis began in January 2002 when I joined the "Webheads in Action" workshop, coordinated by Vance Stevens and sponsored by TESOL's EVO (Electronic Village Online; see Hanson-Smith and Bauer Ramazani, 2004). It dealt with asynchronous and synchronous Web-based communication tools, a facet of the Internet that I wanted to explore. Communication in real time fascinated me and I wanted to learn more about it, because it meant that I could be in contact with colleagues all over the world and gain knowledge from the shared experience.

What started as an 8-week teacher development workshop has brought us, almost four years later, to our community's first online convergence, WiAOC 2005, "Bridges in

Cyberspace". So much has happened and has been accomplished in these years. How did all this come about? How has it affected me at the professional and personal levels? That is what I will briefly cover in this paper.

Learn by doing

The spark that ignited my Webheads in Action (WiA) connection was the Syllabus and its 'hands-on' approach to different communication tools, some of which I had heard of, but had never worked with. The hands-on aspect meant that I would be exploring these tools in collaboration with peers and by manipulating the tools myself, the best way to fully understand them and grasp their applications to language learning. For a language teacher, or any professional, for that matter, to take the fullest advantage of what's out there in cyberspace, s/he must work collaboratively with others, because the online world is not just information. Above all, it is communication. And we need others in order to be able to communicate and interact.

What I learned and how I learned

Web-based communication tools can be asynchronous and synchronous. Asynchronous tools establish communication that is not live or in real time, such as email, discussion lists, course management systems, Web pages and blogs. Synchronous tools allow for live communication and interaction in real time, as is the case with chat and virtual classrooms.

1. Asynchronous tools

My first contact with the Webhead world was through asynchronous tools when I registered in the Webheads in Action Yahoo Group, got my first message from the moderator welcoming me, posted my intro, and uploaded my photo to the Photos section. It may not seem much at first glance, but it's often daunting for a complete newbie to these tools to engage in a totally new and unknown microworld that needs to be discovered step by step. In fact, these processes often require coaching and collaboration from peers, because they seem insurmountable on one’s own, and there's always fear of doing something seriously wrong. Belonging to a community such as Webheads in Action, which spreads worldwide, means that whatever the time of day or night, there is always someone 'just a click away' awake and ready to give a helping hand. It also means that members of a supportive community never feel alone, lost or helpless, and any barrier overcome is praised, resulting in a true sense of

accomplishment. This boosts egos and encourages community members to move on to the next hurdle.

The WiA teacher development workshop was set up in a YahooGroup, one of the easiest platforms available for such purposes. Though it has its limitations, it's practical both for beginners and veterans. It isn't an all-inclusive 'do-it-all' platform -- it needs to be complemented by external software such as chat -- but experience has shown that there are advantages to this, namely, getting familiar with other collaboration software and having diversified options.

As a very active member of the Webheads in Action, I learned about the potential of YahooGroups for teacher development workshops and course management through 'hands-on' exploration of its features, on my own and with the help of peers, by using it on a regular basis and learning from mistakes, as well as by giving feedback and exchanging experiences.

We experimented with other asynchronous course management systems (CMSs) available at the time: Blackboard, GEN VirtualU Open Course, WebCT, Nicenet and Delphi. This exploration and comparison showed that certain of these CMSs were more user-friendly than others and more appropriate for the objectives pursued. Dafne Gonzalez (in Spain), Susanne Nyrop (in Denmark), Nigel Caplan (in the USA) and I (in Portugal) carried out a group project, Team Blackboard, to be presented to the Webheads during a Sunday chat. This very basic page is a good example of the type of collaboration that was immediately generated in this community, in tune with the principles of social constructivism (Graduate Student Instructor Teaching Resource Center, n.d.) and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, or ZPD (Morris, 2002).

2. Synchronous tools

It is through synchronous tools that members feel so related and connected to each other in a community, the next best thing to being with them face-to-face (f2f). My first chat experience with the Webheads in Action took place at Tapped In (TI), which describes itself as "the online workplace of an international community of education professionals, students, and researchers [who] gather here to learn, collaborate, share, and support one another". This happened in Week 1 of the workshop, on a Sunday, the day chosen for the Webheads weekly online synchronous meeting. As I wrote soon afterwards:

> For someone who had entered a MOO environment for the first time only the day before and for a very short time, it was like being sent into outer space without ever having set foot in a spaceship before,

> much less having looked at its commands!... I felt totally lost and out of context,... completely uprooted. Probably like an E. T. would feel had he/it (??!!) just landed on Earth!... Concentrating on anything else was difficult... I felt I was in another galaxy! Alas, there were other people feeling totally lost and dumbfounded, just like me, which felt comforting! But, at the same time, there were very helpful and supportive members trying to guide the newbies, or taking them aside into virtual offices, explaining things, sort of letting them breathe or just get some fresh (virtual) air!... here was a warm group of people who immediately greeted and welcomed everybody as they came in, and tried to make contact. A closely-knit group of people, some going back a few years, who made 'newbies' feel 'at home', and were willing and available to patiently teach them what they had learned before us. That human and affective touch sure felt nice! (Almeida d'Eça, 2002)

This initial experience has helped me to always be very understanding, encouraging and supportive with first timers in any platform. It can be especially discouraging for newcomers to feel 'adrift', so it's absolutely necessary to have a hand reach out.

These weekly Sunday get-togethers at TI to explore new tools or just socialize greatly contributed to our getting to know one another and make lasting bonds and friendships that are part of the glue that hold us together. Another excellent tool for social bonding was Yahoo Messenger (YM), a chat environment much more versatile than TI because of two added features: voice and video. This meant that we could not only hear one another's voices for the first time, but also see one another live and in real time. How thrilling it was to start matching a voice to a name and then a face... live! Several participants bought their first webcams for the weekly chat on Sunday, Feb. 10, 2002. I still remember vividly that I saw Dafne Gonzalez (in Spain), Vance Stevens (in the UAE) and Michael Coghlan (in Australia) for the first time on my screen and heard them speak. It was a memorable day!

Since then I have better grasped the potential of chat both for teachers and for students through collaborating regularly with other Webheads and their students at TI and YM. I have seen how authentic chat can make language learning, and how much more motivating and enriching this process can become. Chat platforms that have both text and voice modes, what I call the "4 in 1" tool, greatly add value to language learning, because they allow for the practice of the four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3. Building a presence online

One of the simplest ways of starting a presence online is by creating your own Web page or blog. Several colleagues set up their first pages in GeoCities, as in the case of Dafne's Nook, and it was interesting to see the different and sometimes 'shy' attempts of colleagues who

seemed to have a "Sorry, but this is all I could do!" attitude, as if we were all expecting a professional page right from the outset. Every achievement, big or small, was praised and considered an important hurdle that had been overcome. Any future progress was dealt with in the same way. Praising peers, giving them the boost to carry on and go higher up the ladder, as we do with students, is part of our community spirit that comes naturally to teaching professionals.

Though we discussed blogs superficially, we only got hooked on them a year later. I believe it had to do with the fact that Web pages were still more popular then, and people were not yet familiar with the ease and advantages of blog technology.

Community building online

The sense of "belonging to a community of like-minded peers" has always been very strong among us and is one of the essential characteristics of community building online. The starting point to gathering these kindred spirits is an interesting and motivating syllabus that constantly challenges participants to get involved in new adventures through hands-on creation of end products, as the Webheads in Action syllabus did. But a sense of community assumes other features, such as:

- a members page with intros and photos – they are the first way to relate to a face, a person and his/her work
- a constantly updated syllabus with personal contributions and feedback
- regular synchronous get-togethers, with or without an agenda, a major step in getting to know one another more closely
- an ever-present moderator who replies promptly to mail, answers questions, clarifies doubts, gives moral support or 'a pat on the back' that can make the difference between giving up or persisting ... in short, a moderator who doesn't leave the participants alone or marooned, but is there for them
- a moderator that promotes horizontal relationships by motivating participants to come to the foreground when they are more knowledgeable and have more expertise in a given area, thus generating valuable results and added value to the community.

Though a moderator is a key element in building a community, there would be no community without participants who accept challenges and feel thrilled with each accomplishment, big or small, be it his/her own or that of a peer. According to Vance Stevens, participants "make or break" a workshop (Optimal degree of control).

Finally, an effective and productive online community results from the convergence of several elements:

- common goals
- understanding of the objectives and tasks
- high motivation and curiosity
- prompt help and feedback from the moderator and/or peers
- teamwork and collaboration
- learning from one another
- the ability to learn at all times from critique and feedback
- openness to new ideas
- a warm and caring atmosphere and group
- a true sense of belonging, and
- close bonds.

Since joining Webheads in Action, I have experienced all this on a daily basis by involving myself, being committed to the group, feeling highly motivated and enthusiastic, praising and being praised, and making close friendships. And I have long understood that a learning process based on social constructivism and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development -- "the distance between the actual level of development as determined by independent problem solving [without guided instruction] and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Morris, 2002) - enhances learning considerably and makes our common knowledge greater than the sum of all the individual knowledge put together.

In the last two weeks of the 2002 Webheads in Action EVO session, after reflecting on how our online community developed, its characteristics, and all that we had accomplished collectively, individually and with our students in only two months, we felt that we couldn't end it all then and there and let each of us go our separate ways. So we asked ourselves, "Where do we go from here?" And we found our way: stay together, pursue our common path, welcome new members, explore new tools, collaborate with one another and our students, give presentations about our work, conduct online training workshops, and hold our first online conference-convergence.

How this has affected my professional & personal life

The Webheads in Action connection has affected me profoundly both at the professional and personal levels. In 2004 I felt confident enough, with the expertise I had gained, to co-moderate an online teacher development workshop and co-teach an online credited course. In addition to being an online teacher trainer and facilitator, I have since then presented and webcast on a global scale, all thanks to the Webheads in Action phenomenon, without a doubt a "healthy" virus that hasn't stopped "bugging" me!

Together with the Webheads I have explored and used many different types of Web-based communications tools that have led to different collaborative projects which contribute to sustaining a Web presence. Among these are asynchronous tools such as:

- blogs
- audioblogs
- photoblogs
- wikis,
- course management systems (e.g. Moodle),
- interactive maps
  - Have Fun with English! (Bravenet map)
  - BaW06 (Frappr map)
- voice mail (Tommy's message recorded with HandyBits),
- video mail

And synchronous tools such as:

- chat
- voice chat (6F & 6G),
- virtual classrooms
  - Alado
  - Elluminate at Learning Times (need to be a member).

