

Multicultural Societies. SEAMO Regional Language Centre. Singapore.

Edge, J. (1990). Mistakes and correction (Longman Keys to Language Teaching). Harlow: Longman.
Hyland, K. & Hyland, F. (2006). Feedback on second language student's writing. Language Teaching, 39 (2), 83-101.

Bio:

John Blake has taught English at universities and schools for over 20 years in Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong and the UK. His current research interest is corpus analysis of scientific research articles. <johnb@jaist.ac.jp>



Use a class blog to start your paperless classroom

Brett Milliner

Tamagawa University

Abstract

The potential of a paperless classroom cannot be achieved unless a context is created for collaboration and sharing of paperless content. A class blog is perfect for fulfilling this role. A class blog is free and easy to use and, more importantly, it gives students and teachers the opportunity to create and share paperless content. In addition, most blogs have a comment function, which allows

students and teachers to interact with their audience. To capitalize on smartphone ownership and encourage students to participate in real-time conversations, the author experimented with the micro-blogging software, Posterous® Spaces. This paper will share a brief report on experiences using the software at three Japanese universities, describe how students participated on their mobile devices, and reflect on questions and feedback received during the presentation at the 2014 Paperless: Innovation and technology in education conference.

Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in a homogenous setting like Japan provides one's students with very few opportunities to practice communicating in English outside of the classroom. However, the development of the Internet and computer assisted learning technologies has created opportunities for students to gain valuable experience interacting in their second language. The challenge for teachers is to find tools that enable these potentials to be realized. This paper is a reflection on the incorporation of the blogging platform, Posterous Spaces (<www.posterous.com>) into five university-level EFL classes. It will present student perceptions of the blogging experience, report on how students utilized their electronic devices, and discuss audience questions and feedback during the oral presentation of these findings.

Blogs in the EFL classroom

Bakar and Ismail (2009) identified three types of blogs generally found in the EFL teaching context. These include:

1. The tutor blog, which acts as an online notice board for teachers or tutors (e.g., teachers share reading texts or websites for personal study).
2. The learner blog, whereby students are responsible for designing and maintaining their own website which includes a regularly updated blog section.
3. The class blog, which involves the whole class working on a shared, online publication.

This specific study sought to evaluate the implementation of a class blog component. Figure 1, provides a summary of the author's motivations to start a class blog.

This study was undertaken between September 2012 and January 2013 in EFL classes taught by the author at three private universities in Tokyo.

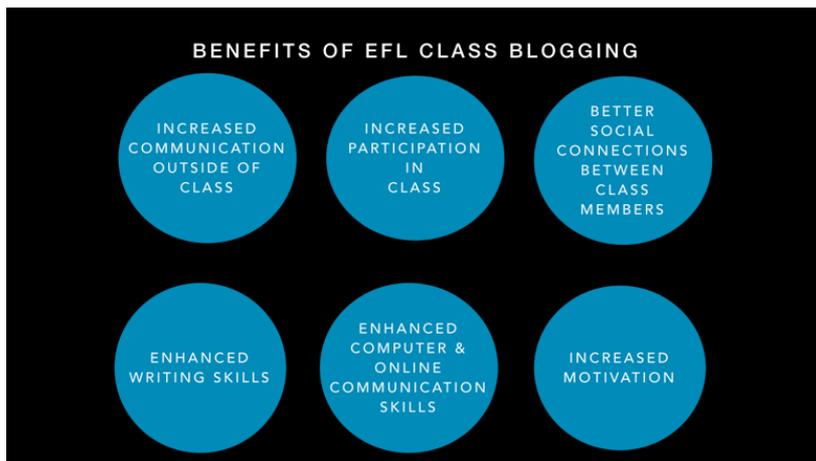


Figure 1: Possible benefits of EFL class blogging
The context

The total sample size was 92. Although there was a range of tasks completed by the students utilizing the blog platform, a required core task for all classes was to publish one blog post of 300-500 words every week, which included reflection on lesson content and two paragraphs on topics set by the teacher.

The research questions

This study attempted to respond to the following research questions:

1. How was the class blog perceived by students?
2. Did the blogging component motivate students?
3. How were students using technology to participate in the blogging component?

