

**Title of Session:** Weblogs in English Language Teaching-Using Weblogs

**Moderator:** Bee Dieu

**Guest Speakers:** Dana Watson, Yu Hua Chen (Stella) and Warren J. Reagin

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Room: After School Online Room

**BeeD:** Our 3 guest speakers have started blogging recently and will share with you their personal experience

**BeeD:** and how they have used blogs in their classrooms.

**BeeD:** So my first question to you is how long have you been blogging and why/how did you start?

**BeeD:** Dana?

**DanaGst3:** I began blogging at the urging of friends when I went to teach in Japan after graduating

**DanaGst3:** from college. Mostly, I viewed it as a way to avoid having to send out the same mass-mails

**DanaGst3:** to everyone I knew every weekend, the way I had done during my semester abroad in Chile.

**DanaGst3:** Once I started, I was really glad I had done so, because I ended up with an excellent record of my time in Japan. It was actually fascinating to keep a blog while in Japan, because I found myself noticing a lot more than I think I would have otherwise, just so I would have something interesting to write about on my blog. I think I got much more out of my year there than I would have otherwise.

**BeeD:** so as to avoid emailing?

**DanaGst3:** Yup, mostly.

**DanaGst3:** I just wanted not to have to type the same things 8 thousand times.

**BeeD:** and you also posted photos

**BeeD:** and links to the places you had visited

**DanaGst3:** Not very often while I was in Japan, but more once I got an actual website in addition to my blog.

**BeeD:** Stella...how/why did you start?

**YuhuaStelC:** For I majored in CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) when I was attending Master course, I found Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can be very helpful to language learning, and therefore I did some research on it.

**YuhuaStelC:** Weblog was one of my research areas. I created a personal linguistic blog and a Taiwanese community blog; I have been blogging since then for about half a year.

**YuhuaStelC:** I am now testing how much learners can learn and improve their English proficiency (especially speaking and listening) from blogging experience. Most of our classes are held online; I only meet my students 3 hours per week.

**BeeD:** right....Jason...what about you?

**WarrenR:** After reading the article "Introducing your students to blogs" in "IATEFL's Issues," by Graham Stanley, I felt that it would be worth looking at blogging further. At the same time I was planning to attend an ELT conference in Beijing, China. The organizers asked if I would consider writing and presenting a paper. I saw the excellent opportunity to do both. I started my own personal/professional blog and then started writing. My article was later published in a Chinese-based ELT Journal. I have been blogging ever since.

**WarrenR:** That was in April of last year

**WarrenR:** I also wanted to find a way to mix IT and ESL in a more interactive way

**BeeD:** What advantages and inconveniences have you three experienced until now?

**DanaGst3:** In using blogs in general, or with ESL?

**BeeD:** first in using blogs in general

**DanaGst3:** When I first started, 3 years ago, commenting wasn't that prevalent, so I had to use an outside source. Blogging was much more for tech-proficient people.

**DanaGst3:** It did help me learn a lot about computers, though.

**DanaGst3:** Or rather, the internet.

**BeeD:** Yes..I had the same problem

**BeeD:** had to resort to Haloscan

**BeeD:** and tag boards

**DanaGst3:** And since I learned the hard way, I can help my students much more.

**DanaGst3:** Yup. I use Haloscan, too.

**AaronPC** nods

**YuhuaStelC:** I found it rather difficult to make the interaction going..if the teacher do not give them pressure

**BeeD:** Blogger has already added comments since...but no trackback

**WarrenR:** I have to use HaloScan for trackbacks also

**BeeD:** what level were you teaching Stella?

**SusanMar:** Sorry, what's Haloscan?

**JaninaT:** Uhhhhh...

**JaninaT:** Can I ask what Haloscan is?

**YuhuaStelC:** low -intermediate

**BeeD:** We will be seeing more of it in week 4

**DanaGst3:** Haloscan is a commenting service that you can add to your blog.

**BeeD:** Mariana mentioned it in the list

**YuhuaStelC:** learners are afraid of making mistakes...it's hard to keep their motivation

**BeeD:** any tips on how to improve on that?

**WarrenR:** Here are some pros to using blogs in your class;

**WarrenR:** 1)Using technology is exciting for the learner, 2)Because blogs are a form of publishing, the learner will be published, 3)It creates a forum for the learner to be an individual, 4)Teacher feedback can be given instantly in the form of comments or as a response to what the learner has written, 5)Gives the learner confidence and pride in their work

