

mELTing pot Extra Special SIGs Edition

face2face and Online

Getting the balance right



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October 2009

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IATEFL-Hungary

Editors: Mark Andrews, Anna Csíky
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Proofreader: Mark Andrews
Printed by: Artscan

Postal address: 1276 Budapest, Pf. 19.
Tel.: 06-20-574-8029
E-mail: office@iatefl.hu
www.iatefl.hu



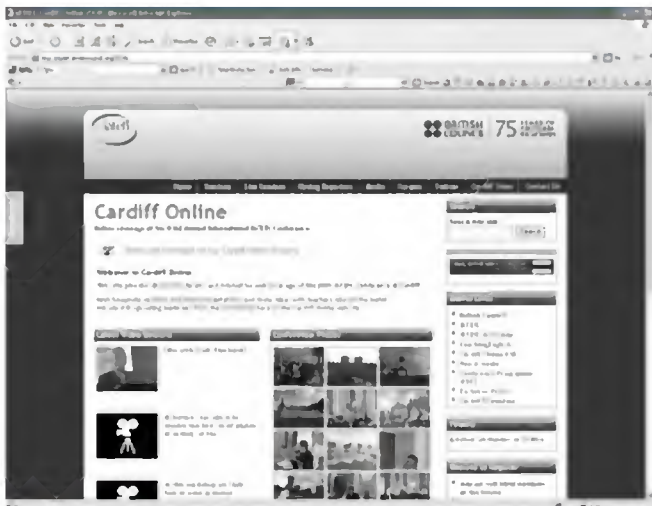
Mark Andrews

IWB: Interaction or Transmission?

Mark Andrews works as a teacher trainer at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) Budapest in the Department of English Applied Linguistics (DEAL). He is also co-ordinator of the Hungarian IATEFL Culture and Literature Special Interest Group. He has come to realise that inspiring, motivating and encouraging both teachers to teach better and learners to learn better is how he enjoys spending his professional time the most. He often gives talks at IATEFL conferences in the region and when he isn't teaching he is usually swimming in a lake, sea, pool or river or at a concert or chilling out in a Budapest Romkocsma (ruin pub!).

One of the wonderful opportunities available to us all now is to access the annual IATEFL conference in Britain online. Here you can watch sessions, take part in discussion groups, watch interviews with presenters and get a really good feel of the conference. For our magazine we thought it would be good to include extracts from a discussion on the use of Interactive Whiteboards. Whatever we think of them now, they are around and how to get the best out of them is a big ongoing issue. What follows are three posts from the discussion:

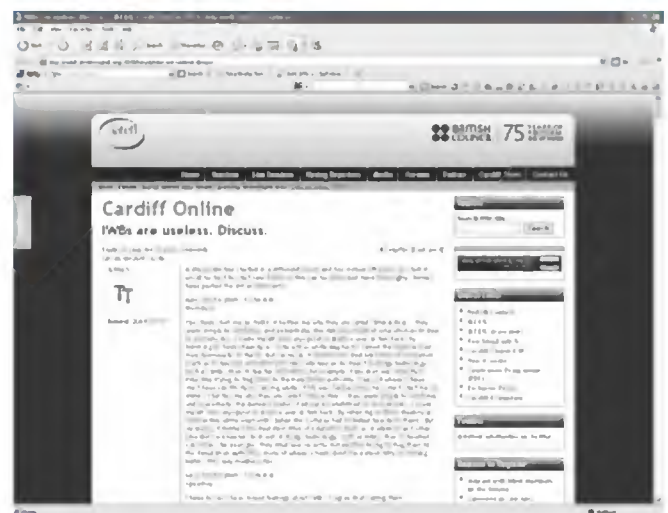
Cardiff Online <http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2009/>



IWBs are useless. Discuss.
<http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2009/forum/iwbs-are-useless-discuss>

Graham Stanley

Unfortunately, because they look deceptively like the old non-interactive whiteboards or even older chalkboards that hang in most classrooms and are actually quite useful tools for teachers, there is this assumption that no new training is needed. This assumption however is a bit like giving a soldier a rifle with a bayonet attached and asking them to use it like a



sword. It may bear some resemblance to the sword, and can be used in the same way (albeit not as effectively), but it's much more effectively used in other ways.