Although this project is part of a larger mixed-methods study, this paper focuses on student responses to an online questionnaire which students completed during the final class of each course. The survey instrument contained six items focusing on the use of technology, eight items asked about the blogging experience and three questions investigated whether the classroom blog influenced students' motivation for studying English.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the students' overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the blogging component. The most significant result was that 93% of respondents believed the blogging component fostered a closer relationship among class members. Many students also recognized this when they were asked to comment on the blogging

experience. For example, a first-year student noted, "the more we posted on the blog, the more our relationship developed".

Moreover, some students appeared to appreciate the public submission of homework. A female student replied, "I realized it's good to hand in homework using the blog. It's convenient and more importantly, I can see another student's blog, so I learned lots of things not only from my teacher, but also other students".

The blogging component also appeared to have a positive influence on the students' motivation. Eighty-six percent of respondents believed that being able to read their classmates' posts motivated them. Seventy-nine percent believed they made more effort on homework assigned as blog tasks, as opposed to homework simply submitted to the teacher. Receiving comments from classmates also appeared to have a positive effect on motivation. One student noted, "Any comments or 'like' from my classmates encouraged me to increase my motivation for writing blog entries".

Question	Yes%	No%
1. Do you think a class blog is a useful way to study English?	92%	8%
2. Is a class blog a good way to practice writing in English?	92%	8%
3. Did the blogging component enable you to improve your English skills?	88%	12%
4. Did the blog make the class' atmosphere happier?	93%	7%

Table : Student perception of the blogging component

To conclude, students had very positive perceptions of the blogging component. Blog tasks and blog participation also appeared to leverage students' motivation. The importance of these findings also deserves special recognition in light of the fact that the Posterous platform presented students with a range of technical problems.

Posterous' problems

Just after the study began, Posterous was acquired by Twitter. Slowly, technical problems emerged. Mobile applications stopped working, students would carefully compose a blog post only to have it disappear before their eyes and all requests for technical assistance went unanswered. These issues frustrated many students. One noted: "Sometimes I had trouble to post the blog from my

cellphone or computer. It made me annoyed". However, in spite of a range of technical problems students were able to finish the program with very positive perceptions of the blogging experience. Despite a host of technical problems when using the mobile application, close to half of the sample (44%) reported that they generally composed and read blog entries on their smartphones. This result suggests that any teacher who wishes to implement a class blog should consider a platform that allows students to successfully engage with their smartphones.

Discussion

Feedback from both the student questionnaire and presentation at the Paperless conference centered around two issues: how to encourage blog commenting, and the most useful blogging platforms. This study, like many others before it (Murray, 2009; Wolff, 2011), failed to generate meaningful blog comments among students. An audience member at the Paperless conference suggested that if the blog was staged in a format where students are used to commenting (e.g., Facebook, Google Plus or LINE) students might be more inclined to comment. For recommendations about choosing an appropriate blogging platform, audience members recommended, Edmodo, Edublogs, WordPress, and the social networking sites mentioned above. In recognition of the need to protect students' privacy as well as tracking and evaluating blog participation, the audience suggested education specific platforms (i.e., Edmodo or Edublogs), or blogs included in an institution's learning management system (e.g., Moodle or Blackboard), as these may be more effective.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the implementation of a class blog component into the curriculum for five EFL classes was well received by students. The class blog was a catalyst for strengthening bonds between class members and leveraging student motivation. A high number of students engaged with the blog using their smartphones, which suggests that teachers should be mindful of smartphone applicability when choosing a blog platform.

*The Posterous Spaces blogging platform was officially closed on April 30, 2013.

References

Bakar, N.A., & Ismail. K. (2009). Using blogs to encourage ESL students to write constructively in English. *AJTLHE: ASEAN Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 1(1): 45-57. Retrieved August 17, 2012 from, <<http://journalarticle.ukm.my/1481/1/kemboja.pdf>>

Murray, A. (2009). Student perceptions on the use of blogs in a writing course. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT2008 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT. Retrieved from, <<http://jalt-publications.org/recentpdf/proceedings/2008/E118.pdf>>

Wolff, G. (2011). Japanese university students use Content 2.0 online forum to share their views of the world. *The JALT CALL Journal*, 7(2), 195-205.

Bio:

Brett Milliner is an assistant professor in the Center for English as a Lingua Franca at Tamagawa University and lecturer in the faculty of law at Keio University. Brett's major research interest is mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and he is a regular contributor to Digital Mobile Language Learning (<<http://dml.jaltcall.org>>). When Brett isn't working he can be found surfing or moonlighting as a yoga teacher in Kamakura.
<milliner@lit.tamagawa.ac.jp>