Many of these tools are part of what is currently referred to as Web 2.0, "a second generation of services available on the World Wide Web that lets people collaborate and share information online" (Wikipedia definition of Web 2.0), to which Webheads were introduced before the tools and their underlying concept became popular.

1. Online Presentations

The impact of a community of practice on an individual participant can be a powerful influence on that member's career, as my own involvement with WiA illustrates. I can trace

my development as an experienced online communicator in a series of small steps that increased in ever larger strides made with the constant encouragement and collaboration of other Webheads. My first such collaboration project directed outside the Webhead 'family' at a wider audience of peers was a presentation produced for the summer festival in Tapped In July 2002 where Dafne Gonzalez, Susanne Nyrop and I co-presented Cooking lesson, a set of Web pages about preparing meals in our respective countries, which we discussed with festival participants in text chat.

Meanwhile we were all developing our audio chat skills using Yahoo Messenger and other voice and webcam instant messaging services. This led to my involvement in Case Study of a Community of Practice (Mar. 2003), our first major attempt at 'webcasting' (broadcasting over the Web) by a group of seven Webheads, some *in loco* at the TESOL 2002 Convention in Baltimore, MD, others online. In Nov. 2004 another group of Webheads in Action prepared different webcasts for the 6th International BelNATE-IATEFL Conference in Minsk, Belarus, under the theme "Teaching English as a World Language in the Information Age". Barbara Dieu (in Brazil), Buthaina Al-Othman (in Kuwait) and I (in Portugal) presented on blogs and blogging, and guided the participants at a distance in creating their own first blog. (I suggest a visit to our WiA Index under "Live Events" and "Presentations" for more examples.)

2. Online teacher development

After a year of intense collaboration and very positive role modeling by our coordinator, Vance Stevens, some Webheads felt ready to take their own first steps in e-moderation. That's when Rita Zeinstejer (Argentina), Susanne Nyrop (Denmark) and I (Portugal) got together to plan and co-moderate Week 3 of the Webheads in Action EVO workshop titled Online communication tools that facilitate interaction of participants in a virtual community and their role in language learning (2003). Our presentation concerned different aspects of e-moderation, namely,

- creating a warm atmosphere where everybody feels at home and confident to ask questions and raise doubts
- replying promptly to mail
- being synchronously available at set times for timely help
- giving guidance
- motivating and praising participants

- holding a collective chat.

The hands-on experience that we acquired that week and in the workshops from other Webhead colleagues gave me the confidence to suggest to Dafne Gonzalez that we hold a 'back-to-basics' workshop of our own the following year. Thus was born Becoming a Webhead, a 6-week online teacher development workshop to introduce newbie participants to Web-based communication tools and make them feel comfortable enough with these tools to join our mother community, Webheads in Action. The experience was so enriching and gratifying that two more rounds have followed (Baw05 and Baw06).

3. Online courses

The intense learning that went on at the individual and collective levels in the six weeks of our first BaW session gave me enough confidence to accept another challenge in the form of a second partnership with Dafne Gonzalez, co-teaching PP 104: Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar Online, a 4-week module that is part of TESOL's "Principles and Practices of Online Teaching Certificate Program". As with Becoming a Webhead, the session was successful and was followed by two other rounds in 2005.

4. Blended learning

When community members learn so much and use so many different tools in collaboration with other Webheads, the next step is to blend the new information and communication technologies in their f2f teaching. In my case, I wanted students to freely practice the language they were learning, away from class and from the constraints of the curriculum. A blog seemed like the ideal tool since I would post content that students could comment on and/or add ideas of their own. I started with Let's Blog! in the 2002-03 school year for three 7th grade classes (3rd year EFLers). However it didn't catch on as I expected because the students seemed to lack the "curiosity" that inevitably leads to discovery and learning. Since participation and collaboration were very slow, I created a graded project to be developed individually, outside of class and on paper, but with all the rules online, in the blog. This way I was sure to have most students, if not all, visit the blog at least once. Participation did increase somewhat, but never to the level that I expected.

The following school year I created the Have Fun with English! blog for my two 5th grade classes (1st year EFLers). However, I immediately felt that something was missing, since half of the students didn't have a computer or access to the Internet or email at home, and not all of them were using the computers at school during the breaks. And I did want **all**

students to have access to this exciting new world. Thus, a month later, I introduced CALL Lessons 03-04 with a different activity in each lesson and all students involved and working hands-on in pairs at the computer. The blog continued the following year and CALL Lessons 04-05 developed at a rapid pace: from interactive exercises to those involving voice mail, video mail, a mystery guest, an interactive map for guests, and two voice chats, we did it all. This success can be attributed in no small part to the fact that I always had the support and participation of Webhead colleague-friends, a strategy we implemented from the very beginning, which was very relevant to generating interaction with outsiders who became the students' friends. This meant that they were communicating with real people from the real world, beyond the four walls of the classroom, and not just with their teacher. This is one of the major assets of belonging to an online community of like-minded peers.

5. Peer collaboration: giving and taking

Giving and taking are 'must' ingredients in a community of practice. The Webheads in Action are "givers" by nature. **Giving** through collaboration with peers is in the true Webhead spirit at most any time of day or night, and giving time to work with one another's students has been one aspect of such collaboration. We have a long list of such projects in these four years. One of the first was Food discussion (Dec. 2002) with Webheads talking about "food" with Aiden Yeh's students in Taiwan. Buthaina Al-Othman (in Kuwait) was one of the first to use synchronous voice CMC techniques with students when she had her Kuwaiti-national lady students present their Final projects (Dec. 2003) online for a Webhead audience at the Alado virtual classroom. Guest Tutors (Apr.-Jul. 2005) was yet another interesting collaboration with students introduced by Dafne Gonzalez: several Webheads volunteered to give presentations on different bridges all over the world for her "English for Architecture" students in Venezuela. (Many other collaborative projects can be found in the WiA Index under "Courses".)

From the point of view of individual members, peer collaboration has also involved **taking**, or having friends collaborate with one's own students. Some examples from my own perspective include the Portugal-Poland exchange (Feb. 2004), in which Agata Zieba-Warcholak, a Polish Webhead, guided her young son and nephew in an email and voice email exchange with my 5th graders. In the BaW05-students exchange (Feb. 2005) participants in the "Becoming a Webhead" workshop interacted asynchronously with my 6th graders. In A Mystery Guest (Apr. 2005), Sharon Holdner in Boston collaborated with my

students on a project about finding out where in the world she lived and then learning about her city.

6. The face-to-face meetings

This intense collaborative work has inevitably led to f2f meetings that have been equally intense and emotional. And because our bonds are so strong, when we meet for the first time, we have the feeling that we have known each other all our lives.

There are many instances of these meetings, e.g.: Webheads in Action meet (Apr. 2002) at the annual TESOL conference in Salt Lake City; Teresa meets Webheads in Action (Mar. 2004) at the TESOL Convention in Long Beach, CA; and Teresa meets Dafne in Spain (Jun. 2004), a very special moment for me when I flew to Valencia, Spain, to meet Dafne Gonzalez, my online partner-turned-very-close friend, and to be at her Ph.D. dissertation defense. (For more examples, please visit our WiA Index under "Face-to-face meetings".)

Wrap-up

When new members join the group, the initial "Wow!" factor soon gives way to a "discovery" frenzy, which is healthily addictive and contagious in a stimulating way. Curiosity is constantly aroused through never-ending alerts to new tools and software. There's no better (and often no other) way to explore computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools than with colleagues who quickly become friends. Once they feel comfortable with the tools, participants often apply what they've "learned by doing" in their classes for the benefit of students, so there is constant transfer of knowledge. Involving students with a global audience and having them experience everyday language of the real world makes language learning authentic and the practice very similar to what they will experience in the working world.

Since my personal path has been similar to that of many other Webheads in Action, I hope to have shown through my example how members can develop professionally at a distance and what can be achieved in a group of like-minded and active peers for our own benefit, but above all, for the benefit of our students. Belonging to this community of practice has been the most exciting and fun way to learn how to work with Web-based communication tools and then apply them to language teaching and learning. In short, it's been the most motivating and fulfilling way imaginable to develop professionally and feel personally enriched. Only a small fraction of these achievements would have been possible without the support of such a group.

The Webheads in Action have infected many peers with a healthy 'virus' in the past four years. We hope to infect many more in years to come. We are very fortunate that as a result something is changing for real and for the better in the Education field on a global scale. I feel very lucky and proud to be a part of this fabulous community and to be a co-agent of change.

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- Cooking lesson http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/webheads/tisumcarnival2002/cod-recipe.htm
- Dafne's Nook http://www.geocities.com/dygonza/dafnes_nook.html
- Elluminate http://home.learningtimes.net/learningtimes?go=273662 (need to be a member of Learning Times)
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- Photoblogs http://teresadeca.buzznet.com/user/?id=926165
- Portugal-Poland exchange http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/school/fwe5-feb04.htm#news
- Potential of chat http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/school/fwe5-jun05.htm#21Jun05
- PP 104: Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar Online http://www.geocities.com/dygonza/pdc2004/pdc04-index.html
- Syllabus http://www.vancestevens.com/papers/evonline2002/syllabus.htm
- Tapped In http://www.tappedin.org/
- Team Blackboard http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/webheads/tutorials/bb.htm
- Teresa meets Dafne in Spain http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/webheads/meetings/teresa-daf1.htm
- Teresa meets Webheads in Action http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/webheads/meetings/tesol2004/photos1.htm
- Tommy's message http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/school/sound/tommy-voicemail.wav
- Video mail http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/school/fwe5-jun05.htm#21Jun
- Webcasts http://home.learningtimes.net/learningtimes?go=570543
- Webheads in Action meet http://www.geocities.com/dafne_gonzalez/tesol2002pics/index.html
- Webheads in Action Yahoo Group http://groups.yahoo.com/group/evonline2002_webheads/
- WiA Index http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/webheads/wia-index.htm
- WiAOC 2005 http://www.vancestevens.com/papers/evonline2002/convergence2005.htm
- Wikis http://baw-06.pbwiki.com/index.php?&doneLogin=1
- Wikipedia definition of Web 2.0 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0
- YahooGroups http://groups.yahoo.com/

Editor's notes:

This presentation was made as a regular session at the Webheads in Action Online Convergence on November 19, 2005. The session took place in the Alado Webheads presentation room. A recording was made and can be heard at http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/papers/wiaoc05/19nov05-alado-wiaoc05.htm or http://www.digibridge.net/webheads/tere.htm. There is an integrated page with a link to the presentation file and reference links at http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/papers/wiaoc05/wiaoc05_pr-integrated.htm

A full, but unpublished version of this article can be read at
http://64.71.48.37/teresadeca/papers/wiaoc05/fullarticle.htm.