In actual fact, if a teacher uses an IWB the way you use any other board (i.e. just writing on it, filling it up with marks), then there's little point in it being there, other than the fact that you can save what you do and go back to it later. If that's the only thing the teacher is doing - that and using it to display Youtube videos - then the school has wasted its money. I suspect that the school hasn't spent any money or time training the teachers how best to use it either. And by training here I don't mean the tech training (how to switch it on, where to find the files, etc.), but a hands-on-practical-design-and-deliver-show-and-tell-observation-good-practice (phew!) one. Used creatively (especially when the teacher has actively used it in the planning process, and when it becomes just another tool that can be switched on and off, rather than a screen the learners are glued to), I'm convinced the IWB can add significant value to the learning process.

This debate about IWBs keeps cropping up, and as someone who uses and has trained teachers to use one, my first reaction



to the arguments was one of bewilderment. ‘How can anyone who’s used one, or who has seen one being used, be against it?’ (other than for cost reasons) is how I used to think.

Now, however, I realise better that bad practice abounds, probably due to the lack of training and/or lack of time for reflection on the part of the teachers who use IWBs in this teacher-centred and lazy way. Neither is the point of the IWB or the benefit of it best served by the ‘digitise the coursebook’ brigade. Fortunately, I do see moves by some publishers away from this towards a more interesting approach.

So, we do need to keep bringing this up and tell schools they are wasting their money buying these things unless they also spend on the training and deliver it as part of an integrated INSET programme to help teachers develop. The IWB may just look like a whiteboard, and shares 2/3 of its name with one, but it’s so much more than that and deserves to be treated like something entirely different.

Inca Perea

As an EFL teacher I try to use ANY method of imparting information and knowledge to my students, regardless of whether it is new or old. The important thing is to allow the students to learn, and using an interactive whiteboard (with or without accompanying software) can give language teachers more actual teaching time in the classroom by removing the need for cd players, dvd players or TVs.

I find it incredible that educated people can condemn this technology without weighing up the pros and cons - maybe they did the same thing when computers and the internet entered the classroom?

One problem for all teachers nowadays is motivating the students. Ok, ok, I know that a good teacher will always find ways of motivating students, but they live in a technological society and they are used to having this in their lives. Should we make the classroom a technology-free zone? No matter how good a course book is it will not capture the imagination of students like this technology *can*, when used properly.

The cost of this technology can be prohibitive, I agree, and teacher training is more important than technology, but how many of you know colleagues who groan when told that they

have to attend training sessions? And do they attend and give their full attention to the training itself? Investing in technology can be a safer bet for institutions.

As one older (and wiser?) colleague said to me when I started my first teaching position: ‘I won’t use computers or CDs in my classes, they’re just not relevant to teaching’. Hmm.

Scott Thornbury

IncaPerea wrote “As an EFL teacher I try to use ANY method of imparting information and knowledge to my students...” Ah ha! This is where we differ - not on whether IWBs are good at “imparting information and knowledge”, which I’m sure they’re VERY good at - but on whether EFL teaching is all about “imparting information etc”. I believe it is less about “imparting information” and more about “providing opportunities for use”. I like to think I can do the latter without forking out 2000 quid on electronics.

As I tweeted (twote?) recently, the debate about IWBs is not about technology, or about THE technology; rather, it opposes two views of language teaching: as delivery and entertainment (on the one hand) or as interactivity and socialization (on the other). (Dick Allwright makes a similar distinction, between “teaching points” vs. “learning opportunities”, and it all goes back to Freire’s polarity of “the banking model of education” vs “dialogic education”).

“Take the IWBs off the teachers and let the students control them” (Marc Prensky in an interview with Gavin Dudeney.

Back to me, Mark Andrews

It was a lively discussion and you can follow it yourself by following the link on page 14. I have just selected 3 of the posts that I thought were particularly interesting. It seems to me that the IWB, unlike the pencil traditionally, which had and has one basic use, is very much like the Greek Sea God Proteus, who was constantly changing his shape and who we get the adjective “protean” from, meaning “versatile”, “mutable”, and “capable of assuming many forms”. The word has positive connotations of flexibility, versatility and adaptability and I don’t see why we can’t use the IWB’s in flexible and versatile ways and not all the time of course! Just because they cost a lot at the moment doesn’t mean the way of getting the best value out of them is using them all the time.



