Text menu

the **IATEFL** | *Future* Events | *Past* Events | *CALL* Review | *Discussion* Forum | *Committee* Members
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Reports on Past Events

Last updated: 4 May, 2003

37th International Annual IATEFL Conference, 23-26 April 2003, at the Brighton Conference Centre & The Quality Hotel, Brighton, UK

Friday, 25 April

Network-Based Communication and ELT: Online chatting with classes

- **Workshop** by **Adam Edmett** (The British Council, Slovakia)
- Target audience: inexperienced teachers; adult learners
- SIG track: Computer
- Report by Geoff Taylor, St Clare's, Oxford, UK

This workshop used examples from two chat facilities developed by the British Council:

- **GlobalVillage** - limited to British Council students
- **LearnEnglish** (www.learnenglish.org.uk/adult_frame.html) open to anyone, no charge

Summary of content:

- Online chat can be synchronous or asynchronous, and provides the potential for unlimited communicative practice.
- Like face-to-face (f2f) communication, online chat offers opportunities for 'negotiation of meaning'.
- Online text chat involves special language features, e.g. short forms like 'RUOK?' and 'emoticons', and brings up issues of turn-taking and classroom management.
- For purposes of analysis and correction, transcripts of text chats can be recorded for later study.

Practical activities, similar to f2f activities, were suggested, including:

- roleplays, e.g. booking a hotel room

- questionnaires & surveys, e.g. free time survey
- topic-based discussions, e.g. traditional festivals
- task-based discussions & games, e.g. information gap activities (e.g. picture differences)

Future predictions

As for the future of real-time text chat, it was suggested that, with increases in bandwidth and the use of voice and video-conferencing software, text-based chat might become an anachronism.

Any comments? Drop all your fellow Computer SIG members a line at the SIG Discussion Forum.
(To join the Forum - open to all, and free - please go to the Discussion Forum page).

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Use of WebCT in content-based freshman course

- Talk by **Nazan Sabuncu** (Sabanci University, Turkey)
- Target audience: inexperienced teachers; adult learners
- SIG track: Computer
- Report by Geoff Taylor, St Clare's, Oxford, UK

Context:

The speaker works in a new, technology-rich university where each student is issued a lap-top, and all can connect (wirelessly) to the college resources from anywhere on campus. (Who is not jealous?!)

Summary of content:

The speaker described the use of a particular course management software (CMS) program, WebCT, which provides a Web-based educational environment. Other examples of this kind of software (unlike WebCT, free to use) are:

- **Blackboard** (www.blackboard.com)
- **Nicenet** (www.nicenet.org)
- **Topclass** (www.wbtsystems.com)

Features of WebCT:

Facilities to put a **whole course online** including:

- online calendar/weekly timetable, permitting public and private entries
- course assignment descriptions and due dates
- course material (including text, pictures, even audio and video, links to Web pages, interactive online exercises, attached Word or PowerPoint files)

(Available 24/7, so students have no excuse for not being up-to-date with course information.)

Facility to **create interactive exercises/quizzes**:

- can be timed
- students' scores can be emailed to the teacher

Facilities to **track student activity**:

- see how active students have been
- check who has done particular activities
- check students' scores on quizzes

Communication facilities including:

- group email: instructors can email group, students can mail each other
- discussion forums: permitting multiple 'threaded' class discussions
- chat rooms: good for one-to-one virtual tutorials

Why WebCT rather than a collection of free Web services?

- WebCT is a 'walled garden', secure, password-controlled, private, so strangers can't intrude, but students have access to all World Wide Web resources
- as email is only from students in group, easy to manage and keep records

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Integrating culture into the EFL classroom using the web

- **Talk** by **Hye-Ryun Kim** (Incheon National University of Education, South Korea)
- Target audience: not stated
- SIG track: Computer
- Report by Geoff Taylor, St Clare's, Oxford, UK

Description of study:

The speaker presented a paper describing a study done with pre-service teacher trainees in South Korea. The trainees were assigned group projects, which consisted of gathering cultural information from the Web, and presenting the results orally in English.