ARE YOU ON THE PD CYBERTRAIN OR STILL HESITATING ?

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Introduction

Globalisation of the world economy, together with the Internet and rapid technological developments, have 'reduced' the size of the Earth, making means of communication both greater and easier, and knowledge more accessible to all. If we, the educators, do not want to be left stranded on the 'platform', ongoing professional development is essential as we enter further into the technological workplace and an information-based society!

Today's learners are often technologically savvy, as surfing the Net, sending SMS messages, text chatting with IM, voice chatting with VoIP such as Skype, and gaming are all part of their day-to-day lives. They are the Net generation or the Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001). Yet, in the traditional classroom, learners are being more enraged than engaged (Prensky, 2005) or just passive, because we as educators, have not all got on the professional development cybertrain.

What do I mean?

We all agree that technology should not be used for technology's sake, but we have to accept that recent paradigm shifts (Jacobs et al, 2001) together with new accessible technologies, the needs of the 21st century learners, and just-in-time learning (http://webphysics.iupui.edu/jitt/jitt.html) are changing the educator's role.

Branson (1999) suggests that the education system experienced a long period beginning in the early 1960's, in which educational performance remained static despite financial investments due to resistance to change within the educational system. We may be emerging from that hiatus with the technological breakthrough of the Internet. Treadwell (2005a) refers to the Book Based Paradigm as a time when the emphasis was on knowing and

books were the essential knowledge resource for educators. He uses the term 'Internet Based Paradigm' to indicate where the advent of the Internet, new technologies and increased bandwidth have forced a paradigm shift to a learning-centred environment, leading to rapid increases in learner performances and understanding. The illustration below (Treadwell, 2005b) delineates the educational performance (blue line) from the 1600's to 2015, showing a paradigm shift away from the teaching-centred model where the educator is the source of knowledge, to a more learning-centred model.

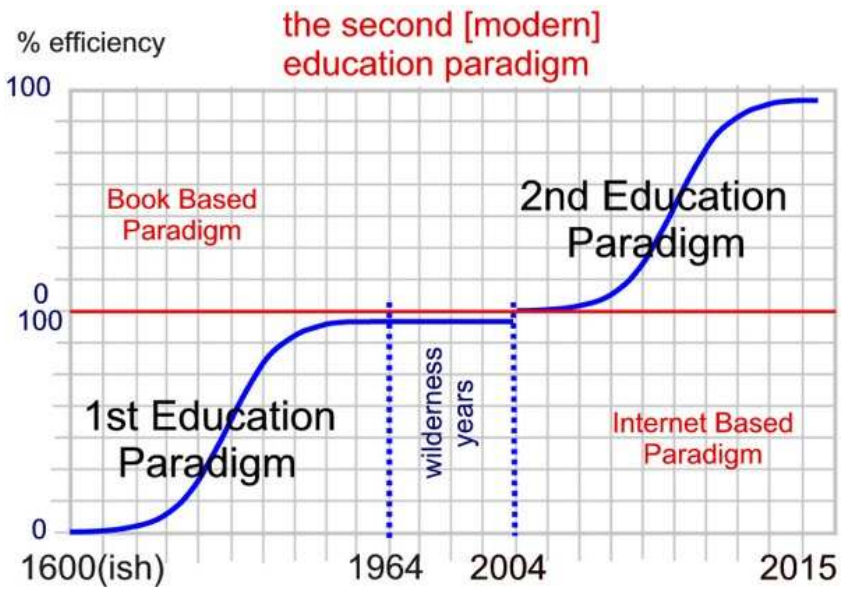

Figure 1. Paradigm Shift: The Second [Modern] Education Paradigm. Retrieved from http://www.teachers-work.com/archive_Nov_2005.htm.

In the following illustration, Treadwell (2005a) lists characteristics of an Internet-based paradigm, made possible through the integration of new technologies in a learning-centred environment, as opposed to the teaching-centred first education paradigm. Within this second (modern) paradigm, the educator guides the learner in integrating technological tools to explore the real world outside the constraints of the traditional classroom.

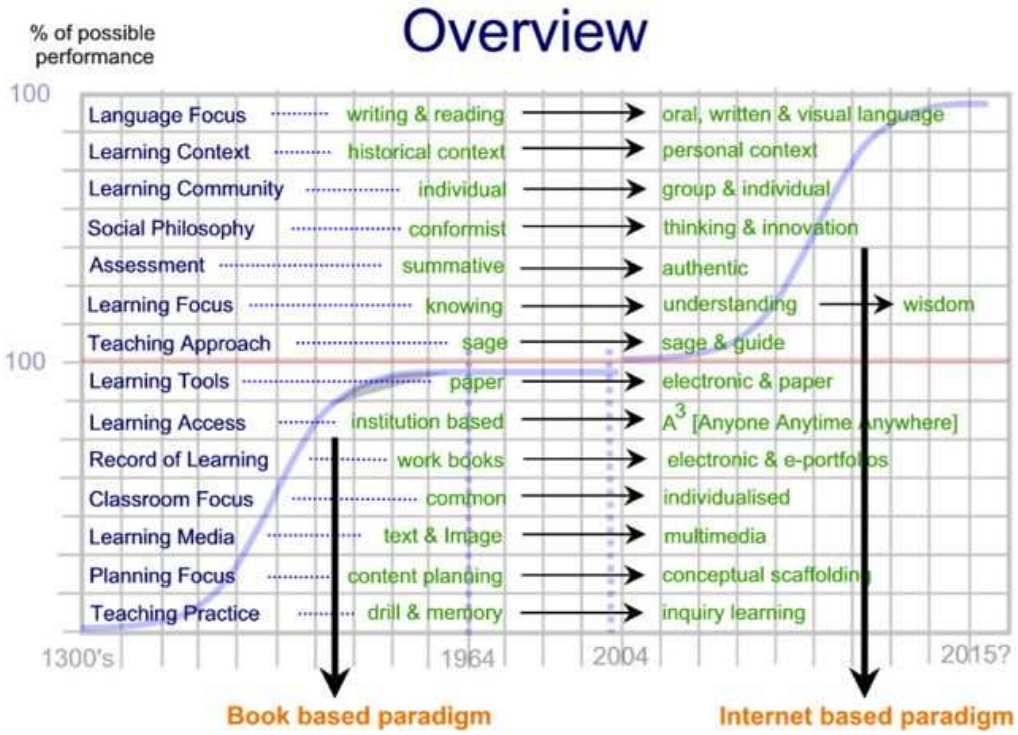

Figure 2. Overview: Transitions from Book Based Paradigm to Internet Based Paradigm. Retrieved from http://www.i-learnt.com/Paradigm_2.html.

All this suggests that in order to enhance learning-centred instruction within formal learning environments for higher education students and adult learners, we must carefully review how we plan, design and deliver our 'lessons' in order to engage our students in the learning process.

This becomes imperative if we take into account the recent IDC report (Anderson and Brennan, 2004) which states that "one third of learning occurs in a formal setting. The other two-thirds of all learning is 'informal' in nature and occurs either spontaneously as a result of incidental experiences or as part of an intentional search for a specific piece of information". Cross (2006a) states that it is even less, a mere 20%, finally resulting in less than 1% of behaviour change attributable to formal learning.

To ensure that we are providing the necessary set of skills for the 21st century Digital Native learners, educators must adapt an inquiry-based approach to engage them in interactive, collaborative learning experiences which are hands-on, task-based, and project-based. In this new teaching/learning through technology paradigm, educators are no longer the "sage on the stage" but become the "guide on the side" (King, 1993) as knowledge facilitators. By adopting this new role and making necessary transitions, we can develop

learners' high-order thinking skills through the careful incorporation of available technologies and guide learners to use vast amounts of available information wisely, both in and out of the classroom environment. Learners will then be better able to appreciate the relevance of their formal learning and expand and explore further in informal learning environments. In this way, we are also preparing more advanced learners for their future role in the global professional world and supporting the adult learners already in the workplace, by guiding them in online communicative collaborative tasks and projects, thus empowering the learners and encouraging autonomous learning.

Greater accessibility to metadata and knowledge banks, together with the evolving learning-centeredness of instruction and training, have also led to a shift towards just-in-time learning (JIT), whereby learners access the exact information required as they need it rather than just-in-case learning (JIC) which entails a different teaching approach. This implies a need for yet further professional development on the part of the learning professional.

A further element to be considered is the mobility of digital learners. As we accumulate online experience over time, it can now be observed that the traditional classroom has occasionally been replaced with a 'sit-in-front-of-pc' static learning environment, whilst in contrast, our learners have become an increasingly 'mobile' population, both physically and technologically. The illustration below classifies the mobility of technologies (Naismith et al, 2005). It is clear that different types of personal portable technologies are becoming more abundant and that mp3 players and iPods can be added to this cluster.

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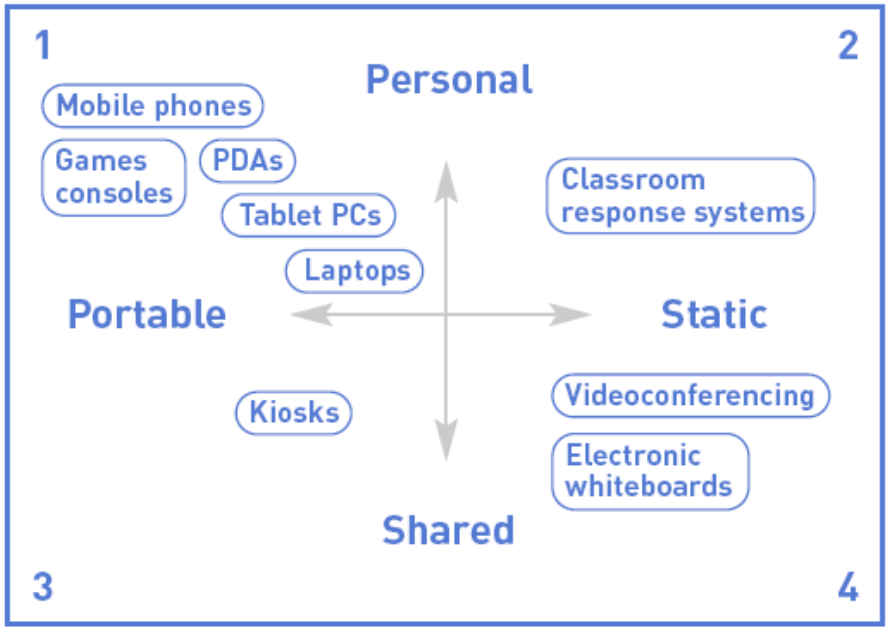

Figure 3. Classification of mobile technologies. From http://www.nestafuturelab.org/download/pdfs/research/lit_reviews/futurelab_review_11.pdf (p. 7).

