

On the Internet

Pedagogical Affordances of Syndication, Aggregation, and Mash-up of Content on the Web

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"Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making."

- from the Project Gutenberg EBook of *Areopagitica*, by John Milton
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/608/608.txt>>

1. Introduction

As Internet and online learning become more and more incorporated into our courses, syllabi, and teaching materials, it becomes increasingly important that the impact the Web is having on changing perceptions of literacy carries over to the way we practice teaching and learning. Here we will focus on which collaborative online tools can most appropriately be applied in online and blended courses to foster reading and writing. Specifically, we will discuss some of the freely available social networking platforms and tools, their common features, and how these can help language learners find, aggregate and harvest learning objects while connecting to other people on the Web at large. We will also introduce two web publishing projects, Dekita.org and Writingmatrix, and explain how they function to facilitate this process and encourage connections.

Live link to youtube.com

Source: Michael Wesch, "WEB 2.0: The Machine Is Us/ing us."
[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nkoE0E&mode=related&search=>]
There is a transcript of this video on the Kansas State University, Dept. of Cultural Anthropology, Digital Ethnography blog: [<http://mediatedcultures.net/ksudigg/?p=78>]

2. Social networks

A social network is a collection of individuals linked together by a set of relations which, in the online environment,

incorporates their common interests, affinities and the possibility of producing, collecting, sharing and re-mixing artifacts (e.g., posts, comments, photos, stories, films, songs...). A new generation of social media (blogs, wikis, podcasts, and photo sharing and social networking sites) and a set of "harvesting" technologies such as syndication (RSS, Atom), aggregation, folksonomies and mash-ups are available for users to house this production, share it, collect information on others and collaborate more efficiently.

Contrary to traditional media like radio and television, which distribute their messages one-way from centralized static locations (from a sender to a receiver), social media are two-way, distributed, and part of a shifting internet-wide social network (peer to peer). This enables individuals to communicate their own viewpoints and negotiate meaning with many others, creating their own content and constructing their own "spaces" to network according to their own choices, not controlled by media owners. There is a shift in paradigm as we move from a passive "read-only century, totalitarian, centralizing, controlling" to the participatory 21st, a "return to read-write" (Lessig 2006).

Blogging and other social networking platforms give learners the opportunity to build a presence online through interactive spaces where they can display their different aptitudes and talents. Belonging to different networks, sustaining a large number of loose ties with individuals from diverse backgrounds and skills, reading what they have to say, reacting to it through comments or posts can all help learners develop their inter-cultural and inter-linguistic competencies. They have access to content in the target language and opportunities to acquire the critical engagement necessary to better understand their own and other people's personal, social and academic/professional contexts.

As Kern and Warschauer (2000) characterize it: "network-based language teaching does not represent a particular technique, method or approach. It is a constellation in which students communicate via computer networks and interpret and construct on-line texts and multimedia documents, all as part of a process of steadily increasing engagement of new discourse communities." Blogging and social networking platforms help develop multiliteracy skills and underpin critical nodes in this constellation.

3. Some Social Tools and Platforms

The best way to get to know and start participating in the various communities hosted on these different platforms is to explore a number of them, observe their layout and features, how they work, the current practice of the environment and how people interact. What are people interested in and posting about? How do they express themselves? What kind of comments are there? How is their language different from what is normal in the classroom? Which context is the language placed in?

3.1. Popular Blogging Platforms

A good comparison chart and advice on blogging platforms can be found in Campbell (2005). Among the most notable blogging portals are:

- **WordPress** <<http://www.wordpress.com>>, WordPress.com is a hosted version of the well-known open source package Wordpress.org. It allows you to start a free blog in seconds without any technical knowledge and is under very active development with and services based on users feedback and requests and frequently released new features. One of the attractions <<http://wordpress.com/features/>> is the possibility to manage not only blog posts but also create web pages easily.
- **Edublogs** <<http://edublogs.org>>, educational blogging Web site set by James Farmer on a Multi-User Wordpress platform. It offers blogs and customized support for four types of communities:
 1. teachers, librarians and educators (edublogs);
 2. k12 students (learnerblogs);
 3. English learners (eslblogs) and
 4. university students (uniblogs)