Conclusions from study:

The trainees were generally very positive about their part of this study. They found the research gathering and synthesising part of the exercise very useful, but having no/little previous experience in oral presentations, they found the oral presentation stage very challenging, and required assistance from the instructor. The conclusion of the study was that, due to the amount of authentic texts available on the Web, it was a valuable resource for integrating language and culture.

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Globalisation made easy by using authentic materials

- **Talk** by **Inas Kotby** (American University in Cairo & MISR International University, Egypt)
- Target audience: experienced teachers; adult learners
- SIG track: English for Specific Purposes
- Report by Geoff Taylor, St Clare's, Oxford, UK [Although this talk wasn't on the Computer SIG track, I think the use of the Web as a source of authentic material is of interest to Computer SIG members]

Summary of content:

The speaker described classes for university foundation students and business English students in Egypt, in which authentic materials culled from the World Wide Web were used, successfully:

- to provide really up-to-date case studies (for example, substituting out-of-date topics in economics textbooks for topics currently in the media)
- to expand the students' horizons about the world, in the areas of history, politics, culture and society (for example, the role of women in Middle Eastern societies)
- to improve the students' EAP reading and writing skills

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Communities of practice: easing the burden of online teaching

- **Talk** by **Gavin Dudeney** & **Nicky Hockly** (Netlanguages, Spain)

- Target audience: inexperienced & experienced teachers; adult learners
- SIG track: General
- Report by Geoff Taylor, St Clare's, Oxford, UK [Although for some reason this talk wasn't on the Computer SIG track, I think the use of virtual communities of practice is of great relevance to the interests of Computer SIG members]

Summary:

The speakers outlined the theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs), suggested software tools, and discussed possible applications. The talk was supported by an attractively-designed PowerPoint presentation.

Theory:

Following around a group of photocopy engineers, *Wenger* (Wenger, E. 1991) discovered that work-related learning occurred in informal group interaction, e.g. around the water-cooler/coffee-machine, rather than in formal training sessions. Wenger developed the idea of a community of practice: "a group of people who share an interest in something, and come together to develop knowledge around this topic, in order to use it in practice". The idea of an online distributed community of practice, communicating via the Internet, and meeting at virtual rather than physical "Schelling points" (= convenient meeting places for like-minded people) was developed by *Jones* (Jones, C. 2002).

Tools:

Asynchronous (delayed) communication tools, including:

- email
- listservs
- threaded discussions

Synchronous (immediate) communication tools, including:

- instant messaging
- chat
- video conferencing
- interactive whiteboards

Educational applications:

Learning in CoPs will:

- be constructivist
- include cognitive and social scaffolding (supports)
- target various competencies (linguistic, socio-cultural)
- involve creative practice.

Small CoPs can emerge spontaneously inside educational

institutions.

English language teachers can join self-development CoPs, including:

- the **WebHeads SIG** (American Mensa): http://www.dan.info/webheads/
- the **IATEFL Computer SIG discussion forum**: http://www.paddocks64.freeserve.co.uk/CompSIG2/list.htm
- the **ELT Dogme discussion group**: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dogme/

Further study:

The PowerPoint presentation used to accompany this talk can be downloaded at: http://www.dudeney.com/consultants-e/resources/DudeneyHocklyCoPs.ppt (949KB)

There is also a follow-up 10-question interactive quiz, allowing you to test your understanding of the talk at: http://www.dudeney.com/consultants-e/quiz/quiz.html

Further study links:

- Communities of Practice - TCM.com <http://www.tcm.com/trdev/cops.htm> by Eric Snyder
- Themes and ideas: Communities of practice <http://www.ewenger.com/ewthemes.html> by Etiene Wenger
- CPSquare "the community of practice on communities of practice" <http://www.cpsquare.com/> by Etiene Wenger
- Community of Practice References <http://www.learningalliances.net/CP_bib/> by John D. Smith

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MENU

Home page | CALL Review | Committee members | Discussion forum | Future events | Past events
Contact us | Search this site | Guest book | Web links | IATEFL home page
Top of page