“Because a whiteboard is typically immobile, visible to many, and easily editable, its uses in classrooms are presupposed. Thus, the whiteboard is usually placed at the front of the classroom and is controlled by the teacher. This location imposes a particular physical order in the classroom by determining the placement of tables and chairs and framing the nature of student-teacher interaction, since students often can use it only when called upon by the teacher. However, it would be incorrect to say that there is only one way in which whiteboards can be used. One has only to compare the use of a whiteboard in a brainstorming meeting in an advertising agency setting to see a rather different use of this technology. In such a setting, the whiteboard is not under the purview of a single individual. It can be used by anybody in the group, and it becomes the focal point around which discussion and the negotiation/construction of meaning occurs” (Matthew J. Koehler and Punya Mishra
Michigan State University.)

For a more academic but excellent discussion on the integration of technology into our teaching check out the article which this quote comes from Matthew J. Koehler and Punya Mishra 2009: What Is Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge?
<http://www.citejournal.org/vol9/iss1/general/article1.cfm>

In the end, I think we need to give teachers all the help, support and training that they need if they choose to engage with IWB's. Teachers shouldn't be bullied into new things that they feel uncomfortable with, on the other hand a supportive environment should be created where they feel they would like to find out more about these things and maybe try them out. The important thing is to avoid oversimplified knee jerk reactions but at the same time to be cautious of which new technologies can enrich our ELT pedagogies. Much of new software is driven by business contexts and what is appropriate for big companies might not always be appropriate for our English teaching contexts. It is our task to rise to these challenges and create a rich learning environment for our



children and our students to learn English better! And I'll give the last word to Gavin Dudeney.

21st century technology is about the 'prosumer' - the consumer / producer. It's about writing in various forms in various social communities, it's about sharing knowledge, chatting, exchanging experiences. It's about editing videos, adding soundtracks and voice overs, it's about engaging in meaningful dialogue with people, it's about producing podcasts, it's about.... well, it's about people and their needs, wants, desires and their wish to share them.



Tüندی Nagy



Szandi Tóth and Andi Jámbrík

**Hand over
the tools to your
students, let them
use their own
and never
underestimate
their abilities!**

**Never do anything
that you can get
your students
to do.**



Szandi Tóth



Livia Faragó

Teaching and Learning for the Present and the Future 21st Century Skills and the NING Classroom

Livia Faragó (MEd, Leeds) works as a practising primary school teacher of English, freelance teacher trainer and educational expert. She has been involved in several curriculum and materials development projects, runs in-service teacher training courses both in the Hungarian and in an international context. Her special interests lie in holistic approaches in education, teacher development, curriculum and materials design, school leadership and educational management. She is currently doing her PhD studies at ELTE University, Budapest. She is the president of IATEFL-Hungary.

This article aims at raising some challenges our profession faces these days, considering some aspects that can help us identify necessary skills to be developed in the 21st century and at sharing experiences with a tool that can be helpful to enhance the development of these skills in a stimulating way. The paper will give you an account of our work with a free community network called NING and consider several questions which have emerged during its use.

Challenges in education

Social, economic and technological changes on a global scale are challenging traditional forms of knowledge and educational practice. Change involves all elements of the teaching-learning process: learners, materials, applied methodologies and processes, the learning environment as well as the wider teaching context.

Schools and teachers need to cope with new challenges and expectations coming from different directions. Local and national authorities promote innovations and new initiatives to be introduced in the school system in order to enhance the level of student achievement and maintain accountability of schools. Moreover, disturbing voices keep coming from the workforce expressing that there is a significant gap between what learners learn at school and what is needed at workplaces today.

In the atmosphere described above, reflective teachers start wondering about how they should react to the various challenges and different expectations. Several questions might arise: How should we change? In which areas? Or to take one step back: what should we prepare our learners for? How can we prepare them for a future that cannot be foreseen? Children who start school this year will leave universities in about 2020 and we cannot even imagine what society they will live in then, what technologies they will apply in their future professions which may not even have been created yet. In addition to all this, we should not forget that the role of education cannot merely be to prepare learners to land

lucrative jobs as well as simultaneously assist them at being successful at them. Education should serve a much more holistic and universal goal which helps each individual develop and nurture their talents for both themselves and others to benefit from.

