

Reports on Past SIG Events

Last updated: 9 October, 2002

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March 15th, 1997, Manchester University, England

Introduction

The first Computer SIG event in 1997 was held at Bradford and Ilkley Community College and run by Tony Sibbons who works in the English Language Centre there. This session covered some of the main uses that computers are made of in the language classroom.

The next Computer SIG event was run at Manchester University on March 15th, 1997. The event was organised by [Gary Motteram](#), our former Co-ordinator, in conjunction with [BESIG](#). It was held in Manchester's well-resourced Humanities Building. The morning speakers were Peter Sharma ([Linguarama](#)) and [Mike Harland](#) ([Glasgow](#)). In addition, there were a number of useful workshops in the afternoon. The event was well attended and turned out to be a very interesting one.

We have received some reports on the sessions held during this event. To read them, simply click on the corresponding session from the list below.



Surfin' with Gary

led by Gary Motteram

The session was led by Gary Motteram who gave a brief outline of the World Wide Web. He drew attention to some of the differences encountered by teachers using this new medium. One that worried me a little was to hear that you might find a useful page and decide to use it with a class only to discover that the page has disappeared because a server is down somewhere. It seemed a good example how this virtual electronic world has a transient quality we traditionalists are just not used to.

We were the beginners and we climbed on our surf boards and started our trip at the Manchester University Home Page. The first wave carried us not very far, just to the IATEFL Home Page on <http://www.man.ac.uk/IATEFL/>, hosted by one Gary Motteram. This listed among other things, a list of TEFL related web sites. I just managed to slip in a bookmark on an interesting looking site called the **ESL Loop** before we were whisked off to the **Comenius** site at <http://www.comenius.com/fable/index.html> and soon became engaged in reading fables to improve our fluency. I was just about to look at the vocabulary help when we were off again, this time we were heading for Cambridge and the CUP site. Just to reassure us, we were given worksheets printed off screen from this site. CUP provide examples from their publications. How safe and secure we felt handling paper again! Then back to the electronic world but oh no ! Error messages everywhere.

Our trusty navigator had misplaced a dot in the CUP address and sent us all crashing down from the crests of our waves. Was this a craftily devised teaching ploy to instil the need for accuracy when keying in addresses of web sites, or had Gary himself got lost in this one? Judge for yourself:

[Click here](#) (See, we got it right in the end :-)

Very soon we rectified the mistake, climbed on our boards and set off once more. Feeling confident I tweaked my bookmark and sped back to the ESL Loop. From there it was but a short step to Japan to read an American teacher's account of his experience getting work in Tokyo. This looks interesting I thought, electronically leafing through pages on Japanese immigration procedures and some of the cultural problems for a new migrant to Japan. However, the author soon moved to his cross-cultural sexual encounters and the prose became decidedly purple. "She pressed me against the blackboard, I could feel her hot breath on my neck". Realising that there were 13 chapters still to go, I jumped this wave and headed back to the calmer waters of Comenius. The Ant and the Grasshopper - a fable for fluency. Now isn't that just the sort of text that my students would prefer ?

Reported by Geoff Shaw, Champion Bradford & Ilkley Community College



The use of CD ROMs in the ELT context

led by Diane Slaouti

Take a room full of computers, sprinkle over a good selection of CD Roms, add 20 keen English Language teachers, put in one enthusiastic leader and you can forget this is a rainy Saturday afternoon in Manchester.

Diane was committed to us finding out for ourselves just what is available at the click of a mouse. We were invited to taste and try

and evaluate. On my machine was a copy of Cinemania from Microsoft. With no instructions I managed to get underway after a few false starts. I found I was looking at an index of all the films ever made anywhere. selected Westerns from the Genre index, entered a key word Good and soon was looking at a still from The Good, The Bad and The Ugly. Read two short paragraphs by film critics, and scanned a detailed account of the plot, checked the biography of Lee Van Cleef, and gasped at the number of films he appeared in. What would EL students make of it ? Diane encouraged me to wonder. Well, they couldn't fail to find something to grab their interest, draw them in and invite them to struggle with unsimplified text.

I left my machine and went off to see what other participants had found. A group had formed around Longman's Grammar Rom. By now they were well into it and not happy. A page of grammatical information was followed by ten multiple choice questions with some flashy graphics for filling the gaps. Student feedback on their efforts - a big red cross if you fail, a big white tick if you succeed. A huge step forward in technology, two giant leaps backward in methodology. On to DK Multimedia's The Human Body. Someone was electronically dissecting a body and had stripped down the head. How are sounds made ? Click. Here's a cross section of the voice apparatus. ADI Schools had enthralling cartoon figures that commented on one's progress, went to sleep when you got tired - would definitely keep young children interested.

This was all I had time for before Diane brought us back together to look at Microsoft's Encarta. She displayed the entry in this electronic Encyclopaedia on the Greenhouse effect. Stills from a video clip were pasted into the word processor to generate worksheets that could support students as they listened to the voice over describing each step in the sequence.

Since most CD Rom reference material can be used in this way we realised that we were looking at an inexhaustible source of text and graphics. The rest was up to us. Much inspired, we returned to the common room to chew this over while tackling IATEFL's inexhaustible supply of cakes and biscuits.

Reported by Geoff Shaw, Champion Bradford & Ilkley Community College



Creating WWW pages

led by Alejandro Armellini

Alejandro managed to shoe-horn an amazing amount of information and number of demonstrations into a mere 60 minutes. Since all the participants were Web aware, we plunged straight into the essentials and some of the advanced techniques of html [Hypertext mark up language] - the code, or set of tags, that turns a word processed text into the glories that we access at the best sites.

Alejandro nimbly toggled between two OHPs and into and out of the growing web page he was constructing for us. Soon the methods of adding colour, changing font size and type, and linking to other sites, were made clear. Then for the enthusiasts who preferred html to tea and biscuits, it was our turn to type and tag.

An excellent presentation, backed up with a most useful handout listing tags and Web sites to visit for more tutorial help, and other WWW resources. Another session, please, to follow this up, with more hands-on time.

Reported by Tony Sibbons, The English Language Centre at Bradford and Ilkley Community College



Using the world wide web as a business English resource

led by Duncan Baker

Duncan's advocacy of using web based resources for business English is based on the tenet that the web provides available, up-to-date, authentic, and modifiable business resources that are relevant to the target learners. The data is "pulled information and not pushed."

Armed with a list of URLs for [The Financial Times](#), [British Petroleum](#), [British Airways](#) and [Railtrack](#) amongst others, we sallied forth to gather information for those stalwarts of business English: Report Writing, giving a Presentation, a P.R. campaign and preparing a travel plan for delegates to a conference.

Like any lesson, planning is essential and even more so for web based activities where the temptation to surf off on exciting, but irrelevant, bywaves is ever present. It was quite clear that Duncan had visited the sites he recommended; they were live and could deliver the information needed for the tasks. This checking can take a long time to do until the teacher has built up their own list of bookmarks for relevant reliable sites. A most interesting, stimulating and informative session, with lots of ideas for business and general English web based activities.

Reported by Tony Sibbons, The English Language Centre at Bradford and Ilkley Community College



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