As we come to realise the potential of m-learning for mobile professional adults and off-campus students, and the importance of 24/7 access, research- and discovery-based learning are essential to link the learning experience to the learners' formal and informal learning environments, without intruding upon the ownership or privacy of these tools (especially mobile phones) which 'belong' to the learners' social lives, and help shape their 'social identity'. Greater research is needed here in order to appreciate the benefits of m-learning. However, some innovative educators such as Tony Vincent (http://www.learninginhand.com) have already engaged today's learners using PDAs, Buthaina Al-Othman has been engaging her students using cell phones (http://alothman-b.tripod.com/tesol06_callis_acsession0316.htm), while others are focussing on Skypecasting, blogging, and podcasting (e.g. Stanley, 2006).

The need to integrate technology can only be established if the educators themselves understand and know what its potential use to the end-learners can be. Ongoing hands-on, experiential learning is therefore essential for educators' professional growth.

What do we need to attain this new role?

This new role assumes the following:

- access to new technologies;

- knowledge of these new technologies;
- training in these technologies;
- allotted time for course design and development;
- institutional support;
- collegial support;
- technical support.

Sadly, these requirements do not exist in most educational institutions for various reasons. Lack of finance has often been a reason, together with reluctance and resistance on the part of the educational bodies and colleagues to adopt new ways. Other factors include lack of training and time, teacher technophobia and poor choice of technology for the desired learning objectives and outcomes. Moreover, impediments may unwittingly be placed in the path of instructors who wish to use technology, as the following email exchange illustrates.

"Can these extra headsets be ordered with mics, please ?

Cheers,

Moira"

"Re: the ones with mics., could you explain please what you hope to be able to do with them?!"

Author Undisclosed

Figure 4. Authentic email conversation extract dated 09.03.06 between M Hunter and senior institutional educator.

Many corporations have been faster than academic institutions to recognise the benefits of new technologies and have adopted them to disseminate corporate training but have also often lacked the necessary pedagogical training to facilitate and foster an enriching online learning experience for employees, despite large investments in systems and programmes. Weaver (2002) posits that expertise is needed to ensure the success of online learning and offers advice to organisations to avoid the ten most common pitfalls leading to failure.

Whereas many educators are still desperately behind in adjusting and adapting their approach to meet the expectations of today's 'global' learners' some independent learning professionals have caught the cybertrain to catch up in their own self-directed development. In doing so they acknowledge the paradigm shift and become lifelong learners themselves in an ever changing, complex environment, sharing their knowledge and interacting in a networked world.

However, educators are often reluctant to change or to share their knowledge. Norris et al (2003) report that "academic knowledge substantially remains a cottage industry" and that "the knowledge ecology of colleges and universities will need to change if they are to move from a culture of knowledge hoarding to one of knowledge sharing".

Fortunately, some innovative institutions and individuals have been spearheading this 'new paradigm' for some time and have created banks of knowledge data and networked communities of learning and best practices, together with effective and ongoing professional development. We look now at some of the needs such communities address, and consider in particular, the accomplishments of one such community, Webheads in Action.

Educators need help to use new technologies and to feel comfortable in incorporating them in their long-term strategy and planning. They need help in instructional design and mentoring for online environments, together with online intercultural communication management. None of this can be achieved overnight with a one-off training input. It is an ongoing process in which educators must be guided, encouraged and motivated in a 'discovery learning' virtual environment, whether using asynchronous tools (such as blogs and podcasts) or synchronous tools (such as instant text chatting, or 'real-time' live online tools such as webcasts and videoconferencing). Varied and multiple opportunities must be sought out and explored in order to gain 'confidence' in the online environment. Educators need to exchange ideas, successes, and failures with each other, and try out different approaches to problem-solving tasks using different strategies and tools in order to appreciate the pedagogical advantages and disadvantages of using such tools.

Educators need to have the opportunity, time and funding (where necessary), to try and test different technologies with different approaches. Through trial and error, fine-tuning is possible and only once this occurs can the educator feel comfortable in incorporating this new approach for their learners, blending face-to-face with online learning experiences. With this level of comfort and confidence, educators can make 'on the fly' changes to their courses to optimise the learning experience and environment for 21st century learners.

How can these needs be addressed?

Where institutional and collegial support is partial or non-existent, cyberspace can be a very lonely place and can consequently lead to abandonment or failure on the part of the educator. As individuals, we must take our learning into our own hands if we want to catch the professional development cybertrain and embrace new life skills in a cycle of continuous learning!

As learning professionals, we must be aware of what can be done easily, with little or no cost and independently of an institution or corporation. We must be self-directed in our own professional development and seek out opportunities for lifelong learning. We must experience for ourselves what we intend our own learners to do.

Putting ourselves into the role of online learner is highly beneficial, as we can evaluate the positive and negative aspects regarding the environment, tutor support and availability, the tools used, course design and delivery, and online peer collaboration and community building within the duration of the course. The more online courses teachers can take as learners, the greater the insight which can be gained regarding the nature of best online practices.

However, this is still not enough, as courses have a lifespan, coming eventually to an end, at which point the asynchronous and/or synchronous communicative collaboration ceases totally, or at best, is substantially reduced. Furthermore, when a course concludes, the learning professional can often feel an 'emptiness' or 'isolation' from disconnection after experiencing an interactive, dynamic online learning experience. In addition, whilst bandwidth problems are being reduced in an increasingly globally connected world in which new technologies and easier to use products continue to appear on what seems a daily basis, it is becoming increasingly difficult for educators to remain up-to-date and current.

In order to sustain professional development, some element of continuity is required. Traditional settings may have a staffroom for this purpose. Online globally dispersed educators need a 'space' for continuous collaborative professional growth where experiences can be shared and learning can occur in a peer-to-peer low-risk environment.

What is a Community of Practice?

An ongoing, supportive online community of practice can address all these aforementioned needs and requirements. Communities have always existed in different countries and cultures and for different reasons. In the 21st century, the term community of practice was coined to refer to "the community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice" (see, for example,

Wenger 2006). This term does not apply only to work apprenticeships but to "learning on the part of everyone" within the community of practice. According to Wenger, a community of practice is a group of people who share the same passion and desire to learn about something, who come together to develop their knowledge about the shared topic of interest, and who then apply this knowledge to a practice. Wenger states further that a community of practice requires three elements: a domain of interest shared by all members, to which they are committed; a community in which members engage in learning and interaction together and, thirdly, a practice, whereby the members are practitioners and share their experiences, both good and bad, within the community. (A quick start-up guide to cultivating communities of practice can be found at Wenger, 2004.)

Today, learning professionals may be connected technologically but they are disconnected in their professional development. Siemens (2003) maintains that "the connections we make (between individual specialized communities/bodies of knowledge) ensure that we remain current" and that "these connections determine knowledge flow and continual learning." He further points out: "It's the connection to continued learning, not existing learning, that is valuable"

Johnson (2005), himself a member of the Webheads in Action online community of practice, distinguishes the virtual or distributed community of practice (DCoP) from the physical (CoP), as its geographically dispersed members communicate using asynchronous and synchronous tools in computer mediated communication (CMC). Johnson says that whilst the group's aim is to advance the community's collective knowledge, the knowledge of the individual is increasing at the same time, resulting in ongoing opportunities to learn from one another. The non-hierarchical informal structure, which is self-organising and self-governing, evolves constantly as new members, both expert and novice, join the core members and participate to a greater or lesser degree of engaged activity. This informal environment encourages the transfer of implicit knowledge via the frequent exchanges, developing human relationships and leading to formations of subgroups of learning practice. Whilst novices may require explicit transfer of knowledge in some areas, the open community enables a continuum of expertise, a rotation of experts whenever a specific need is voiced. This social scaffolding whereby the learning professional can learn with experts, rather than learning on his or her own, enables knowledge advancement and continuous innovation as members share their own knowledge. Johnson provides a comprehensive interactive overview of CoP Theory in the diagram below.

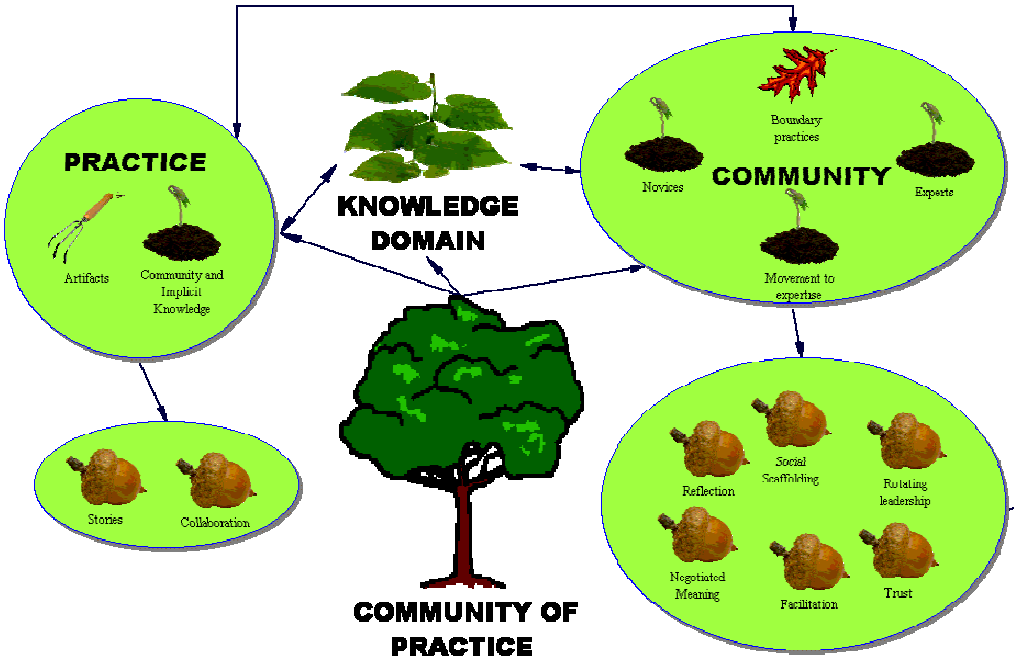

Figure 5. CoP Theory Overview (Johnson, 2002: http://sites.inka.de/~W3446/cop/sitemap.htm).