21st century skills

While trying to find my way out of the masses of questions like the ones above and investigating what different stakeholders expect schools to prepare learners for, I found that several institutions, non-profit educational centres and companies alike name similar skills as necessary skills that successful workers would need to possess in the future. These skills are often referred to as 21st century skills and they include

- Critical Thinking
- Creativity
- Teamwork
- Cross-Cultural Understanding
- Communication
- Technology
- Self-Direction

Items on this list might look familiar to English language teachers as they have appeared as elements of good practice for several years. This finding can be a relief for us. However, this list can give us an opportunity to take a fresh look at it and think about new ways of developing them in an integrated way using technology.

To start our systematic work with technology, I chose to create a virtual classroom called NING as it seemed to offer several opportunities to exercise and develop skills on the list above.

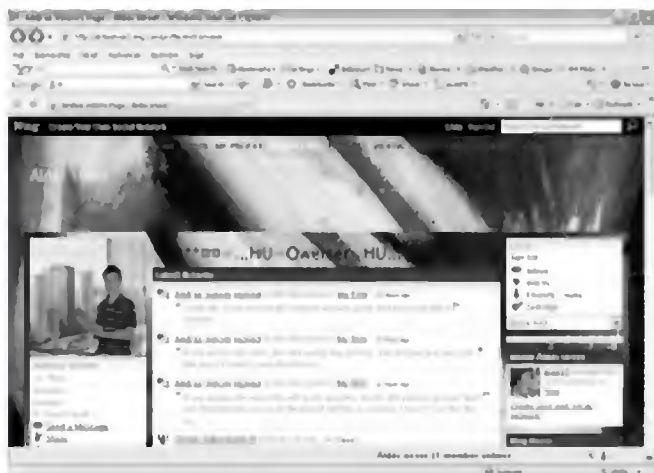
NING community in the classroom

In February 2009, with a group of 12-year-olds we set up the first NING classroom. Since I was quite new to the challenge and had basic experiences with the tool myself, I decided to

involve some computer fans from the group before introducing the idea of working on the new platform to the class. When asking two boys to have a look at the site at home, they immediately googled 'ning' on their mobile phones and nodded saying they knew what to do. One of the 21st century skills, 'self direction' from the list above was immediately practised by one of them as he created the NING site for the whole class by the next lesson. Some children started to personalize their individual pages very soon using their *creativity*. Apart from making their personal pages (see Pictures 1 and 2) colourful and attractive, they uploaded their photos or videos on the site for others to see.



Picture 1: Personal home page on NING



Picture 2: Personal home page on NING

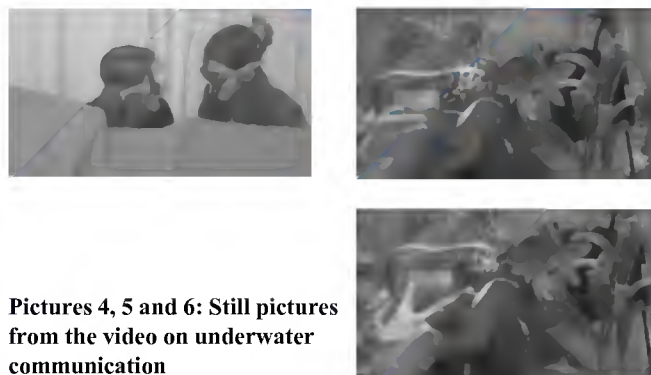
The topic we were covering in the lessons was that of 'communication' at that time so we decided to do a project around that topic area. Project products had to involve ICT and they were presented orally before uploading them to the NING site. The task was carried out in pairs or small groups and the planning phase also involved the use of ICT. Cooperating with the ICT teacher at school we asked learners to plan their projects, consider its aims, schedule, resources they needed etc. The presentation of the plan was a Word document involving plain texts, tables and images inserted within the text. Creating documents of this kind and developing *word processing skills* was part of the syllabus of the subject of computer studies and also belongs to one of the 21st century skills. As an end-product of the project, learners came up with technology-based media presentations such as

Powerpoint presentations or video recordings which were dealing with different aspects of communication. One example of this was a Powerpoint slide show considering the differences in Japanese and Hungarian use of body language in counting or giving simple instructions (see Picture 3).