**DanaGst3:** My students are discovering the love of college-student slacking, so it's not only making mistakes that hurts motivation.

**BeeD:** I must say mine were very much excited in using them

**BeeD:** and they are much more worried about my correcting them

**WarrenR:** My students have been a mixed bag

**BeeD:** I mean...they want me to correct them

**WarrenR:** some like it and others don't

**AaronPC:** Mine worry a little about making mistakes.

**DanaGst3:** I agree with Jason, students can be very motivated at the idea of owning a site on the internet.

**DanaGst3:** One of mine last semester thought I was going to correct every entry.

**BeeD:** before they would just throw their copies into their bags and not even bother to look at them

**DanaGst3:** Exactly.

**BeeD:** now they publish it...and ask me to go over it...or leave it in draft for me to check

**AaronPC:** The exposure can make them more self conscious of it.

**BeeD:** not all obviously

**YuhuaStelC:** yes! I agree. they were very excited at first..and then several weeks, if teachers don't give them assignments to do..they just won't blog

**DanaGst3:** I made mine a standing assignment, with 3 entries every week required.

**AaronPC:** Jason...do you see any cons of using blogs in your classes?

**WarrenR:** the main cons would be to do with language

**YuhuaStelC:** but I think for people who are shy in class, they feel more comfortable to express themselves on the blog after class. I am really happy about this

**WarrenR:** some of them do not understand the instructions

**WarrenR:** and time constraints of the teacher

**SergeiG:** Yes, that's a big plus, Stella!

**WarrenR:** it takes a lot of time to check blogs and comments

**YuhuaStelC** smile to Sergei

**DanaGst3**: Especially if you have a big class.

**WarrenR**: exactly

**BeeD**: the time has been considerably reduced with the introduction of RSS

**AaronPC**: That's especially true here in Japan I think.

**YuhuaStelC**: Warren, do you mean check your students' personal blog?

**WarrenR**: I would imagine so (rss)

**WarrenR**: because my students are much younger I check their blog to give feedback

**DanaGst3**: It took enough time for me to check 8 students' personal blogs.

**BeeD**: feedback is important

**DanaGst3**: And I wasn't always giving feedback.

**SusanMar**: It seems that some of the student interest in CALL is due to its novelty, which gradually wears out, doesn't it? Even blogging

**BeeD**: neither was I

**AaronPC**: very important for keeping communicative flow.

**WarrenR**: I would agree with Susan

**BeeD**: but the feedback can be also part of their assignment

**WarrenR**: there is a certain amount of novelty

**AaronPC** nods to bee

**DanaGst3**: Last semester, I turned the assignment into a personal reporting project, so I try to emphasize what they are writing, more than the novelty of the medium.

**BeeD**: they can provide the comments

**YuhuaStelC**: I'm more focusing on 'the classroom blog'...do not always give comments to students' personal blog

**BeeD:** I think we are all experimenting with what works and what doesn't

**JaninaT:** Jumping in...

**JaninaT:** I think if you can get outsiders involved, and students commenting on each other, it reduces the workload of the teacher