3.2. Photos

- **BubbleShare** <<http://www.bubbleshare.com>>, a free photo sharing Web site where you can post photos and create albums and slide shows. Bubbleshare allows you to add clip art, audio, captions and caption bubbles to photos and share albums on your blog or Web site. Your photos can be added to your MySpace profile and shared on Blogger, Friendster, and other social networking sites. You can add tags to your albums and members of the community can comment on your photos.
- **Flickr** <<http://www.flickr.com>>, a photo sharing Web site and web services suite, and an online community platform. You can upload pictures from your computer, from your camera, or from your cell phone. Flickr allows you to create your own image sets and slide shows, comments, titles and specific notes on top of pictures. It offers four levels of privacy (private, family, friends and public), three types of filter (safe, moderate and restricted) and three entry categories for your uploads (photos, art/illustration or screen shots). You can categorize your production by use of keyword "tags" (a form of metadata discussed further below), which makes it easier to find images concerning a certain topic such as place name or subject matter. Much of the content is covered by a

Creative Commons license that allows for non-commercial use. Flickr also has a number of different applications that can be used for education, like geo-tagging and flickr-toys.

See Aaron Campbell's (2006) blog post on Flickr for "Low Level" EFL Students and Alan Levine's cleverly hyperlinked illustration of possible uses in education at <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cogdog/265279980/>>, which serves as a window on a docuverse of many other resources on use of Flickr in education.



3.3. *The 43Trio*

- **43Things** <<http://43things.com>>, a life to-do list, organized around people's dreams, wishes plans and intentions. You can share your goals with others and give advice on how to reach them. Those who have completed an objective can rank the feat, as "worth doing" or "not worth doing," and, if they desire, can be contacted for advice by others still working to achieve their goal.
- **43Places** <<http://43places.com>>, a meta-travel guide built by its users, letting you chart places you have visited and list future destinations. You engage in conversations, ask for advice, comment and give tips. It integrates Flickr photos, Yahoo, Google, and Upcoming into this shared experience of travel and adventures.
- **43People** <<http://43people.com>>, here you can create a list of people you want to meet, report on how you got to know them and tell stories about them. The lists include other users and celebrities.

3.4. *Dynamic Blogroll*

- **Feevy** <<http://feevy.com>>, a dynamic blogroll that you can put on your blog--or on any Web site--it replaces static, boring blogrolls and creates a nice dynamic collection of blogs--or any web content that has an RSS feed (Flickr, Del.icio.us, etc). You can aggregate as many blogs as you wish and personalize the blogroll with people's avatars and Feevy will bring to the top the most updated posts, transforming your blog into a web portal for your network of friends. You can use it to generate mini-communities around interests.

3.5. *Quick mobile messaging*

- **Twitter** <<http://www.twitter.com>>, a social network and micro-blogging service that allows users to keep in touch with busy friends, send "updates" (text-based posts, up to 140 characters long) via SMS, instant messaging,

the Twitter Web site, or an application such as Twitterrific (Mac OS X client).

- **Jaiku** <<http://www.jaiku.com>>, another social networking and micro-blogging service, comparable to Twitter. It allows you to connect with people by sharing presence updates on the Web and mobile. You can create a miniblog, follow your friends, send comments, or share your feeds, availability, location, and calendar from your smartphone.
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3.6. Mapping

- **Community Walk** <<http://www.communitywalk.com>>, allows you to create personal and community maps and show them on your blog or Web site. It allows you to link directly to markers on your map, insert and display interactive media, and hide and show categories of locations, videos, photos and comments. You can also upload any icon file you want to use in your map.
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3.7. Timeline

- **Dandelife** <<http://www.dandelife.com>>. provides a timeline and a place for learners to record the milestones of their life, past and present, public and private. It allows you to import streams of sound, video and photos from other sites such as Flickr, YouTube, Del.icio.us, Ma.gnolia, Last.fm, Netflix, Twitter, Amazon, Plazes, Headlines and Feeds.
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3.8. Podcasting

- **Podomatic** <<http://podomatic.com>>, enables anyone to easily find, create, distribute, promote and listen to both audio and video podcasts, directly into their computer, iPod, mp3 player or even TiVo. It encodes the podcast and syndicates it to all podcast directories.
 - **MyChingo** <<http://mychingo.com>>, a public voice messaging system which allows visitors to record their audio comments to your blog. It also makes messages automatically available for people to hear when you receive them. It allows moderation and you can easily download your MP3 messages from your control panel.
 - **Chinswing** <<http://chinswing.com/>>, a global message board where anyone can add voice messages to ongoing topical discussions. It allows users to start a discussion thread by leaving an audio message under the appropriate category channel (culture and society, entertainment, etc.) with a relevant title and tags. Other users record comments linearly and the individual discussion can easily be followed via RSS, podcast or watchlist.
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3.9. Video