The building of such a community takes time to emerge into a social and collaborative environment of trust in which both experts and novices negotiate meaning, collaborate, facilitate peer interaction, and share learning goals. This environment emerges organically, leading to reflective learning which the practitioner can then transfer to the needs of the 21st century learner.

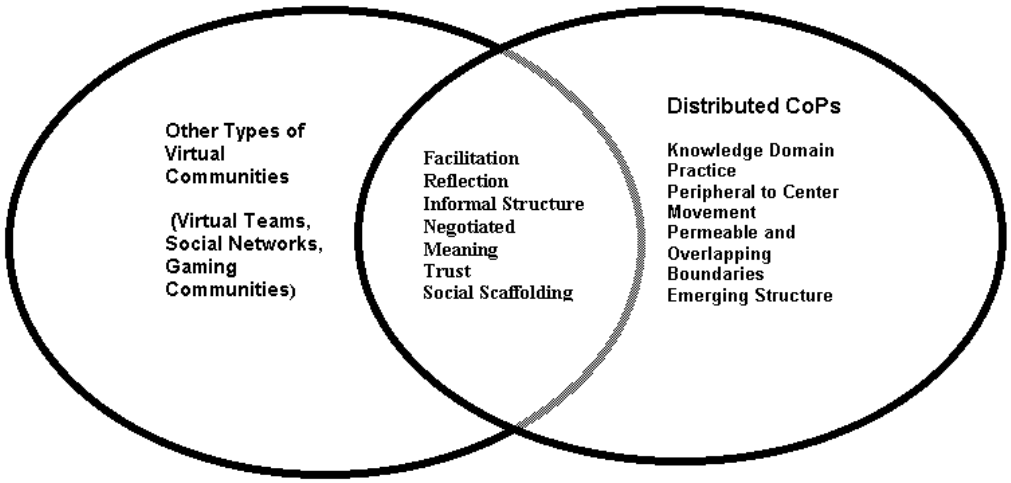

Figure 6. CoPs and Virtual Communities (Johnson, 2002: http://sites.inka.de/~W3446/cop/vc_cops.htm).

Communities of practice exist to provide the environment for educators to 'learn by doing', to seek advice from 'seasoned onliners' and networkers and find collegiality which is often lacking, even in large institutions, and where they can bring their own knowledge and be appreciated by similarly thinking educators and learn and share with others. Collaborative projects with learners and educators in different parts of the world can be organised to enhance the online cultural learning experience for both learners and the educators or 'co-learners'. Within a community of practice, learning professionals can nurture the pursuit of lifelong learning by creating and then sustaining an online presence where experiences are shared and learning takes place.

Webheads is such a community of online practice which addresses the needs of the educator's changing role in the Digital Age. The creators of this community in 1997-98 were Vance Stevens in Abu Dhabi, together with Maggi Doty in Germany and Michael Coghlan in Australia. What started as a writing and grammar online experimental class for students (http://wfw.webheads.info) has evolved into a thriving online community of educators with common enthusiasm and shared interest in exploring the uses of computer-mediated communication (CMC).

Webheads in Action

Webheads in Action itself (http://webheads.info) was created as a TESOL Electronic Village Online EVO session in 2002. Many of the members are language learning professionals.

Webheads is a community of practice which offers learning professionals, both seasoned onliners and novices, the opportunity to self-direct their professional growth in a supportive online environment driven by their own enthusiasm, energy, generosity, and the support of the resulting collaborative community.

The purpose of the community is to help learning professionals understand the potential benefits of the appropriate integration of available Internet technologies into their teaching practice by first experimenting and learning in a hands-on, low-risk online environment before engaging their own learners. A further purpose of Webheads in Action is the continual and ongoing discovery of free and open source Internet tools, such as, to name but a few:

- Yahoo Groups (http://groups.yahoo.com);
- Skype (http://www.skype.com);
- Nuvvo (http://nuvvo.com);
- Springdoo (http://www.springdoo.com);
- Docebos (http://www.docebocms.org/doceboCms/);
- Bubbleshare (http://www.bubbleshare.com);
- Vyew (http://www.vyew.com);
- Vaestro (http://www.vaestro.com).

A community, whether virtual or physical, needs a gathering place, where individuals can connect, interact, and collaborate in the creative learning process within the core community. Over the past eight years, this online gathering place has evolved for Webheads in Action with the emerging new technologies. Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), often referred to as 'the interactive Web' (Downes, 2005) in which users can create content and interact and collaborate online, has enabled members of the community to create their own learning spaces in the learning process. Web 2.0 technologies include wikis, blogs, podcasts, vodcasts, and other open, collaborative platforms such as:

- Drupal (http://drupal.org);
- Joomla (http://joomla.org);
- Elgg (http://elgg.net).

Other product name tools allow for collaboration, group member recognition, and knowledge sharing, all of which are given characteristics of a dynamic community of practice. Some examples:

- Writely (http://www.writely.com);

- Frappr (http://www.frappr.com/c/user/createamap);
- del.icio.us (http://del.icio.us).

Webheads in Action meet weekly in an informal setting using Tapped In (http://tappedin.org/tappedin) and also Skypecasts (https://skypecasts.skype.com/skypecasts/home), enabling group text chats and voicecasts, in which anybody may raise an issue or just socialise. Yahoo Group membership allows continual communication, enabling practitioners to seek advice, share experiences and resources, and set up student and cultural learning projects across the globe using Internet technologies.

Siemens (2003) suggests that learning communities should have different spaces for different types of learning and stages within the learning process (the major spaces are listed below). Webheads in Action is comprised of these very spaces, enabling members to learn, interact, collaborate, discuss, share, and trial in a safe, trustworthy low-risk environment.

> A space for Gurus and Beginners to connect (master/apprentice)
> A space for self-expression (blog, journal)
> A space for debate and dialogue (listserv, discussion forum, open meetings)
> A space to search archived knowledge (portal, website)
> A space to learn in a structured manner (courses, tutorials) (Siemens, 2003)

According to Kim (2000), the robustness and therefore survival of an online community of practice also lies in the variety of leadership opportunities which can be offered to regular core members. She argues that it is important for members to have their developing skills and achievements acknowledged by an audience in order to strengthen the sense of communal belonging. Webheads in Action, already extremely active with an important online presence, not only gave the opportunity to participate in the first ever online convergence to core members but also to non-members and near novices.

This virtual community of practice held its first completely free convergence from 18 to 20 November 2005 with volunteer support and practically non-stop back-to-back conference presentations. Webhead members were involved in the pre-convergence planning and organisation, the support and maintenance throughout, and the delivery which included online helpers during the convergence to ‘guide’ the visitors and the many presenters and co-moderators. Invited speakers included Curtis Bonk, Randall Davis, Joy Egbert, David Nunan, and Dave Sperling, all of whom volunteered their services and expertise. Webhead

presenters shared their skills, accomplishments and reflections with the online interactants, and it is important to note that nobody was paid.

It was a marvellous example of community spirit and professional development, offering participants a myriad of examples of best online practices and cutting-edge technologies being used by learning professionals throughout the world in an informal learning environment. Seasoned and novice onliners were introduced to tools, concepts, ideologies, and practices in an environment encouraging multi-tasking and risk-taking on the part of the participants. For those who 'dared' and followed as many presentations as possible, the experience was dynamic, thought-provoking, and beneficial, resulting in chaos navigation (to quote Sus Nyrop's term), skipping from one platform to another and sometimes between platforms such as Elluminate (http://www.elluminate.com), Alado (http://www.alado.net) and Worldbridges (http://www.worldbridges.com), with most participants having multiple windows open on the computer screen engaging in different text chats. F.U.N. or "Frivolous Unanticipated Nonsense" was certainly had during this extremely intense 'learning and discovery' weekend. Webheads supported each other mutually throughout the convergence, attending and interacting in each others' presentations, together with the participants. Recordings and details of the convergence can be found at http://schedule.wiaoc.org and can be perused at leisure.

Vance Stevens, the founder of Webheads, stressed in his wrap-up of the convergence that the community and the convergence was only possible due to the "reliability" and "dependability" of the Webheads, saying they "get paid in karma here". He re-purposed the term "cat herding" comparing Webheads to cats which are independent, powerful, and beyond control. He also stressed that being a Webhead means that "you develop skills" and "you use tools" and finally, "you have to do it because it keeps you employable".

Figure 7. "Converging on Bridges Across Cyberspace: The First WiAOC 2005" by Vance Stevens.

Many participants then took part in the most recent EVO Sessions (http://webpages.csus.edu/~hansonsm/announce.html) in January, 2006, where during six weeks, they explored further the technologies and pedagogical practices seen in the WiAOC Convergence. Hands-on experiential learning, academic reading, and discussions together with ongoing community building were the key points to these very intense weeks.