**DanaGst3:** Exactly.

**WarrenR:** nods

**YuhuaStelC:** agree!!

**SusanMar:** Wouldn't even the teacher's enthusiasm wane after a while?

**BeeD:** The idea is to concoct an activity which makes them active and productive

**SusanMar:** Yes!

**BeeD:** and where they see the benefit or interest of it

**BeeD:** just saying blog

**WarrenR:** right, Beee

**SergeiG** agrees

**BeeD:** doesn't take you far

**AaronPC:** Or center it on their personal interests so that when the novelty wears off...they still have their bliss.

**BeeD:** exactly

**SusanMar:** Yes, I agree

**BeeD:** let them talk about things that interest them

**BeeD:** show you what they know

**AaronPC:** yes...that's the long term motivating factor.

**DanaGst3:** I actually managed to get 2 students to continue after the semester was over

**SusanMar:** But not everyone likes to share their private thoughts, don't you agree?

**AaronPC:** true Susan!

**BeeD:** it does not have to be that private Susan

**SusanMar:** In fact, I think some people aren't even interested in writing for themselves

**WarrenR:** I sometimes will allow my students to blog in their mother-tongue and English

**DanaGst3:** It doesn't have to be private thoughts. It can be opinions on the news, what happened in the day, whatever.

**YuhuaStelC:** I don't know how u design your materials...for EFL learners, I think designing culture-related material is pretty important

**BeeD:** I have found out that many of the students who did not blog much at the beginning

**BeeD:** ended the year with much longer posts

**YuhuaStelC:** I always need to spend lots of time designing culture related blogging task

**AaronPC:** I did that too Jason...my students liked it.

**JaninaT:** I'm thinking of starting my classes each time next semester with a speed write on paper...

**DanaGst3:** I think it is somewhat easier in ESL settings, because I can get them to blog about their cross-cultural experiences on their own.

**WarrenR:** you are right Bee

**MichaelGst5** joined the room.

**BeeD:** Could you expand on this Dana?

**WarrenR:** Aaron, I am planning to add this feature more

**BeeD:** Hello Michael, take a seat

**DanaGst3:** Sure.

**SergeiG:** speed writing.... Is it the same as freewriting?

**YuhuaStelC:** Dana, I saw your students' blog...pretty interesting it seems like u don't give them topics

**JaninaT:** Yes, I guess - 5 mins as many words as poss

**DanaGst3:** When I blogged in Japan, I was recording my experiences there, and what seemed interesting to me.

**DanaGst3:** So I hope that my students who have come to the US from Asia (mostly) will do the same here.

**BeeD** listens attentively

**DanaGst3:** I showed them examples of what I meant, like my blog, some other teachers' blogs, some students' blogs from before, and then

**SusanMar:** Yes, I checked it out, Dana, and it seemed interesting

**DanaGst3:** let them go.

**BeeD:** It would be interesting to read their impressions

**BeeD:** comparing and contrasting both cultures

**DanaGst3:** Some of my students have been very insightful.

**AaronPC:** Would be motivational to their peers back home in EFL classes.

**ChristinaT** joined the room.

**BeeD:** yes

**WarrenR:** nods

**DanaGst3:** Takashi from Japan last semester was really good, and now that he's back in Japan, he's still blogging.

**YuhuaStelC:** for my students are adults, I give them an article to read before class (eg. body language in different countries) then ask them to discuss

**BeeD:** Hello Christina

**SergeiG** waves to Christina

**WarrenR:** that sounds good Stella

**YuhuaStelC** say hi to Christina



**DanaGst3:** If I were teaching EFL, I think I would have to be more structured. I like the idea of responses to articles, etc.

**YuhuaStelC** nods

**BeeD:** Mine are teenagers

**AaronPC:** My EFL students like conversing on their blogs with people from other countries....

**AaronPC:** the response to articles is excellent too...

**WarrenR:** The motivation is different from ESL and EFL students, so varying the assignments would almost be a must

**DanaGst3:** Experiences just seem more intense and thought-provoking living in another country, so I assume my college students have more to say.

