Thriving on Screen: Web-Authoring for L2 Instruction

Jack Kimball
kimball [at] post.miyazaki-med.ac.jp
http://interserver.miyazaki-med.ac.jp/~Kimball/
Miyazaki Medical College, Japan

In the beginning, they just wanted a toy. Nowadays, you expect interaction, information, and innovation. People are a lot more Web savvy, and they know what they like.
Web author Richard Turner

Web Pragmatics

As recently as a year or two ago many second-language teachers were in early stages of Web anxiety. We wondered how we could connect to the Web and, once there, what we could do with it. But as more of us start experimenting with the Web, the sorts of questions we pose are shifting to Web pragmatics, questions such as, How can we best profit from the Web as a supplementary resource? Or more simply, Where in the Web does one turn to get great ideas and materials for teaching? And more proactive, How can we utilize the Web's array of electronic toys as a platform for online instruction?

Where To Turn

Now the first question, where in the Web do you turn, is becoming easier to answer. As students and teachers we turn to Yahoo, AltaVista and other search engines for topic starters; we go to academic libraries, such as Harvard and Stanford, as well as to ERIC for document searches and summaries; and for teaching ideas, we can contact California TESOL, the University of Hull, the Annenberg/CPB Projects Online, TESOL, JALT, and so on.

What To Use

The second question, how can we utilize the Web's toys, is what I want to sketch out here. I'm going to share my opinions, making **a few base points** that I have found valuable in my own Web-authoring, points so basic in fact that I keep coming back to them. I'm **not** going to get technical, and by no means do I want to imply that I can cover all the bases, but I hope what I suggest here makes sense to you, especially if you're involved or thinking of getting involved in Web-authoring yourself. Authoring on the Web is the buzz of the moment, because, as more teachers discover the educational potential of the Web, many are thinking of going one step further, plugging into the Web as a platform for classroom instruction.

In fact, the site you have accessed / are now reading, *The Internet TESL Journal,* is a good example of a transitional-proactive Web site and resource for initiating the authoring process. This site is "transitional" by offering practical tools like immediately-accessible, downloadable quizzes, a huge battery of lesson plans and links to other teacherly sites -- as well as fully-stocked archives of Web projects and other educational material. This site is also a "proactive" resource in that its archives contain a lot of advice on how to author and put up your own Web resources.

Other sites for more proactive information to help authors / teachers get started building Web pages include the so-called FUN Pages, the Academic Net, the Global School House, and the Ohio University CALL Lab. Examples of more customized resources for using Web technologies and constructing Web pages: the University of Sussex CALL Library, which offers text prompts for students and text editors for teachers, and La Trobe University's CELIA, a gopher resource which contains clearly written lesson plans for Web activities as well as language-teaching software for Mac and Wintel computers. In addition, there are numerous science-oriented sites especially designed or easily adapted for language learners, among which are an entire course centered on Web-applications provided by the Technical University of Berlin, "English for Engineering and Economics"; NASA's Learning Technologies Project -- to help teachers and students access scientific databases; the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology's "Presentation Resources" -- guidelines for giving formal talks on botany and other subjects; Austin Community

College's online ; and Ohio University's "Introduction to Research and Research Writing".

Having an Agenda

Web-authoring is a newcomer to the teacher's toolkit, and, for me, after a year or so of putting together a few sites and talking to colleagues about scores of other sites on the Web, I see that Web-authoring introduces new levels of responsibility and professional fulfillment. The most central question I keep asking myself is, How can I construct Web sites to give students opportunities for deeper processing of language? So, you see, I have an agenda. In other words, I have a goal. This is the essential first step in authoring. And this is my most important point: having goals.

A Flexible Ecology Combining Media

A classroom Web site designed with deeper processing of language as one goal approaches the learning environment as an ecology available for re-invention and transformation into real communities of practice. This would be a flexible ecology in which the **great divide** between the emergent and the authorized is blurred. Classroom Web pages become **combinations** of media -- combinations through which students working solo and in collaboration take on more responsibility for data collection as well as language- and knowledge-acquisition. These are "nice words," I know, but staking a few theoretical claims to your authoring is another way to get rolling and stay relevant.

Here's what I mean by authoring media combinations for data collection and knowledge-acquisition: Students at intermediate and advanced levels of English -- in high school, college and professional settings -- can get very excited by ideas they see as intriguing, essential or otherwise specific to their own interests. We see an example of this, in native-speaker contexts, when the quiet guy in the group suddenly pipes up with pitchers' stats when the talk comes round to baseball. When we author a Web page to get students started on a topic they care about -- following lines of fact-finding, image-collating, and hypothesis-building -- we are engaging learners so they can pipe up, get more involved.

Authoring for Specific Purposes

Speaking of second-language teaching at the college level, in categorical terms, among other strategies, I suggest gearing Web pages to students' academic and other specific orientations as one way to begin. (In the language teaching field, we often refer to this strategy as English for Academic Purposes -- EAP -- and English for Specific Purposes -- ESP.) There's a good chance that a Web site for history majors, for example, featuring a mix of dateline quizzes, pop-up menus with bios and visuals of historical figures, links to student-authored opinions about famous events from the past -- this mix of specified interactivity will be more attractive than a generic language approach. (For a good set of links for teaching history and other social sciences, by the way, visit Georgetown University's Teaching with Information Technologies site.) Similarly, a business-oriented strategy can be applied to Web pages for college business majors. Case studies in successful commercial ventures can be authored or gathered by the teacher or teachers working together, and these texts and other items can be brought together as the core of a Web site devoted to deploy business subject matter for second-language learners. Examples of ancillary items include links to more texts (such as background on a particular case), audio/video files to dramatize the role of business conferences, supplementary language-oriented files, and so on. To get started on specific-purpose projects such as these, you might consider checking out the new ESP site housed at the University of Aizu, Japan.