Picture 3: Differences in body language in Japan and Hungary

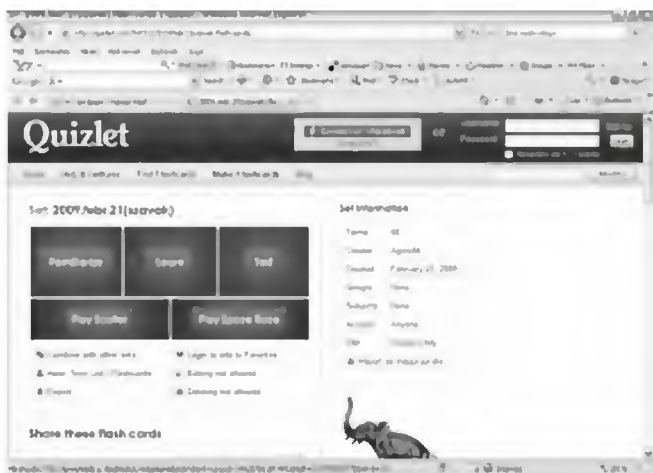
Another pair decided to focus on underwater communication of divers and video recorded themselves showing signs and interpreting their meanings (see Pictures 4, 5 and 6).



Pictures 4, 5 and 6: Still pictures from the video on underwater communication

After the oral presentations, all work was uploaded to NING and learners could comment on each other's work. During the process of project work almost *all 21st century skills* were used especially *teamwork, creativity, cross-cultural understanding communication, self-direction or critical thinking*. Another task that involved skill development was that of making visual film reviews. Learners used Animoto (www.animoto.com) to create short individual video clips with scripts and music to introduce their favourite films. After uploading and watching them on the NING site we learned several ways of giving feedback on each others' work, expressing opinions in a polite and positive way.

The site has become a springboard for more traditional language skills work, as well. After having worked on a set of new vocabulary it became a custom to have one learner create flashcards on the Quizlet (www.quizlet.com) site and embed it on our site which with a click took everyone to the place where they could learn, practise and test their vocabulary (see Picture 7).



Picture 7: Quizlet page for learning and practising vocabulary

The forum area was also used to keep a record of tasks and homework which was helpful not only for those who do not note them down properly in the lessons, but also for learners missing from school.

Communication, changing ideas and opinions in writing was encouraged by adding new topics to regularly exchange ideas about on the Forum. They were partly thematic eg. Easter or related to the topics emerging in the lessons.

Learners' motivation could be traced by the appearance of new topics created by them on the Forum area. Themes covered areas of their interest such as different mobile phones or internet applications. According to our earlier agreement, the language of communication on the site was English.

With more and more content appearing on the site, our NING platform was turning into a kind of class portfolio giving an account of our activities carried out throughout our months working on it and showing our progress. The element of highlighting achievement and success was invaluable to keep up motivation and bring the feeling of satisfaction to the teaching and learning process.

Having the NING classroom also added to our feeling part of our own community and belonging to the group. While working on the site we shared several experiences, we could discuss challenges we faced on the site and very often learners could help the teacher to solve certain technical problems on the platform. This enriched the relationship among learners and with the teacher and brought more emotions into the teaching which made learning and teaching an even more enjoyable experience.

Challenges with integrating technology and the NING site in teaching

While our experience with the NING classroom was extremely positive, there are some issues and questions worth raising for further thought.

- Giving homework that needed NING proved to be problematic sometimes. Slow internet connections at home, temporarily ill-working computers etc. gave us some hard times. Alternative ways of doing homework in exercise books could help but it also exceeded the workload and the attention of the teacher.
- The involvement of parents in the idea of using NING seems to be important. They should understand the rationale and aims behind using NING in the classroom.

This way we can ensure that they do not just see it as a trendy new way of working that keeps learners in front of the computer for even longer than before.