- **BlipTV** <<http://blip.tv>>, a video-sharing site focused on independently produced videos which allows you to record, upload and broadcast your content in multi-formats with a serious focus on video blogging and podcasting. It has tagging features and a built-in syndication to AOL Video, Yahoo! Video, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, MSN Video, Google Video, Blinkx, iTunes and the Apple TV, Blogger and WordPress.com.
 - **Mojiti** <<http://mojiti.com>>, allows learners to collect their favorite videos from top video sharing sites online, bring them all together to one place, and tell the story their way. Mojiti Spots gives learners the possibility to narrate their personal videos, add captions or subtitles in any language, or just comment on any scene to share their thoughts and opinions.
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3.10. Social Networks

These are integrated social platforms designed to allow people to easily connect and share resources.

- **Elgg** <<http://elgg.org>>, an open source software platform which allows you to create a social network and host it on your own infrastructure, modifying the features to fit your specific needs. Users establish personal digital identities and connect with other people, collaborate with them and discover new resources through their connections. Plugins allow users on different social networks to collaborate, and provide specific functionality for tasks like project management, mobile browsing and collaboration through user-controlled wikis.
- **Ning** <<http://ning.com>>, an online service where you can create, customize, and share your own Social Network. It allows a combination of features (videos, blogs, photos, forums, profiles, RSS and text boxes), customization of pages, and two levels of privacy.
- **Facebook** <<http://www.facebook.com>>, a popular social networking site originally designed for college students, faculty and staff, but now allows any user with an email address to join networks based on schools, companies and regions. Users create profile pages listing interests, favorite books and movies, employment and education information, relationship status, and so forth (with privacy options to determine who gets what information).

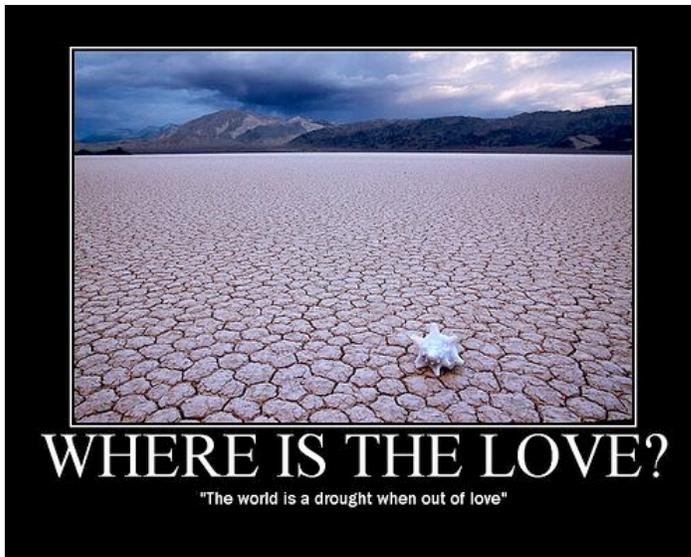
Facebook allows for users to search for people with similar interests and is also very useful in reconnecting with old friends. Other features include a photo sharing utility, which allows friends in uploaded photos to be "tagged" so that photos of tagged users, uploaded by other users, are viewable from the tagged user's profile page. Friends can also comment on each other's photos. New features are added frequently. One is the News Feed, which tell users of their friends' activity on Facebook. Recently a Marketplace utility was added. This allows for users to post classified advertisements, similar to Craig's List. New applications have been added, which allow users to customize their profiles even further. Users can create and join groups. Events can be posted as well, and users can invite their friends to their events. Users can publish notes, which is similar to a blog. In fact, external blogs can be imported into a user's notes. Friends can be tagged in these notes, in a manner similar to the photo sharing utility.

4. Features of Social Tools and Platforms

Although not originally developed for education, online collaboration and community networking features are interwoven as main components of these platforms, to facilitate interaction and communication among learners. Through them learners can reach out globally and contribute to an international dialogue of ongoing discourse. Understanding how social tools and platforms work is also fundamental to helping learners find their way on the Social Web.

