

Integrating WWW, Multimedia, and Culture in ESL Classrooms

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Rationale

In recent years, computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools, including e-mail and bulletin board systems, have become increasingly popular in the second language classroom. Research proves that the use of CMC tools in English as a second language (ESL) settings can improve student involvement, increase student interest, encourage student participation (Kamhi-Stein, 2000), cross-cultural understanding (Cummins & Sayers, 1995), and promote reflection on and awareness of how to use language in social discourse (Cummins & Sayers, 1995).

Although computer technology has been recommended to ESL teachers, many think designing an ESL teaching website is not an easy task. The ready-to-use lesson plans and WebQuest¹ covered in one website² give ESL teachers the essential components they need to include in their websites and an idea as to what their future website can cover. Moreover, the website provides various comprehensible input and affective impact in order to increase ESL students' motivation and lower their affective filter (Krashen, 1995). Additionally, the theme of the website is dating customs that adult ESL students will somehow encounter, whereas the WebQuest combines math and English writing skills in order to provide scaffolding and opportunities for cooperative learning.

Basic Components of an ESL Website

Before introducing the basic components of a useful ESL website, educators or website designers need to know what features a good website should consist of. From the website visitors' point of view, a good website is one that (a) is useful and easy to follow, (b) has something they want, (c) does not waste their time, (d) is not irritating, (e) has the contact

¹ The WebQuest Page at San Diego State University. <http://webquest.sdsu.edu/>

² <http://www.PaolisEnglishWorld.com>

information, and (f) is updated regularly. The loading time of pictures or video segments should be considered as well as the factors mentioned above.

The basic components that a good ESL website should cover are: contact information and last updated date, and the pages to be shared online, such as the webmaster's information, various activities, or ready-to-use lesson plans. In addition, if information is adapted from other resources or authors, it is always safer to cite their work or link to the resources in order to avoid copyright violation. Moreover, links to useful sites for students are also strongly recommended.

Useful Tools for ESL setting

English language teaching has included the Internet in the last decade. The activities, therefore, have been changed from face-to-face to many features online; for instance, forum discussion, WebCT³, blogs/web journal, chat room, and instant messenger⁴. By participating in forum discussions or WebCT discussions, students are encouraged to address their opinions while their affective filter is lowered, especially for those who are least likely to participate in class. Therefore, students' anxiety can be reduced.

In addition to the online features mentioned above, several tools/software have been particularly designed for educators to integrate in their teachings, such as quizzes creating softwares: Hot Potatoes⁵ and Quiz Star⁶. Moodle⁷ is another popular tool being used as a course management system. It is designed to help educators who want to create quality online courses. Similar to Moodle, NiceNet⁸ is another online course management that educators use frequently.

³ WebCT is the world leading provider of e-learning systems for educational institutions. <http://www.WebCT.com>

⁴ The most popular and commonly used are MSN messenger, Yahoo messenger, and AOL Instant Messenger.

⁵ The *Hot Potatoes* enables educators to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering, and fill-in-the-blank exercises. <http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/>

⁶ QuizStar, similar to Hot Potatoes, is an online quiz creating tool that can include multimedia. <http://quizstar.4teachers.org/>

⁷ Moodle is an open course and free of charge. <http://www.moodle.com>

⁸ NiceNet is an online course management that allows educators create their own course that let students around the world to access their courses without physical barrier. <http://www.nicenet.org>

Things to Put Online

After learning the tools necessary to create a website that useful for students, teachers can consider the following features to include:

1. Links that are appropriate for your students.
2. Quizzes and activities.
3. Syllabus and handouts.
4. Homework assignments and sample tests.
5. Forum discussion or/and blogs/online journals.

Sample Websites

Several websites consist of online activities and useful lesson plans for English teachers to use, such as Dave's Café which actually covers more than what has been mentioned above.

Websites created by students are also good examples. The link⁹ that leads to the class offered at California State University, Los Angeles has student websites based on different themes and topics. However, in order to publish a website, register a domain name and find a web hosting service, there are two essential steps to take. It may sound complicated for those who are not familiar with publishing websites. The examples are:

- ◆ Dating Customs <http://www.PaolisEnglishWorld.com>
- ◆ National Parks http://instructional1.calstatela.edu/lkamhis/tesl565_sp04/moon/index.htmReferences
- ◆ Speech Act http://instructional1.calstatela.edu/lkamhis/tesl565_sp04/troy/stage.htm

⁹ TESL 565: Using Computers in the Language Classroom, Spring 2004.
http://instructional1.calstatela.edu/lkamhis/tesl565_sp04/

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