- Involving and keeping the school management informed about our work and successes with NING also seems to be necessary. Some headteachers, heads of departments, especially if they do not use technology in teaching themselves, cannot see the point in its application and can develop negative attitudes towards it.
- Asking learners for continuous feedback on their experiences with working on the site is an important tool to get useful information and to develop our practices. Many learners already use several Web 2.0 applications outside the classroom and might have good ideas to explore and make a better use of the opportunities NING can offer to us.
- Working with NING, or any other new tools in your teaching, needs time, energy, patience and sustainable effort. When starting to use it we will inevitably face problems, experience failures, everything seems too slow and complicated. However, when we get over the first phase of difficulties and experience successes, it gives us more energy and motivation to go on and experiment with the new tool.

I find that technology will not be a solution to our problems in teaching, neither will it substitute careful planning, good management and reflective practice. However, it can offer us new routes to take, new adventures to participate in and can place us in a better position to make informed decisions towards developing 21st century skills in our classrooms.

A brief account of using NING in the training context

In the summer of 2009 I had the opportunity to experiment with the NING social network in an international teacher training context, as well. I set up a community site for a group of 17 practising teachers arriving at Pilgrims teacher training centre in Canterbury, UK. They came from Austria, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Spain and took a course on teaching young learners between the ages of 6-12.

I decided to introduce the idea of having a 'virtual classroom' alongside our real one on the very first day of the course which was easy to organise as the room was equipped with a PC, projector and internet connection. The beauty of having the site up and running at the beginning of the course was that participants could follow and experience the development of the site throughout the two weeks and they could observe how it was turning into a kind of 'group portfolio', a rich resource bank, a reflective diary and a social area for sharing ideas, thoughts, teaching tips or nice memories as a result of their contributions and activity. Some participants brought their cameras to class and started to upload photos and materials that they themselves created in the workshops (see [Picture 8](#)). Following the purchase of a 'sophisticated' web camera we could add video recordings of group presentations, songs and rhymes performed in the sessions (see [Picture 9](#)).

We thought it would help the teacher recall their favourite pieces of children's literature that they learnt during the course and would find difficult to remember months after the course came to an end. We organised resources on the site into topics on the Forum area which were extended day by day as teachers



Picture 8: Writing and making storybooks



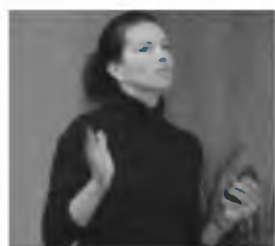
Picture 9: Presenting a story in a multisensory way

got more and more involved in the idea of working with and on the site and creating and sharing content. To support this we spent a whole morning in the computer lab where we learnt how to import videos from YouTube, embed other sites in NING or use its functions in a creative way. As a last step in the lab we also learnt how to set up a NING site for the teachers to use in their own classes at home in the future.

Our 'growing' and evolving site gave us a wonderful opportunity to revise content from previous days and reflect on what we had been doing during the course up till that moment, thus making progress more 'visible' and noticeable. Awareness raising was also helped by the blog option on the site where participants could write their personal thoughts

and feelings about the course. These learning logs proved to be helpful to trace professional growth

A very nice and unexpected effect of our work with NING was that other courses started to take an interest in the idea and towards the second week we set up two new NING classrooms for other courses at Pilgrims. What is even more exciting is that there are still a lot of ongoing member activities taking place on the site today – long after the courses ended... participants go on writing to each other, sharing pictures of joyful moments, materials and ideas and keep on learning from each other. Isn't this what summer courses should be about?



Gina Bianchini is the co-founder of Ning

"We get asked a lot why we called the company Ning. Ning means peace in Chinese. When we heard this, we were pretty darn excited. However, it was after we'd already decided it was the exact right perfect name for us. Ning was short, sweet, and wouldn't take away from the main focus of our service: your social networks. As I've mentioned before, our service is about you, not us."

And a poem to enjoy by Spike Milligan which came first in 1998 in the BBC's poll of top comic poems. It always provides much fun and laughter with young learners!

"On the Ning Nang Nong"

On the Ning Nang Nong
Where the Cows go Bong!
and the monkeys all say BOO!
There's a Nong Nang Ning
Where the trees go Ping!

And the tea pots jibber jabber joo.
On the Nong Ning Nang
All the mice go Clang
And you just can't catch 'em when they do!
So its Ning Nang Nong
Cows go Bong!
Nong Nang Ning
Trees go ping
Nong Ning Nang
The mice go Clang
What a noisy place to belong
is the Ning Nang Ning Nang Nong!!