**AaronPC:** get them thinking cross culturally.

**SergeiG** I've posted a link to a very interesting article today on our wiki

**JaninaT:** Yes, that's a huge motivator. It's the first time for lots - except the teacher

**BeeD:** I saw that Sergei...very interesting

**SusanMar:** BRB

**YuhuaStelC:** ha~! I used to have a very difficult time 'searching for suitable listening practice' for my students... because I don't have a foreign accent..can't record my own voice

**BeeD:** Mine have interacted with other EFL students...from Italy

**AaronPC:** Jason.....

**BeeD:** and in July our Italian friends came to visit us

**WarrenR:** yes...

**AaronPC:** how do your young learners take to the blogs.

**YuhuaStelC:** Apart from using text-to-speech, anybody can suggest me something??

**WarrenR:** They took some time to get used to the idea that whatever they wrote was ok

**WarrenR:** they are so worried about making mistakes in writing

**WarrenR:** but now they are much more comfortable.

**BeeD:** Yes...we all suffer from this mistake-oriented tradition

**BeeD:** in teaching

**WarrenR:** because they are so much younger (age 9-11) I have them comment to my posts

**AaronPC:** It stifles creativity and voice.

**AaronPC:** mistake orientation that is..

**DanaGst3:** I've found that my students do better if I really explain the whole pedagogical theory behind making them blog (you'll think in English, it's good constant practice, you'll use more vocabulary that's important to you...)

**YuhuaStelC:** I still don't like my students to write anything they want, except for a story-creating task (cuz some of them just write something VERY SIMPLE...never to improve)

**DanaGst3:** Yup. Most ESL students are self-selected to want to improve.

**BeeD:** how to

**DanaGst3:** They came all the way here, so why not try?

**WarrenR:** Since my learners are much younger (grade 5) I have found that the more structure I provide the better (at first at least). I usually structure it like a normal writing assignment. I maintain the blog and they comment on the entry for that assignment. In the beginning I would talk them through the process, however, now (4 months into the school year) they are able to just surf to the blog and begin. I suppose it is like anything else, with practice makes perfection.

**BeeD:** show them they can write more?

**BeeD:** and better?

**BeeD:** this is our challenge

**AaronPC:** I can imagine how important that structure is...especially at first.

**WarrenR:** I have found that even my own written English has improved with blogging

**YuhuaStelC** agree!!

**AaronPC:** mine too!

**WarrenR:** so I can only imagine what it does for my students!

**DanaGst3:** With higher levels, I just turn them loose with certain requirements, and know that with the constant practice in addition to classwork, they will improve.

**BeeD:** Absolutely

**AaronPC:** that's for sure Dana

**SusanMar:** Sounds good

**YuhuaStelC:** so~ do u ask your students (young children) to blog at home?

**HollyJ** joined the room.

**WarrenR:** I have a set time each week that we use for blogging

**WarrenR:** in class

**BeeD:** It takes some time to get them into it...

**WarrenR:** but they are welcome to comment on their own

**BeeD:** but if you keep it as a long term assignment

**YuhuaStelC:** I can't do that...some students don't have computers at home..and some parents won't agree with that (for too young. parents don't like them to use the internet

**BeeD:** they will develop the habit

**AaronPC:** Interesting Stella

**AaronPC:** Jason...do you have this problem too?

**WarrenR:** that is true, Bee...and I agree, Sella

**WarrenR:** I do have that problem

**DanaGst3:** I would be kind of nervous about it in an environment where I wasn't sure everyone had a computer. I considered it in Japan, but knew my high school students wouldn't be able to all do it.

**SusanMar:** I have the same problem as Stella

**BeeD:** It takes some explaining like Dana said...of the benefits involved

**DanaGst3:** It works better if you know there is access to a computer lab of some kind.

**BeeD:** Those who do not have computers at home have permission to do it from the school library

**DanaGst3:** I think Jason's idea of a set time would work.

**YuhuaStelC:** I usually book a computer lab 1 hour per week and let them do in class

**AaronPC** agrees with Dana

**SusanMar:** That's a good idea, Stella

**AaronPC** smiles back

**YuhuaStelC** nods and blinks

**DanaGst3:** If they knew they would have a set time every week, they could do some preparation in advance.

**WarrenR:** I think that by developing a regular routine that includes blogging will be the fastest and the most longstanding in habit formation. If it is included at the most basic level of instruction it will lead to more students using it over the long term.