Some important technological networking features that these social tools typically share are:

- **a writing (or recording) area** in reverse chronological area of postings
- **a comment area** which allows other learners to write (or voice) their reactions/opinion to a post or recording
- **permalinks**, which give each post/recording/video its unique URL (address) on the WEB which is archived and can be later retrieved through tags or syndication
- **trackback and pingback**, which are primarily used to facilitate communication between blogs as they enable authors to keep track of who is linking to, or referring to their articles
- **tag entries**, key words that classify each production into a category defined by the user
- **syndication (RSS) and aggregation**, "feed" pages which summarize the content from an associated web site or displays the full text. Whenever a posting is added, the "feed" is updated. This feature allows individuals to subscribe to the content of the site they are interested in through aggregators like Bloglines or Newsreader. A news aggregator is an application software that fetches and displays works syndicated as web feeds in RSS, Atom and other XML formats. Web feeds are typically offered by regularly updated sites such as weblogs and other news media.
- **mash-up**, a Web site or application that combines content from more than one source into an integrated experience. This feature gives users the possibility to import and export the content they have stored on one platform directly to another. Social platforms like Flickr and the 43Trio allow learners to transfer the content they post and blog on their sites to the learners' main blog so as to keep it all in one place. You only need to configure them appropriately. Flickr CC <<http://www.bathurst-tafe.nsw.edu.au/%7Epeter/flickrcc/index.php>> is a tool that gathers all photos from Flickr that are under a Creative Commons License <<http://creativecommons.org/about/licenses/>>, references them and gives you the possibility to edit them online. Flickr Toys Poster <<http://bighugelabs.com/flickr/motivator.php>> allows you to use your own or CC Flickr photos to make inspirational posters; for example:



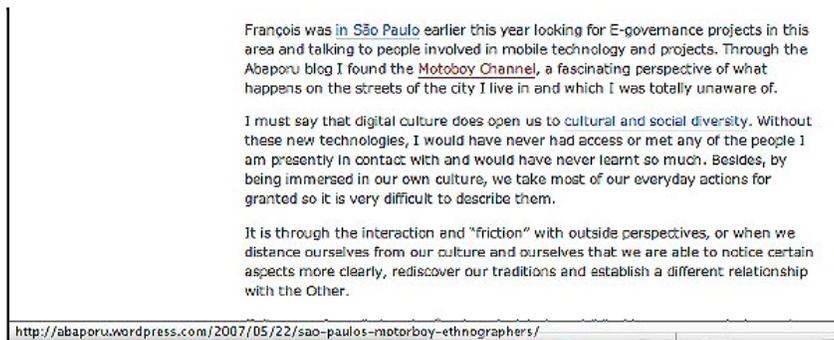
Poster Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/didice/630932941/>
 Original CC Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/33377700@N00/155517365>

Having overviewed some of the tools and platforms that can be used and the main social networking features, we will now expand on three features in particular. These enhance the possibility of practitioners and learners encountering and monitoring one another's work on the Internet, and sharing the subscription and posts so as to enable others to connect according to mutual interests and pursue academic, professional or pedagogical goals.

4.1. *Trackback and Pingback*

One reason that blogs are particularly appropriate in a syllabus of study driven partially by social networking is that they allow students to know who is commenting on their posts. This is made possible through trackbacks and pingbacks.

The red underlined text "Motoboy Channel" shows a link to the original post (see URL below the post) that is being commented on.



A trackback is an acknowledgment which is sent via a network signal ping <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ping_blog> from the originating site to the receiving site. The receptor often publishes a link back to the originator indicating its worthiness and may display summaries of, and links to, all the commenting entries below the original entry.

generated by the motoboy and combined with their own texts.

So, what you see in canal*MOTOB0Y is the result of an ongoing process.

I hope this has answered your questions. If you want to know more, please feel free to contact me at cubo23 [at] moterhuoso [dot] net

Wide open spaces · Cultural and Technological Appropriation Says:
June 13th, 2007 at 4:50 am

[...] talking to people involved in mobile technology and projects. Through the Abasoju blog I found the Motoboy Channel, a fascinating perspective of what happens on the streets of the city I live in and which I was [...]

Leave a Reply

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website



This blog started out as the collective work of François Bar, Francis Pisani, and Matt Weber. Now Avaba Sey is blogging as well. It is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.

Conversations spanning several blogs can then be easily followed. Trackback, however, requires both sites to be trackback enabled in order to establish this communication. Blogging software that supports the TrackBack protocol displays a "TrackBack URL" with every entry. This URL is used by the commenting blogger, whose software will send XML-formatted information about the new entry to this URL. Some blogging tools are able to discover these TrackBack URL's automatically, others require the commenting blogger to enter them manually.