Anna Csíky

‘Ádám made a Comment about your Photo’

How Facebook (and NING) can help you connect and share with the students in your life

Anna Csíky teaches English at Karinthy Frigyes Dual Language Secondary School and International House Budapest. She has been interested in ICT since university, when she became involved in designing e-learning materials. She has been coordinating the ICT SIG of IATEFL-Hungary for two years, organizing workshops and running training courses in different parts of the country.

I've been on Facebook for a bit more than two years but I didn't use to spend much time on it – until my high school students suddenly started signing up a couple months ago. Before that, I just checked out how my friends abroad were doing and occasionally posted some pictures, mainly after holidays. But then things started to change.

It all began with April Fool's Day. This day is often the *fordított nap* (literally “upside down day”) in Hungarian schools, when the students are the teachers and they decide, and of course need to plan, what happens in class. My twelfth-graders came up with an activity that was modelled on a popular improvisation show, *Beugró*, and involved all of us speaking a lot of English and generally making a fool of ourselves – hence the name. So here is my second status update ever, from that afternoon:

Anna Csíky is enjoying her first meal (plus coffee...) on the balcony this year with happy memories of the fordított nap :)

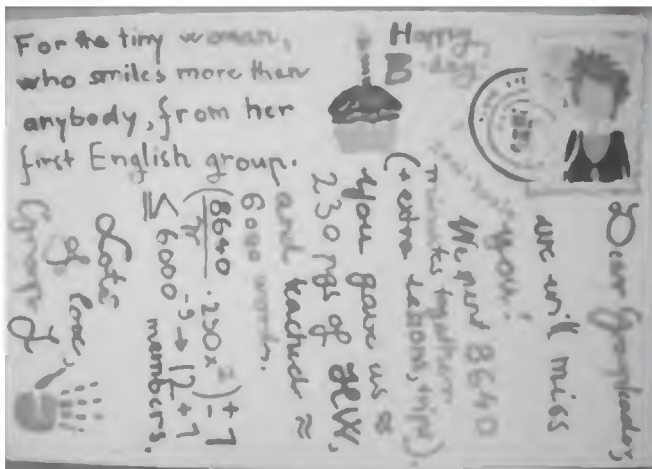
About an hour later Facebook sent me a notification that one of my twelfth-graders likes my status, and this got me thinking. What if I could expose my students to more English in a meaningful way and also tell them something personal indirectly by sharing a bit from my life every now and then?

At the time I was working on some final exam topics for an online magazine, so I posted the link to the material on my profile. Word spread quickly among my twelfth-graders and soon many more added me as a friend. This was where I started wondering whether I was okay with all these students looking at my photos about holidays with my boyfriend etc. Luckily, Facebook has dead easy privacy settings: I simply add my students to my “undergrad” list when we become friends and I hide my personal photos from the undergrad list. I also have total control over what is displayed on my profile, so if a friend made an inappropriate remark or uploaded a not very teacher-like picture of me, I could get rid of it in no time, or just make it inaccessible for the undergrads.

A couple days later I noticed a familiar-looking picture on Facebook's home page: another twelfth-grader uploaded a picture of about nine of us back in grade ten, sitting on a seesaw. There were a couple of comments under the picture, in Hungarian, but that could always be changed... So when I took some zero-year students on a trip for a couple days, I made sure I had my camera with me and took lots of photos. When we got back, I uploaded these to Facebook, each with a short description, in English of course. I tagged people in the pictures who were on Facebook so the photos showed up in their profile. From the comments (in English!) and “I like”-s, I could tell that a number of my students looked through the album, and so just spent another fifteen minutes doing something meaningful in English. When I stopped teaching them at the end of the year, the album they made me contained lots of photos from this trip, so Facebook also helped with group dynamics, not to mention how trendy and cool they thought I was.

Another thing I learned from my zero year group was that even if there is no actual proof that someone has seen your status or post, chances are they have. Our students are, after all, interested in their teachers, especially if they can do so without engaging in face-to-face communication, which they are often not very good at due to lack of experience. Another present from the same group at the end of the year was a beautiful postcard, painted by our artist girl, with me on the stamp, which said, among other things, that “this year you taught us 6,000 words” – apparently excluding the past tense of *teach*, sadly. I have lost count of the times I was trying to make students from other classes laugh with this brilliant story, only to be told that yeah, they had seen it on Facebook and thought it was funny.