**DanaGst3:** Save up something really interesting, whatever, and it'd be more like a final draft.

**YuhuaStelC:** but the funny thing is...everyone just use 'one finger' to type...1 hour is usually not enough :P

**DanaGst3:** True, Jason.

**AaronPC** laughs

**DanaGst3:** Also true, Stella.

**SusanMar:** But I think the students maintain more interest when they're not limited to a specific hour or date

**BeeD:** Our participants are very silent ..any questions?

**WarrenR:** I would say that typing skills have a lot to do with motivation

**SaroltaG:** Do you integrate blogging in your assessment?

**YuhuaStelC** agree very much

**JaninaT:** For my students, basically the blog is their assessment

**DanaGst3:** Nope. I just give points for assignment completion. Blogging 3 times/week for the semester is 10% of their total grade.

**JaninaT:** I only have 1.5 hours a week, 40 students in a class, 13 weeks!

**YuhuaStelC:** yes. 'creativity' 'word written' 'number of comments'

**BeeD:** I do Sarolta...but not the same way as when I started

**BeeD:** I have a rubric I use...but must improve on

**AaronPC:** Me too...but include self assessment too.

**JaninaT:** OOOh Stella, I hadn't thought about making a word count part of it - good idea!

**YuhuaStelC:** linguistic aspects are not included in it

**AaronPC:** I like the idea of using a rubric Bee.

**YuhuaStelC** smile to Janina

**SaroltaG:** Setting the criteria is not easy, i guess.

**DanaGst3:** My students have a 5 sentence minimum, and plagiarized entries don't count.

**BeeD:** [http://members.tripod.com/the\\_english\\_dept/crit2.html](http://members.tripod.com/the_english_dept/crit2.html)

**SusanMar:** How different is blogging from journal keeping and logging?

**SaroltaG:** I like rubrics too.

**SusanMar:** Besides the novelty, and, of course, a wider audience?

**JaninaT:** Very different Sus

**JaninaT:** an!!

**SaroltaG:** Bee, that's great. Something to learn from. Thanks.

**DanaGst3:** I think blogging is like journaling, but with more awareness of the audience.

**WarrenR:** With Blogging, you can add links, photos, etc

**AaronPC** nods

**DanaGst3:** Less like logging, because you're more concerned with content.

**SusanMar** smiles at Janina

**WarrenR:** and people are free to comment on what is posted

**DanaGst3:** I have my students keep logs, too, but they are completely different.

**JaninaT:** And if you can get external visitors there... very exciting!

**DanaGst3:** Yup!

**SusanMar:** Yes, that's true

**AaronPC:** a journal that talks back to you!

**DanaGst3:** One student got people from Alaska!

**WarrenR:** it is great when my students read outside comments

**VennyS** joined the room.

**SusanMar:** But in the long run, do the students always maintain interest?

**DanaGst3:** Not always.

**BeeD** hugs Venny

**YuhuaStelC:** no~~~

**JaninaT:** Aaron featured one of my student's blogs on his blog and it made my student's year!!

**VennyS** bows and waves Hi to you

**DanaGst3:** But all we can do is offer them the opportunity.

**AaronPC** smiles

**YuhuaStelC:** hi Venny

**BeeD:** Venny is our genius behind the wiki

**SaroltaG:** nods

**SusanMar:** Right

**AaronPC:** Yes Dana and try to facilitate the process.

**WarrenR:** Anne Davis posted one of my student's posts and she was really excited

**AaronPC:** Hey Venny!

**SergeiG** shakes hands with Venny

**AaronPC:** Maybe as a community we should try to do more of that...

**JaninaT:** My student entered the speech contest at the uni as a direct result of enthusiasm got from blogging - really using English for communication...