1 comment Comments feed for this article 

<http://beewebfeed.net/wp-trackback.php?c=393> Trackback 

Thanks Bee! Our students don't use SMS in class very much, probably because texting (as we call it here) isn't that widespread yet in the US. But that's changing, in part because of twitter...
Abraços,
F.

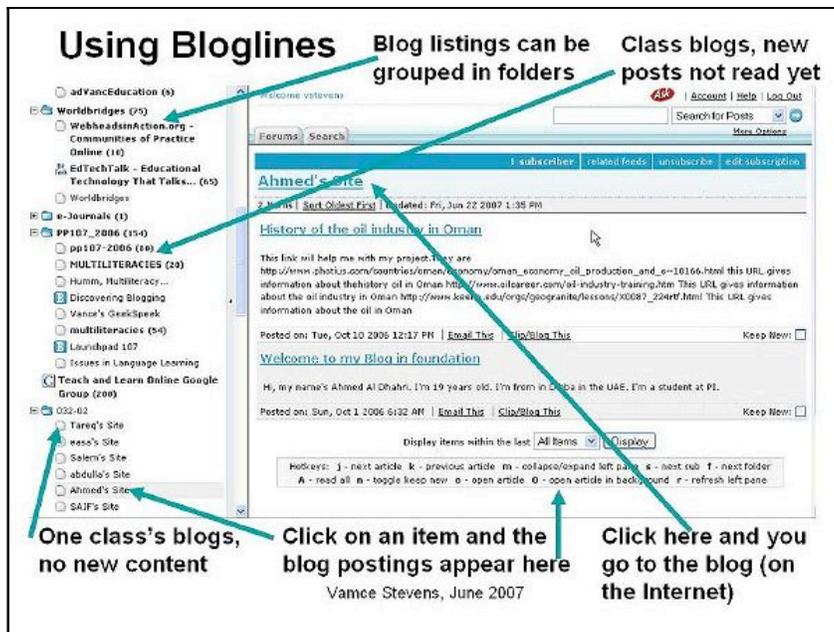
June 16, 2007 at 10:55 am
François

A Pingback is a signal ping <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ping> sent from Site A to Site B that allows you to notify a weblog of your entry just by posting its permalink directly in the content of your blog entry. However, it's also a link. When Site B receives the notification signal, it automatically goes back to Site A checking for the existence of a live incoming link. If that link exists, the Pingback is recorded successfully. This makes Pingbacks less prone to spam than trackbacks. Some weblog software, such as WordPress and Community Server, support automatic pingbacks where all the links in a published article can be pinged when the article is published.

4.2. Syndication (RSS) and aggregation

Mary Harrsch once called RSS a "Killer App" for education (Harrsch, 2003). RSS is crucial to collaboration via the blogosphere (and in other sites that incorporate RSS feeds). RSS makes it possible for students and teachers to subscribe to sites where content is frequently changed and thereby be notified when content is added. This notification can be made with degrees of sophistication ranging from "tell me any time a certain site has been updated" to "tell me when the particular content I am looking for appears in posts anywhere on the sites I have designated." The former query (tell me when a site is updated) would let you know whenever your students had added content to their blogs (without your having to visit each blog individually and figure out whether the students had added content or not). The latter (filtered newsfeeds) is useful in case you want to be made aware whenever certain topics are mentioned on the social network you have subscribed to.

To subscribe to a feed from a blog or other social site, you must locate its feed URL. This is usually associated with an orange graphic which generally displays the letters RSS, XML or Atom. When you enter (paste) that URL into an aggregator or a feed reader, such as Bloglines <http://www.bloglines.com>, it will show you all the entries that come from the site you have just subscribed to. The ones you haven't read yet will appear in bold. Since this blog is just one of many sites you will follow, you only need to check that site when you see that its entry is in bold, which means the content has been updated.



Using a news feed reader, you can subscribe to any content that generates an RSS feed. Nowadays you can find RSS or XML icons on any number of sites where content is frequently updated. Examples of such sites include output from content creation or forums from content management systems such as Moodle or Drupal, discussion postings in YahooGroups (where discussion on those lists has been made public), output from other aggregators themselves such as Stephen Downes's Edu_Rss <http://www.downes.ca/xml/edu_rss.htm> or mashups of aggregated content possible with PageFlakes <<http://www.pageflakes.com>> or MySyndicaat <<http://www.mysyndicaat.com/>>. Feeds can be set up to PULL content toward you on demand using a range of sophisticated filters and other techniques also called "newsmastering."