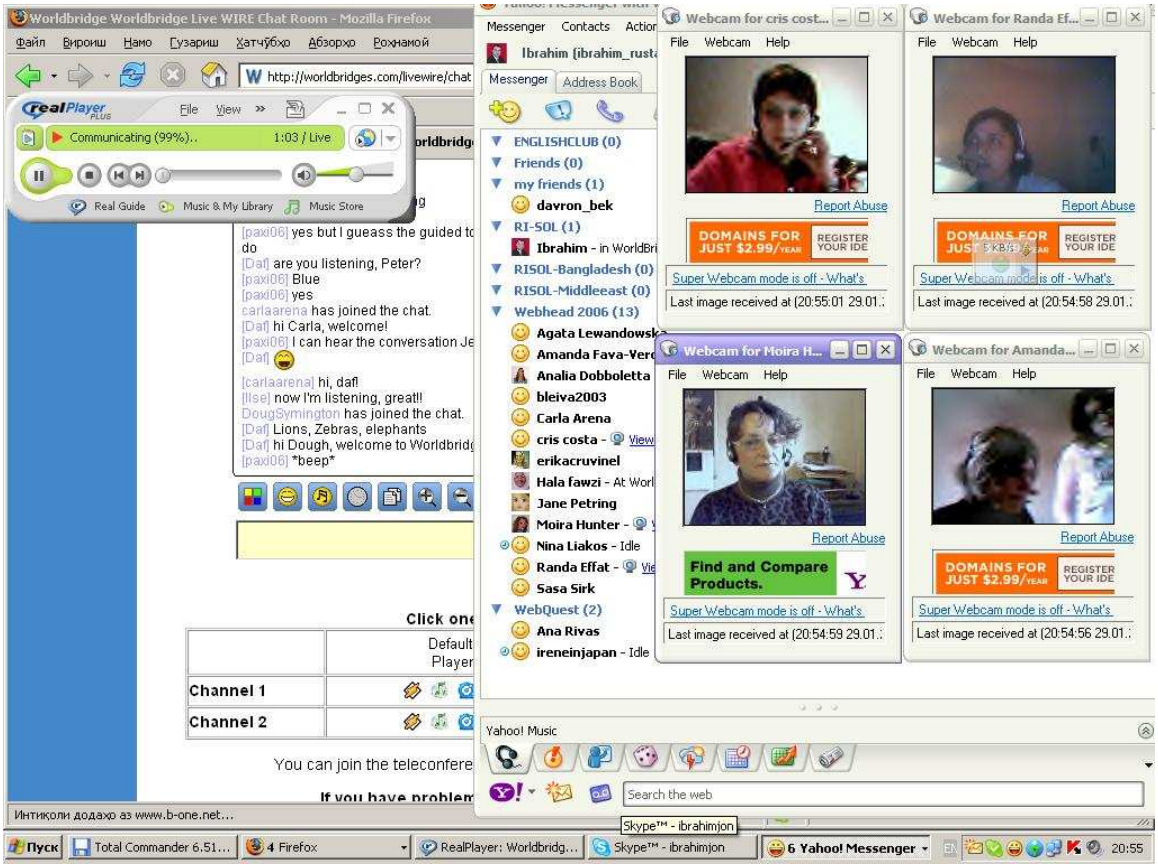

Figure 8. Hands-on learning and multi-tasking : EVO Session January 29, 2006 . Global Participants shown above : Cristina Costa (Portugal), Randa Effat (Egypt), Amanda Fava-Verde (England), Moira Hunter (France), Ibrahim Rustamov (Tajikistan).

Have you noticed how many new words such as “podcasting”, “vodcasting”, “learncasting”, “RSS”, “Web2.0”, “webinars”, etc. you must manually add to your word processing dictionary recently? We are in a rapidly changing world in which we, as educators, must keep abreast of change in order to be able to engage, rather than enrage, Digital Natives in their learning process. We must embrace lifelong learning ourselves and acquire new skills. Social networking, scaffolding and belonging to a robust virtual community of practice like Webheads in Action keep members connected and provide ongoing opportunities for collective and individual professional development.

Jay Cross (2006b) writes in his blog that “the informal learning train is leaving the station.”

Not got on the professional development cybertrain yet?

Still hesitating?

Don't !

Let's ride the cyberrails together!

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A WORD FROM A TECHIE

THIS IS YOUR CLASS ON WEBLOGS

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Introduction

Weblogs have come into their own as an educational tool (Downes, 2004), and are beginning to be used more often in ESL/EFL settings in a variety of ways. The Southern Illinois University Center for ESL program (http://www.siu.edu/~cesl), which caters to students of diverse nationalities, backgrounds, and technological experience, began using weblogs with its students in August 2004. Now, though technological skills are not thoroughly integrated into the syllabi of the program, every student who passes through the program leaves it with

a minimal standard of technological competence, thanks in part to their work with weblogs. For these students, the most profound change in their learning is simply that they are opening themselves up to public scrutiny at the same time they are learning English and learning the skills of finding sources of supporting material to link to and making the links appropriately.

It has been said that weblogs straddle a line between personal journal and public forum. They can in fact be used for other purposes as well. At CESL, each class has its own weblog, each student is asked to start his/her own, and teachers can ask students to put posts on either or both in presenting formal writing on the Web at the higher levels. Now they are used for many purposes, including displaying student research papers in online portfolios, providing venues for student announcements, contests, poetry and photography, and collecting student work for our online newsletter, *CESL Today* (http://www.siu.edu/~cesl/students/cesltoday/csltdy.html).

It's a major undertaking to put a program, or even a class, on the Web, but there are a number of good reasons to do it. In this paper I will discuss three reasons, and show how I have used weblogs in teaching at different levels and for different purposes.

Three reasons for using weblogs

Better integration into the target language community

The primary reason that I expect my students to publish their work is the value of that work in ultimately integrating them into their target English-speaking community. Kern and Warschauer (2000), in their discussion of sociocognitive approaches to CALL, say that

> A pedagogy of networked computers must…take a broad view, not only examining the role of information technology in language learning, but also the role of language learning in the information technology society. If our goal is to help students enter into new authentic discourse communities, and if those discourse communities are increasingly located online, then it seems appropriate to incorporate online activities for their social utility as well as for their perceived particular pedagogical value.

A crucial difference between students' publishing work on weblogs and preparing paper copies of finished work (they do that also) is that anyone can read the weblogs at any time, and people do. While most writing teachers hold the English-speaking world as the ideal, if abstract, audience of essays and research papers, those who publish on weblogs experience this audience first hand. If our ultimate goal is integration into an English-speaking discourse community, we have at least shown them one, and begun the process, in marked contrast to the private-exchange model, where a student's paper is seen primarily by one teacher (a

private reader) - who may, by virtue of knowing the student, be more tolerant of his/her writing weaknesses than the typical English-speaking reader, or their academic teacher.

Integration into a new world of inter-connected media

Second, it is important for students to become familiar with a weblog environment, both as a user and as a creator, learning the processes of searching for information and opinion on the Web, reading as much as is necessary to grasp a point, and making personal comments about what they've read. They become part of the new media in English, and blogging assignments start that process. Siemens, in his notion of connectivism (2004), argues that in the modern world being connected and knowing how to find information, is even more important than what we actually know:

> Connectivism is driven by the understanding that decisions are based on rapidly altering foundations. New information is continually being acquired. The ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information is vital. The ability to recognize when new information alters the landscape based on decisions made yesterday is also critical.

In many ways our students are ahead of us in this regard, as they recognize the place these new media are coming to have in their world, and they are for the most part eager to get started in using them. They are increasingly willing to explore and accept the sometimes subtle changes that these new media can bring to the way we see and are seen.

Lowering affective filters through forming collaborative relationships with language learning facilitators

Finally, orienting a class toward the public, as opposed to orienting individual students toward a teacher or toward a grade, has a profound effect on the teacher's relationship with the student, which can otherwise become adversarial in a subtle way. Whenever a teacher can be on the student's side in facing the hostile world, this helps to lower the affective filter within the class, and serves to help us keep the big picture in focus. Introducing the real world to the classroom from the start thus clarifies the target better than setting up a falsely comforting environment that is so different from the real world that the student can't transfer skills upon leaving.

Approaches to using weblogs

A wide variety of uses of weblogs has emerged in our program. In some cases, they serve to display students' writing, or their group or collaborative efforts, playing a minor role in a much larger effort, but nevertheless changing the nature of the assignment by virtue of making the result results published and public. In one class, for example, groups of students collaborated to make weblogs for their projects, one of which explored a series of violent deer incidents on campus (http://violentdeer.blogspot.com). The weblog itself played a minor role in the preparation of the project, which included reading, writing, and extensive interviews, but became important as a display venue for their finished work, and changed the orientation of the project toward that public display. While I am sure that more innovative approaches exist, I include two of the approaches I use with different levels of student writers in order to show some of the practical consequences of integrating weblogs into an ESL curriculum.

Weblogging at the lower levels

The lower to intermediate level reading/listening course seeks to develop students' conversational fluency and develop their ability to recognize and relate to basic English on the Web and in their environment. One goal of the class is for them to be able to use any appropriate medium: speaking, writing, reading, or browsing the Web, to get information that they need. Ideally they should be able to evaluate what they see or hear on the Web: i.e to make inferences about the people who make the pages and their purpose for creating them. Students should also be able to not just repeat what they've read, but also describe it, add to the discussion, and state and support an opinion.

In the more traditional part of the class, the reading-listening syllabus utilizes a variety of interesting discussion-starting topics. A good textbook, of course, can do this, but I also bring in side readings when I suspect that a tangent might be fruitful. Sometimes these are from the Web (I lead the topic toward the Web if I can). I try to stimulate interest; specifically, interest in the changing world. I then assign a weblog project that involves students' investigating a topic and reporting to the class, on the weblog, what they've found. They choose their own topics, and based on these I put them into two or three groups. I suggest where to start looking and I use the class weblog to point them to some possibilities.

Nelson (1991) argued that learners are more likely to acquire grammatical structures at the point at which they actually need them to communicate in real-life situations. Thus the effort that the teacher puts in to ensure that students are invested in a topic and want to communicate something about it is rewarded in the process of helping them communicate

successfully with the online community. I would argue that line-editing (correcting the grammar) in this context is both appropriate and necessary. I also orient students toward evaluating the sites they have chosen, as opposed to just gathering information and regurgitating it. They are asked to tell me about the page itself, what its purpose is, and whose side it might be on in any particular controversy.

Since the nature of weblogs is to systematically link to what the writer is referring to, I teach students how to link not only within the paragraphs that they write in their posts but in the templates of their weblogs as well. This entails learning some HTML, but this is usually not a problem for students, even if they come to the program with no prior experience. Projects produced to date have covered topics that the students have shown interest in, including

- "Paparazzi" (http://ceslae2.blogspot.com/2005_11_01_ceslae2_archive.html)
- "Carbondale Halloween and its accompanying violence" (http://ceslae2.blogspot.com/2005_10_01_ceslae2_archive.html)

The program newsletter which now appears online appeared in print form for many years. It was produced so that close friends, relatives back home, and those in the academic environment could read about students' lives and interests. Newsletters are attempts at authentic communication with a real community; however, the online version brings a number of changes to the traditional format. Though both formats utilize the same set of steps to ensure that students write about what they are invested in, what is put on the Web tends to stay there and is accessed more frequently than ink-and-paper issues. Accordingly, our assignments have become livelier, since students' writing is usually linked to their own weblogs as well as to sites they are discussing. Furthermore the prevailing awareness of "connectedness" is paramount when the articles themselves are linked to by readers, thus giving the newsletter more exposure. We've found it easier to track community interest in the online world than in the ink-and-paper world, though "interest" has to be inferred from "visits" - nobody knows how much is actually read (nor by recipients of a print newsletter for that matter).