**DanaGst3:** Like I said, I finally had 2 students continue on their own, after 2 semesters of trying.

**BeeD:** Graham Stanley was our mystery guest for a month

**VennyS** grins at Sergei

**AaronPC:** featuring student work from other countries on our blogs.

**BeeD:** and when they discovered who he was they were ecstatic...conversation flowed just like during breaktime

**WarrenR:** it makes a really big difference when the students see that they are not the only ones doing this...

**VennyS:** Dana, how many students do you have?

**DanaGst3:** Usually about 12-16.

**VennyS:** Dana, 2/15 is not bad!

**JaninaT:** I think the motivation may be stronger for students who have "studied" but never had the opp to use English...

**DanaGst3:** Thanks.

**SusanMar:** I agree, Janina

**YuhuaStelC:** Janina..agree very much

**DanaGst3:** I agree, too, but with those students you have to make sure they think of things to talk about.

**AaronPC:** Or get them involved in conversations....

**YuhuaStelC:** use blog=>to promote social equality

**AaronPC:** that is key for blogging.

**DanaGst3:** My lower level students want to use more English, but feel too limited in vocab to say what they want.

**AaronPC:** I like that idea Stella.

**WarrenR:** I agree Dana

**JaninaT:** But I think that's the beauty of blogs

**BeeD:** We're getting close to the end of our session.

**WarrenR:** my students are getting frustrated by not knowing how to say what they are feeling

**YuhuaStelC** smiles

**JaninaT:** My students are sooo low level but they find out they can say something (not much I'd say

**DanaGst3:** So like Stella said earlier, giving them a set topic each time might help.

**JaninaT:** And they are so thrilled they can do it

**DanaGst3:** Yup.

**BeeD:** I want to remind everyone that archives of these discussions are available here in the transcripts page and in Yahoo Groups

**YuhuaStelC:** give them some vocabularies and some readings to read before blogging ..very helpful

**VennyS:** for lower students, can we even give them a template?



**SusanMar:** Thanks Bee

**YuhuaStelC:** sometimes they just don't know 'what to write about'

**WarrenR:** for the low level students, you can see what I am doing <http://y5r.motime.com>

**WarrenR:** thanks Bee

**YuhuaStelC:** Venny...yes! I sometimes do that

**SusanMar:** I'm afraid I have to leave. Thanks everyone; it was all very interesting and informative!

**JaninaT:** I think you give them lots of choice and lots of examples

**BeeD:** Thank you very much for accepting to be with us today and sharing all your experience with us

**BeeD:** Next session will be at Learning Times

**SusanMar** waves goodbye to everyone in the room

**YuhuaStelC:** thank u Bee and everyone :P learn a lot!!

**AaronPC:** Thanks so much Stella, Jason, and Dana!

**DanaGst3:** You're welcome!

**AaronPC** claps

**DanaGst3:** It was fun!

**BeeD** claps

**YuhuaStelC:** u're welcome

**WarrenR:** not a problem, I learned a lot

**SaroltaG:** clap, clap

**AntonE:** Thanks very much!

**JaninaT:** Thanks too!

**AaronPC** smiles

**SusanMar:** Oh, and thanks Aaron, for "unlosing" me when I was lost in the reception room!

**JeanMC:** Thanks everyone. Very interesting. Merci Bee

**AaronPC:** sure thing Susan!

**SusanMar** waves bye

**WarrenR:** waves goodbye

**YuhuaStelC** wave bye bye

**AaronPC:** bye

**DanaGst3:** Ciao

**SaroltaG:** Thanks and bye-bye.

**AnneF:** Many thanks. You may have motivated me to start a blog for my technical students within the next couple of days!

**HollyJ:** Bye

**BeeD:** How's your moblog project going Anne?

**AnneF:** Still got lots of thinking time

**AnneF:** So thinking hard before the call gets published

**BeeD:** did you see the comment i left on your blog?

**AnneF:** and we know what criteria we have to meet

**JeanMC:** Bye; have a good day, or good afternoon, or good night

**AnneF:** Yes thank you. I will probably start a blog for them tomorrow!