PULL requires a mental paradigm shift that is part and parcel of the shift required to transition from print literacy to multiliteracy. In the read-only century (Lessig 2006) information was distributed top down utilizing PUSH technologies <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Push_technology>. Some effects of this are spam, an over-reliance for information distribution on email attachments, and a need for each recipient to develop a unique and redundant information management system to cope with the deluge.

If the office is re-envisioned, then documents are stored in one place and the master updated as required. Instead of PUSHING an email out to a hundred people--who may not be interested whether the document is updated, thereby increasing the unwanted traffic in their inboxes--only those who will have subscribed to the feed are alerted that an update is available. The only management system that each person has to master then is to be subscribed to the correct feeds. This system is a lot more streamlined and efficient than the one where we PUSH everything out to everybody and then wonder later why some people are working off out of date versions of our documents, or can't locate them at all.

The "office" extrapolates to any setting where information has to be managed, be it a real world office or a classroom of students. By managing classroom information flow in the way described above, learners may translate what they have learnt into how they manage projects they have been assigned. Office organization patterns apply to the management of information flow in a classroom (tracking of ongoing work and submission of final assignments), in a professional development group, or in any community of practice or collaboration project. This includes the ones in which the teacher's purpose is to connect writers in order to broaden the scope and enhance chances for meaningful feedback on students' writing.

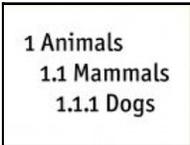
The one thing that people have to manage in order for the system to function, is to be aware of the location of relevant content in the form of blogs or document repositories that they want or need to follow, and be subscribed to those feeds. This can be simple in case a task is well defined, but given the reality of the chaotic nature of content creation on the Web, it isn't really (or shouldn't be, in case we want to take advantage of the truly transformational power of the read-write web).

4.3. Tag entries

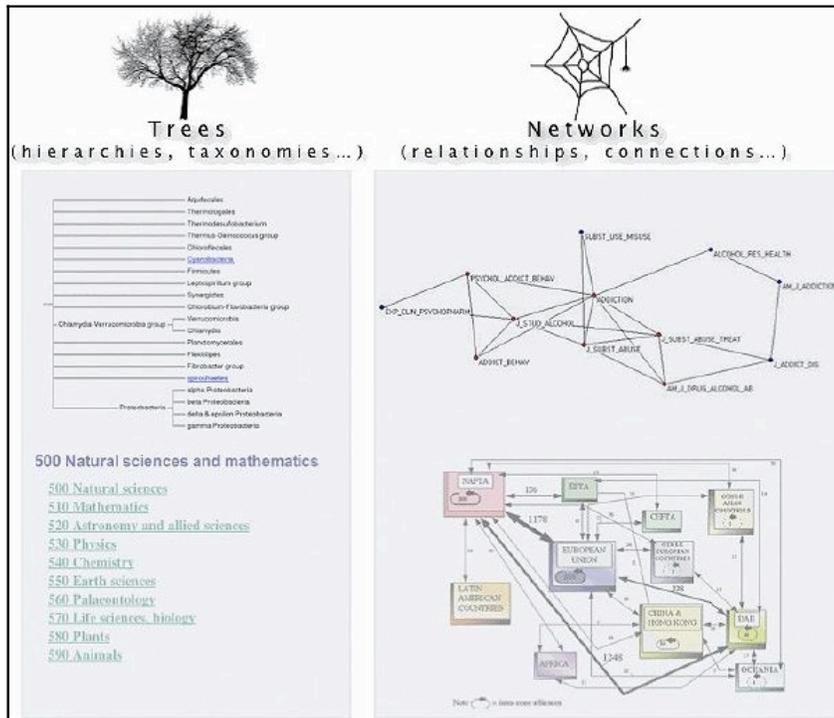
We might be able to unearth content through a normal search engine. You could also use either <http://blogsearch.google.com/> or <http://technorati.com/> to search topics on listed blogs. There are other specialized

services such as <http://www.blog-search.com/> which lets you "Search for a blog, add your own blog or grab an RSS feed on the blog topic of your choice," the significance of which should now be apparent. Having an RSS feed of an aggregation of a specified topic is useful in that it keeps feeding results of constant updates on topic searches to your Bloglines or other aggregator. And it is also possible to construct your own specialized search (using PageFlakes or MySyndicaat) as opposed to just "grabbing" one, and feed the results of that search via its own RSS link into your bloglines where you can monitor them at your leisure.