Students' Self-Authoring

In my own Web pages for doctors-in-training, case studies I authored have prompted scores of texts by learners in response to questions and contextualized problems contained in the cases. Now -- with over a hundred student-written texts that are online as part of the original medical case study Web site -- this combination of student and original texts exemplifies the blurring of authorized and emergent sources of information.

One benefit of the current popularity of integrating Web technologies with language instruction is that the Web entices all of us -- teachers and students -- to get into this **information and opinion business**, affording emergent language learners -- and their teachers -- interactive opportunities to respond to so-called authorized information, the chance to appropriate, emend, debate and extend sources of knowledge first published outside the classroom. And in the process, of course, students can become authors and

"authorize" themselves.

Teachers' Think-Tanks

I mentioned teachers working together, and this is an enormously important dimension of educational use of the Web. Hyperforums are proliferating, evolving from basic list-services, such as online teaching-oriented lists connected with language teaching associations like TESOL, JALT, etc., to more specialized or narrow-casted tankless think-tanks. The advantage of two, three or many more teachers conversing online is that they can help one another to organize and reorganize general principles of common interest. Another advantage is that they can work toward building consensual approaches to teaching practices; and, also, if their collaborative work takes on a public dimension -- a group Web site, reporting findings in cross-postings on other list services, etc. -- the Web can be a vehicle to help them reach out for new voices and new stake holders in their collaborative process.

Teachers' Inviting Collaboration

Here's a final question to those of us who have a Web presence (whether a homepage, a teaching Web site, or something else): Why settle for being just a sub-set of our school's Web site -- for example, tucked away in a corner of the English department? I have designed two of my teaching resources, one in medicine, the other in science writing, so that they naturally belong within the ESL Loop -- a loose aggregation of applied linguistic sites worldwide. Another of my Web sites, on American verse, is connected to the Poetry Webring, a loop of sites concentrated on verse-related media. In other words, in addition to putting up effective documents and other resources for helping our students learn a second language, when we connect our sites to allied resources on the Web, teachers can extend the effectiveness of our Web sites by proposing their wider use and, by inference, inviting collaboration with colleagues.

In sum, 5 points: I am suggesting that fruitful Web-authoring entails:

1. having goals;
2. researching and when necessary appropriating resources;
3. organizing texts and other data so that students can **get involved** and **stay engaged**;
4. creating opportunities for students to become authors online; and,
5. seizing opportunities for ourselves to make connections with other teachers and researchers with similar interests.

Appendix

URLs for Links Mentioned in the Article
In Order of Appearance

These are listed here for the convenience of those who print this article on paper.

Yahoo
    http://www.yahoo.com/text/
AltaVista
    http://www.altavista.digital.com/cgi-bin/query?pg=&text=yes
other search engines
    http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/www/search7.html
Harvard
    http://www.harvard.edu/home/library/
Stanford
    http://www-sul.stanford.edu/
ERIC
    http://edrs.com/
California TESOL
    http://www.catesol.org/
University of Hull
    http://www.hull.ac.uk/cti/langsite.htm
Annenberg/CPB Projects Online
    http://www.learner.org/

TESOL
     http://www.tesol.edu/
JALT
     http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jalt/
quizzes
     http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/
lesson plans
     http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Links/LessonLinks.html
links
     http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/ESL3.html
archives
     http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/indexPrevious.html
FUN Pages
     http://thecity.sfsu.edu/~funweb/Welcome.html
Academic Net
     http://www.academic.com/
Global School House
     http://www.gsh.org/
Ohio University CALL Lab
     http://www.tcom.ohiou.edu/OU_Language/teachers.html
University of Sussex CALL Library
     http://www.sussex.ac.uk/langc/CALL.html
La Trobe University's CELIA
     gopher://luck.latrobe.edu.au:70/11/Information%20Technology%20Services/La%20Trobe%20Archive/pub/CELIA/english
"English for Engineering and Economics"
     http://www.tu-berlin.de/zems/greenman/topics.htm
Learning Technologies Project
     http://learn.ivv.nasa.gov/
"Presentation Resources"
     http://www.jaist.ac.jp/%7emark/Presentationalresourcesnew.html
"Technical Writing Textbook"
     http://www.io.com/~hcexres/tcm1603/acchtml/acctoc.html
"Introduction to Research and Research Writing"
     http://www.tcom.ohiou.edu/OU_Language/researchClass.html
ESP site
     http://www.u-aizu.ac.jp/~t-orr/esp-j.html
case studies
     http://interserver.miyazaki-med.ac.jp/~Kimball/case.html
medicine
     http://interserver.miyazaki-med.ac.jp/~Kimball/med/1.htm
science writing
     http://interserver.miyazaki-med.ac.jp/~Kimball/w/logo.htm
ESL Loop
     http://www.linguistic-funland.com/esloop/
American verse
     http://interserver.miyazaki-med.ac.jp/~Kimball/ex/po.htm
Poetry Webring
     http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/2141/poetry/poetweb.html

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http://iteslj.org/Articles/Kimball-WebAuthoring.html