Portfolios and higher level writing

In the higher-level writing class, goals include researching topics related to what a high-level content-based reading-writing class is studying; writing a number of essays and a six-page research paper, learning how to cite and refer to sources in an academic context, and refining academic writing style, grammar and usage so that entry into academic fields is mitigated.

Putting the academic essays, the research papers, and a variety of other work on the Web has brought numerous changes to the processes of the class.

The publication of the work on the weblogs is the last step of the process, and is generally done after all organizational changes have been made and grammar has been edited. The online essays must have spaces between paragraphs (or use an HTML workaround, if the blog host has eliminated the indentation, as Blogger does), must have references linked, and must be clearly marked as a paper that is part of our class. Abstracts for the research paper appear in the class weblog and are linked to the paper itself, so that, given a single subject (for example, Wal-Mart as a social issue, the subject of research papers in the January-March 2006 term), one can read all the abstracts together and find the papers themselves, one click away. Students who have passed the high level have, by definition, learned how to present formal academic work online, though their weblogs themselves may include earlier work, links to their home countries or favorite music, or pictures of themselves, their friends, or their pets. The presentation of their papers on weblogs makes those written works part of a larger presentation. Thus one side benefit of the use of weblogs is that participants develop a greater sense of community through this aspect of personal expression.

Perhaps the single most profound change brought by the use of personal publication in this academic setting is the resulting accessibility of these essays and research papers by the public, as well as by other students and teachers in the program. In the case of the Wal-Mart research papers, the class papers covered diverse topics related to the retail giant's entry into a small rural area, and the controversy surrounding that. The collection of research papers now stands as a relatively balanced view of the controversy, since students took both sides on the issue and did their best to write sincere appraisals of how our community should respond to this situation. Again, their integration into the target community has been furthered both by their essays playing a real part in the community's ongoing dialogue about an important issue; but also by the fact that, having done research on a timely and important local issue, each student now has a perspective to bring to community interactions, particularly their weekly grocery trips to Wal-Mart with friends.

A risk for the teacher is the fact that publishing essays implies taking a public stand on what exactly the standard "summary-response" or "argumentative essay" should look like, not to mention taking a stand on which kind of essay is indeed more appropriate or valuable for the ESL student, which itself is controversial. In our program we gave up assignments like "cause-effect essay" and "compare-contrast essay" in favor of "summary-response"

essays leading to a research paper. We put all of our serious work online, using APA (American Psychological Association) standards, and teachers hope that critical reaction will not prove their students unworthy in terms of meeting accepted standards of style, argument, or discourse conventions But even regarding the APA regulations, some of which may be controversial, ambiguous or in flux, we often find that identifying correct "rules," in order to make things "correct" for "publication," can be a daunting task. The fact is that personal publishing has made all publishing more common, and has in fact changed the definition of the word "publishing." APA regularly changes its standards for online reference and citation, but is hard pressed to keep up with the rapidly evolving styles and requirements of Web publishers.

The publication of all work has raised the stakes in the perennial battle against plagiarism, precisely because essays and research papers are published and remain online permanently. Even if we didn't publish, we would still make unique assignments, check sources, search out suspicious phrasing, or type such phrases into search engines. The publication of the work actually helps us reinforce the seriousness of the crime. In most cases that we see, the plagiarism was unintentional on the student's part, but nevertheless would have been published had we not caught it. We find that the student's link to the source used actually makes it easier for us to find this kind of plagiarism, since the link allows us to check the source fairly quickly, but even when the student has failed to cite the source used, copying the offending phrase into Google will often uncover its true identity. From the student's perspective, other students' online models of citation done properly are most useful in working out the way the successful paper should cite and refer to sources.

Conclusion

The practice of putting papers up on weblogs has made students' writing better, in part because the best models for students are often the work of others who have gone before. Our students may feel sometimes that they have an added burden of learning obscure technological skills in order to transfer files successfully across platforms and into weblog format. But they also have the benefit of viewing the work of students who have gone before them; and from these examples they can pick the models they like, or those of their friends they most wish to emulate.

The public aspect of portfolios has been a benefit to our program as well. Even when the product is less than perfect; the student weblogs show what we do, what we talk about, and what we teach. Student writing is authentic, sincere and often powerful. I support

making writing public because, in the end, the students' voices deserve to be heard, and they contribute well to the public discussion on any number of topics. The blogosphere, with its 24-hour spontaneity, its informality, its tolerance of youth and disrespect, and its developing social connectedness, is a good place for the work of ESL students and for their entry into the world of public discourse.

Students are free to delete their entire weblog the minute they leave the program, but they very rarely do. Once they get to academic classes, they usually struggle and are busy, and have very little time to do any traditional "journaling", let alone public journaling, but some do it anyway, using the skills learned in writing class to produce writing addressing less formal ends. A surprising number of people, upon encountering the new media with its interconnected participation, find themselves right at home with it. In the end, pressing the "publish" button poses challenges for each of us, and for the CESL program itself, but its rewards have made the pioneering effort worthwhile.

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Program URL's

- http://ceslstudents.blogspot.com - students' weblog, from which all classes are linked.
- http://www.siu.edu/~cesl/students/cesltoday/csltdy.html - CESL online newsletter, made entirely from weblogs
- http://violentdeer.blogspot.com - group weblog, showing collaborative project work
- http://ceslae2.blogspot.com/2005_11_01_ceslae2_archive.html - Paparazzi student project
- http://ceslae2.blogspot.com/2005_10_01_ceslae2_archive.html - Carbondale violence student project
- http://eap2045.blogspot.com/2006_03_01_eap2045_archive.html - Wal-Mart research paper abstracts
- http://eap2045.blogspot.com/2005_12_01_eap2045_archive.html - New York City environmental issues abstracts

Editor's notes:

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THREE WAYS TO INTEGRATE WEBLOGGING INTO WRITING CLASSES

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Introduction

Although weblogs can be private, viewed only by class members or only by teacher and student, these three lessons are designed for using them in their public sense: as dynamic, personal contributions to the personal publishing revolution. In these exercises students are joining with millions of others in publishing their thoughts on the Web, for an authentic audience that may or may not respond to their opinions. With the teacher's help, they can understand what they are doing, do it well, make presentable contributions and receive feedback from authentic readers, including their own classmates. As a class newsletter, the weblog community has the advantage of being more immediately connected to the sources of class material and sites of interest, more dynamic (offering opportunities for ongoing dialogue), more open to the general public, and more permanent in the sense that it is more easily accessed in the future, more likely to be read and appreciated later.

Class 1: Weblogging for intermediate students: creating weblogs, getting started

Rationale

This exercise started with the usual purposes of an intermediate reading core class: improved reading fluency, better ability to summarize what is read and express opinions about it; desire to begin and maintain ongoing discussion on some of the issues brought up by the textbook. Orienting the class toward the Web and specifically toward personal publishing on weblogs brought several advantages. Students learned and used new skills quickly and began writing in the new medium, linking to their sources, and linking to the class weblog and to each other's weblogs. The basic weblogging exercise puts their opinions to the front and allows them the confidence of expressing it successfully in a public forum, receiving feedback, and beginning to use their new language in ongoing discussion.

Objectives

The students:

- Learn to set up their own weblog
- Become familiar with processes of posting, editing, setting up template
- Learn to create links in weblog posts
- Become familiar with the Web and opinions expressed in the weblog community
- Write about sites while linking to them
- Post comments on each other's weblogs; participate in a small weblog community

Materials and teaching aids

Each student should have access to a computer with Internet connection. Teacher should have computer with Internet hookup and possibly a projector to show students how to proceed through steps. Teacher should set up model class webpage, remembering logon, password, and URL for future reference, and becoming familiar with process. Some hardware/browser combinations present problems; teacher should work through problems before starting.

Possible problems

Blogger or another host could be slow at a particular hour; connections could be slow; any particular student could start out almost helpless with mouse or with other computer basics. Students using IE on Mac often find that blogger will not allow them to set up a weblog on a computer that has already set another one up. Safari, Opera, and other browsers will,

however. IE also makes certain weblogs unsightly on Macs, perhaps as part of a war of intentional incompatibility.

In weblogging the temptation to plagiarise is great, and students are likely to copy phrases, sentences or even pictures from the sites they are visiting. This obviously is a teaching point. Appropriacy of borrowing material is discussed and integrated into the class.

Class profile

10-20 adult intermediate ESL students, from various countries and with wide variety of technological expertise expected.

First class: #1 Setting up a weblog

(Can be done in 30-minute segment of class; faster ones can help slower ones; can be combined with other assignments - #2 for example)

Students are shown the class weblog and prepared by being told, in writing or orally, about the process of starting one: establishing logon, password, weblog title, and URL. Optional handout may explain these and allow them to fill these in as they acquire them. Logon must be unique to blogger; thus, *mohammed* will probably not work, but *mohd4397* is more likely to. True beginners will not understand the concept of "URL" - this one, also, must be used to connect the class webpage to theirs once they have one. Finally, on blogger, they *must post something* before connections to their weblog will find it. As part of this assignment, we have them post a "hello" message.

#2 Weblog assignment: writing about websites

When they are finished with this, they are given the first assignment, which is to visit many websites and choose one to comment on. These are chosen by the teacher beforehand, are put on the class weblog, are often related to class discussion topics, and may be as hard or easy as the teacher wants. To encourage active exploration of the Web, the topics, and the links coming from them, they should be kept easy; if they are playing a more crucial role in the reading program, they can be hard. In any case, students can now click through them to choose one that they like. Their assignment is to write two paragraphs. The first paragraph describes the site, what it does, what it looks like, what it links to, etc, and will ultimately link to the site (I encourage them to start with "I visited _____" filling in the blank with the name (and/or the URL) of the site they went to; later, they can replace this with their own sentence that does the same thing). The second paragraph gives their opinion and why.