However, we are still operating at the level of text found in blog postings themselves. There is a deeper layer, a meta-layer, of information that blog posts can, and should always, contain. These are called most generically TAGS. Tags are user-generated labels that serve to categorize and retrieve Web content such as Web pages, photographs and Web links. They comprise an organization system known as folksonomy. A folksonomy is a system of classification created on the fly by users of that system. A folksonomy is to blogs and wiki content and other tagged artifacts as the Dewey Decimal System is to the mostly-printed documents in the U.S. Library of Congress.



Unlike a taxonomy, which is a hierarchical (tree) system ordained top-down in client-server fashion over a structured information dissemination network, a folksonomy is created ad hoc by users of information dissemination networks in peer to peer relationship to one another from the bottom up.



Source: <http://www.knownet.com/discussions/discussion-docs/new-features/figures/fig1/>

There is much written on folksonomies in copious Web 2.0 literatures (and probably not that much yet in traditional print literatures). As is often the case, the Wikipedia entry on 'folksonomy' is first up on a Google search <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folksonomy/>> and there is an excellent overview of the concept at the recent Future of Education conference (Weinberger 2007). The literature addresses the relative merits of the top-down client-server (precise, predictable, yet inflexible) vs. bottom-up P2P (chaotic, unpredictable, yet creatively comprehensive and adaptable) ways of classification. As concerns us here, we can say that tagging is a subtle but important key to collaboration for many purposes over the Internet in its current state of evolution, including that of bringing students together in writing projects according to their interests.

There are two major systems for getting at information distributed over the Internet and classified by means of tags, and

these are Technorati <http://technorati.com> and Del.icio.us <http://del.icio.us>. Whereas both base their power on tagging, the two operate in distinctly different ways. Technorati scans the blogosphere for tags that appear in blog postings, which were put there by the person who created the post. Del.icio.us, on the other hand, is a social bookmarking Web site which stores bookmarks online and allows users to to share and access the same bookmarks from any computer and add bookmarks from anywhere else they happen to be online.

4.3.1. Del.icio.us

Del.icio.us allows users to organize their posted links (or "bookmarks") according to tags (metadata in the form of one-word descriptors, or keywords). People make up tags according to their needs at a given moment, using the words that make the most sense to them.



Tags create a non-hierarchical, flat namespace that can be represented in various ways: for example, sorted alphabetically, represented in proximity to related tags, in tag clouds that correlate a tag's font size to its popularity (the more popular the bigger), and so on.

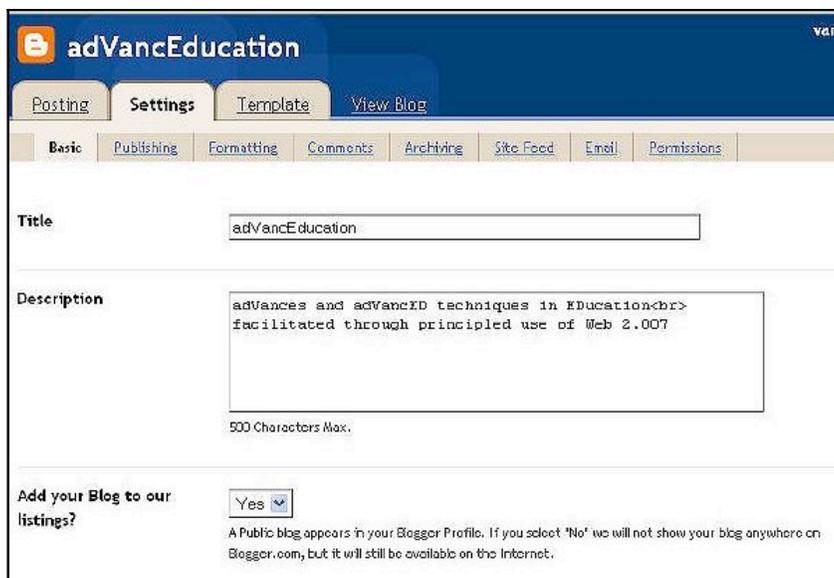
[course-weblog](#) [del.icio.us](#) [e-mail](#) [education](#)
[EFL](#) [EFL](#), [english](#) [ESL](#) [ESOL](#) [Flickr](#) [folksonomy](#)
[French](#) [Greece](#) [high-school](#) [innovation](#) [instructional-design](#) [intercultural](#)
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[weblogging](#) [weblogs](#) [weblogs,](#)
[webpublishing](#) [wiki](#) [Wordpress](#)