Facebook has also helped me keep in touch with students over the summer. The twelfth-graders gave me a dance mat as a goodbye present and I have been keeping them updated on my progress ever since, with lots of encouragement or praise in return. I just reached level five today, but will hopefully



make it to level six or even seven by the time you are reading this! But it is not always me who makes the first move: a zero-year student tagged me in her “every class has” picture on Facebook. Outraged though I was at being called hyperactive, I really appreciated the fact that she thought of me in the middle of July and looked at her other photos while I was on her profile.

This is how I found out that another student from that class now has a completely different haircut than back in June, and I wrote on her wall to let her know how much I liked it. She wrote back saying how great it was to talk to someone in English again because she had forgotten so much over the summer. And the list could go on forever.

I know there are many teachers who are not that into sharing personal things with students, especially teenagers, and I can perfectly understand why that would be. The good news is that there is an option which is simply ideal for such (and indeed, all) teachers to enjoy the benefits of social networking without having to give up any of your privacy. It’s called a virtual classroom and it’s basically a private social networking site, only for you and your students, with very similar functions but naturally slightly different content than e.g. Facebook.

The virtual classroom I like best is called NING, and you can create one in about 1.5 minutes at www.ning.com. (If you are familiar with e.g. Nicenet, NING is very similar except it’s trendy and flash and your students will love it much more.) It is a virtual classroom where each student and teacher has their own profile, which they can personalize by changing the layout and adding content, but NING can also function as a notice board, a forum for discussion, a homework notebook and many other things.

A virtual classroom like NING is great because:

- it is a password-protected environment that only you and your students can access
- it helps you spread news quickly and efficiently
- it improves group dynamics and your rapport with students
- it engages students and makes them active
- it helps students use English for real communication

Some tips about what you can do in a virtual classroom like NING:

(All of these can be set as homework if you have no access to a computer lab. Chances are most of your students have Internet access at home.)

- Post homework and other info about the course. No more “I wasn’t here yesterday” and “Gábor said there was no homework”.
- Add photos and comment on them, describe them, find the best title for them. One thing I like doing is asking students to post a photo about themselves and something/somebody that is important for them, plus add a description of the photo with one mistake (=false information) in it. Once students have found all the mistakes, they send them to me in a message on NING.
- Add videos and watch the magic happen – 57 views in 10 days (with 14 members!). Get students to add subtitles, guess the purpose of the video, react in 7 words etc.
- Start a discussion. Then sit back and see how others get started. Some things I’ve tried that seemed to work: discuss which film you want to watch in the double lesson on Friday, your favourite word of the week, the most important grammar rule to remember for the big test, who had the most interesting weekend.
- Create an event and you don’t need to finish the lesson 5 minutes earlier. From reminding students about deadlines to organising Thanksgiving lunch.
- Add blog posts: “correct your homework” takes on new significance. If students upload the second draft of letters, stories, book reviews etc. they do as homework, others can read them and leave a comment, so writing does become the interactive process it should be, with an audience that reads and reacts.

See Lívía Faragó’s article for some more tips on using NING in a primary classroom and in a training context. Here is what a Polish teacher said about using NING on a training course (as a trainee) and her plans of setting up her own virtual classroom:

“My opinion about NING is highly positive and I liked the sessions in the computer laboratory. Of course the classes themselves were very fruitful, interesting and funny, but the best thing about it is that now, after the course, we can use all these materials collected on NING, remember our interesting sessions and communicate on this site in an easy way.

I’m sure I’m going to use NING in my school. First of all, I’m going to use our own site in preparing my lessons (activities, songs, poems collected during our course). Then I’d like to set up my own site in my school, too: for instance, we could write letters to each other on this site when we do letter-writing. Another idea is to use NING during lessons when students do research on the Internet. For example, they could collect interesting photos, facts about an English speaking country and then everyone could look at these. I think they would enjoy making and uploading their own videos as well – I enjoyed it a lot!”

Let me know if you have any questions or worries or joys to share about social networking with your students: csikyanna@yahoo.com – or send me a message on Facebook :)



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