It can be their opinion about the site, or about the subject; it can be strong or weak, but it should be original and should be supported with their own ideas. It is a fluency exercise, like a journal, and is not intended to teach rhetorical structure; nevertheless it can be used as the teacher wants.

Second class: #3 Putting assignment on weblog, adding links to the weblog

This generally occurs a couple of class days after the first class, and can also take up only half of a class, preferably the last half, when access to a lab is secured and taking them there is not an issue.

Students had already been asked to write out weblog assignments on paper and bring them to class, using them as part of a speaking exercise (in pairs, explaining to each other what they have seen and what they thought), but this also is optional. In any case, before starting this, they are prepared with what they want to write, and what they want to link to. They have been reminded that they are responsible for remembering their own logon and password. At the computer, they log on to their own weblog, click on "Create Post" and type in their assignment. They are then taught how to link their first sentence, which, on Macs, requires a minimum of code, but on PC's requires only knowing and using an icon. The teacher should be familiar with this process before teaching it, and be familiar with whatever variation there is in the lab computers.

Students must master the difference between "draft" and "publish;" teacher can use "draft" to make grammatical correction as desired, or to have and record students' rewrites. Some teachers make a point to know students' logons and passwords, so that access is easier, or make students write drafts and final copies in common spaces, so that both teacher and student can comment and work on weblog material. Students obviously appreciate having published work be corrected for grammar, but the "draft" function need not be used to accomplish this end. Students will occasionally put everything in "draft," not aware that others can't see it upon entering their weblog.

Later classes: adding more assignments, dropping comments

Process repeats as often as possible; we find that, over time, students become more comfortable with the medium, and when all have finished putting assignments on weblogs, a weblog community exists. Thus, one can go to the class page and visit each student, reading as many weblog assignments as are finished and up, and commenting as desired. Comments can be required of students, and each post then becomes a site with a dialogue about a topic.

Form of work

Students will have their own weblog; it could have any name on top, according to their wishes, but is linked clearly from the main class weblog from their name or a name that they have agreed to. Thus each student can go to the class weblog, click on their name, and see their weblog. Each weblog will have entries consisting of two paragraphs each, the first one linked; entries will be short enough that classmates can and will read and comment on them.

Class 2: Weblog portfolios: putting essays and higher level work on the Web (high-level)

Rationale

While putting formal essays, abstracts and research papers onto weblogs may seem at first to be like wearing a suit to a picnic, in fact the blogosphere is a good place for formal essays and research papers. Since all writing is intended for authentic audience, actually having a permanent, authentic English-speaking audience for formal writing can be seen as a last step that should have been there all along for all writing that has reached publishable condition. Allowing it a permanent place in the blogosphere will give it a permanent place to be found, to be linked to, and to be read by the student, friends, family, and casual readers interested in the subject. In many cases argumentative essays arguing for social or environmental solutions can actually contribute to public argument and discussion, providing links to sources of interest and making arguments that need to be heard. Commitment to this last step is a leap of faith for the teacher, knowing that output of the class will be public and permanent. The stakes become higher in the ongoing war against plagiarism; students realize that in publishing they are putting their name behind their work.

Objectives

The students

- Learn to set up their own weblog (see class #1 above), become familiar with processes of posting, editing, setting up template; create links in weblog posts, link to references
- Write entire essays and research papers, following APA convention, but posting them ultimately in weblog portfolios, learning the art of online presentation
- Write abstracts, posted on class weblog, that describe and point to their own research paper

Materials and teaching aids

As above, each student should have access to a computer with Internet connection. Teacher should have computer with Internet hookup and possibly a projector to show students how to proceed through steps. Teacher should set up model class webpage, remembering logon, password, and URL for future reference, and becoming familiar with process. Some hardware/browser combinations present problems; teacher should work through problems before starting.

Possible problems

As above, connections can be slow or difficult; students may have platform compatibility issues, or have very little experience with online presentation. Some blogger templates have problems translating word files; others have problems when viewed through Mac/IE or other platform/browser combinations. This is an issue if students are working with a variety of platform/browser combinations within the same lab.

Using computers for every step of the process, including the final step of publication of essays and research papers on weblogs, means that students who tend toward shortcuts in their work are more likely to plagiarize - but are also more likely to be caught, if not by the teacher, by some future reader. Increased vigilance in this area is mandatory at every step.

Class #1: setting up weblog (see above)

Steps one and two can be combined, but it is best to give students fair warning and let them visualize what their weblog will look like; where it will fit in; how it will be linked, etc. This is where it helps that many students have gone before them; that there are a number of weblog portfolios already online with similar essays on them. Lacking this, the teacher might want to find or create a model portfolio so that students can have a model to work from.

Class #2: putting essay(s) on weblog

It is assumed that essays are similar to paper-and-ink essays, with one minor difference: references are linked to the sources themselves; paragraphs are in block style (weblogs customarily eliminate indentation), and separated by spaces; and the work of the portfolio appears in the body of the weblog, allowing the student to personalize and/or decorate the template (side area) of the weblog.

It is also assumed that publication is a requirement, but is not graded in and of itself; that at the beginning of this exercise, the essay is already graded and perfected to a degree that is satisfactory to both the teacher and student. Though drafts can be uploaded and changed while online, and even offer the advantage of remaining online for comparison purposes, generally it is not necessarily easier to grade and edit online work that is in the draft function of blogger or another server; most teachers are still more comfortable doing process revision in the paper form.

Students thus have a presentable version of their essay in a word file on their desktop, and are told to copy it and open their blogger account using their own logon and password, and click on "create post" and paste. Students are shown how to link references and to check them so that they point to the sources of the paper. Students are advised to put spaces between paragraphs and between references as necessary. Teacher works with individuals on online presentation or has more technologically adept students serve as online tutors.

If research papers are too long to be contained in a single post (this has never happened to us), they can be divided into parts, but with the last parts being posted first, so that the final post, the top or first part of the paper, is posted last and given the title of the paper. For archiving purposes this multiple-post research paper could present a problem, in that the title post must now either link to the other posts or show how to find them by linking to the entire month of the archives. This is necessary because, over time, the link to the weblog itself or to the top post of the paper may not provide immediate access to the remaining parts of the paper to the casual observer. Teaching students to check that their links, particularly to their own material, remain active and useful beyond the immediate class experience is part of the process.

Timing

Finished papers can be uploaded fairly quickly; teacher can use projector to show how it's done, how to edit posts, how to insert links, how to change template, etc., but individual problems will invariably be ironed out personally. More technologically adept students can help others when finished. This will often take the last 20-30 minutes of a class, depending on the size of the class, and lab availability/access.

Form of work

Online portfolios will have most recent essays and/or research papers on top; earlier work will naturally sink to the archives. Thus portfolios will provide longitudinal views of

students' writing development, though they may only show the finished form of each work, and not present to the public whatever editing or correction was done to each one. As an option, each portfolio will be linked to a class page, which will contain abstracts pointing to research papers, and will also contain links to the weblogs of the student writers in the classes.

Class 3: Collaborative weblog projects (high-level, mixed language background)

Rationale

These combine the benefits of collaborative projects in general with the benefits of online presentation of work as discussed above. In these the final goal is a single weblog that is devoted to an issue, and presents the combined efforts of a group, whether it be in the form of written summaries of linked articles, interview reports, collected links related to a subject, or even photographs taken and uploaded, all contributed toward exploring a single topic.

Objectives

Students will

- Read an article about their issue and report to group members about what they've read; and write a short summary-response about the article they've read, and
- Create weblog as a group project, based on their issue or subject; each student will put summary-response on that weblog and link their entry to the article they've read (see above).
- Set up interview with local expert on subject; write questions; interview expert, and provide report, both orally (to group members and/or class) and on weblog.
- Work with partners to improve overall image of weblog, so that, as a weblog that presents many perspectives on a single issue, it presents itself well, and explains what it attempts to do.

Materials and teaching aids

As above, each student should have access to a computer with Internet connection. Teacher should have computer with Internet hookup and possibly a projector to show students how to proceed through steps. As above, teacher should set up model class webpage, remembering logon, password, and URL for future reference, and becoming familiar with process. Some

hardware/browser combinations present problems; teacher should work through problems before starting.

This particular project is ideal for situations when fewer computers are available than there are students, because students can work together to create one weblog, and do not have to be all uploading at the same time. Work can be spaced so that limited access to computers is provided as each group is ready; others can be reading, writing/rewriting, or interviewing while some are uploading, editing, or adding links.

Possible problems

The traditional complaint about groups, that some lazy students may take advantage of harder-working ones, can be alleviated by grading individual entries. The advantages of groups are that the more Web-savvy students can help and even teach the novice ones; thus the weakness or slowness of the novice is not necessarily a burden to the group. Groups are known to lose their logon or password, or to have the main webmaster drop out of the class, leaving everyone in the lurch; these problems also can be alleviated with planning if they are foreseen.

As stated above, plagiarism is always a problem with student work and must be guarded against vigorously, as the work is published and may be read by anyone. The temptation for students will be to make their site prettier in any way they can; lifting of pictures without permission presents a big problem and must be dealt with squarely in the classroom.

Classes #1-5: the setup, the action, the display

The teacher's job here is to do some of the legwork to know whether certain issues will pan out in terms of having a variety of articles that students can read, or sites they can visit and comment on; whether there are local experts in the field, or if something is enough of an issue in a community that people are willing to talk about it and give varying opinions. We have done weblogs on a variety of issues but invariably the students have been given some choice and have done their work on a subject that all liked or at least agreed to pursue. Choices were provided at first. Higher level students can find their own articles, but these must be provided for lower level students.

Students should have something to say before using the "Create Post" function, but they will soon get used to doing reading, interviews, or whatever, and coming back, editing it, and posting it to the weblog. The advantage really is in other classmates and groupmates

being able to have access to the material, once it is posted. This is particularly useful for survey reports; if the group has asked many people a certain bank of questions, results can be posted to the weblog and then commented on as wished, later, by individual group members. The group weblog thus provides the group an online meeting place that not only collects and organizes their work, but also displays it to the public as a final step. Students should be familiar with setting up weblogs, creating posts, linking them, etc. (see above).

Timing

Collaborative projects are spread over many classes because students must do the work outside of class that is then reported on in the weblogs. Uploading, editing, linking and improving weblogs is an ongoing project that may take ten minutes per class of many separate classes, or could be accomplished in a single longer block, given that the content to be uploaded is prepared beforehand.