[I am Dekita on del.icio.us](#)
[Add me to your network](#)

Tagging is a flexible and personalized way for organizing and finding bookmarked (or "favorite") data. It becomes social bookmarking when someone else posts related content using the same tags (the idea behind Dekita Exchange explained below). Most of the bookmarks on Del.icio.us are public, which means you can look at everyone else's bookmarks. If a person has a lot of interesting bookmarks, you can add them to **your network** to see more of them in the future. Therefore, it is also a people-aggregator, collecting your favorite users' latest bookmarks in one place for you to view and enjoy. You then begin building a collaborative repository of related information, driven by personal interests and creatively relativistic organization.

4.3.2. Technorati

Technorati is the world's foremost authority on blogs. It constantly trolls the blogosphere and gathers statistics from the blogs it knows about. It knows about blogs that it can ping, or that ping Technorati. Ping means that one server sends a data packet to another and registers a response, thus verifying the existence of that server (see explanation for pingback above). In order for your blog (or your students' blogs) to be found by Technorati, either you must make your blog ping Technorati manually, or you have to be using a blogging server that Technorati knows about. If you use such a system then your blog must be made "public," that is, enabled to respond to pings from Technorati.



This graphic shows how a blog is made public by being added to a 'listing' in Blogger.

If all is in order then you should be able to use Technorati to search for and find your students' blogs based either on text strings that appear in the blog postings themselves (Technorati's default search mode) or on the tags your students have used (which is one of the options in Technorati's advanced search mode). If you use the latter mode, the system reports a few of the most recent postings tagged with the word you have coined and are searching for, and you have to expend an extra click to see ALL of the postings on that term, but it is energy well spent, because at that point you will find a Subscribe button at the top of the full list. This is the RSS feed for the content you have just aggregated and if you copy its link location to your Bloglines or feed aggregator of choice then you will be able to monitor postings with that tag as they are harvested by Technorati.

This is a powerful and productive way of collaborating with students and colleagues from around the world, who don't necessarily know of each other's existence at the time a project or a blog posting was conceived. This system has been used to aggregate blog postings at numerous international conferences. Participants in these conferences are asked in advance to tag consistently with one another. For example, participants in the recent Webheads in Action Online Convergence <http://wiaoc.org> were asked to tag using `wiaoc2007`, and blog postings with that tag can now be aggregated using all of the techniques mentioned so far <<http://www.technorati.com/posts/tag/wiaoc2007>>. Accordingly the Future of Education conference in June 2007 organized by George Siemens, also requested participants to use a pre-assigned tag `FOE2007`, and content associated with that tag has been aggregated at: <http://www.pageflakes.com/lrc/10987119> as well as through a Technorati search on <http://www.technorati.com/posts/tag/foe2007>.

5. EFL/ESL Projects

5.1. Dekita.org

Dekita <<http://dekita.org>> is the result of an international online collaboration involving Rudolf Ammann (Japan), Aaron Campbell (Japan) and Barbara Dieu (Brazil). It aims to build a bridge between the classroom and the Net at large by promoting networking and peer-to-peer communication in language learning. It advocates open and participatory uses of Web technology. In EFL/ESL this would mean giving each learner the chance to participate in the creation of his or her own content as opposed to having the whole class publish content established by a coursebook or post answers to topics or questions set by the teacher. Dekita.org highlights courses worldwide in which learners get involved in authentic, personally meaningful ways on the live Web so as to make their work more accessible and drive some traffic their way. The site also points out and discusses issues related to open sharing in language learning contexts.

The Dekita Exchange <<http://dekita.org/exchange>> and Dekita Orchard <<http://dekita.org/orchard>> were created to scaffold learners' participation in exchanges. They also provide the EFL/ESL community and other interested parties with a glimpse into the conversations that learners are starting and the thoughts, photos, and sound files they have chosen to share.

Instead of building a central database with a Web interface (push), a distributed approach (pull) was chosen. It is the difference between a site saying "I have something to tell you" versus a conversational partner asking, "do you have

anything to tell me?" Technically, the Exchange initiative is built on top of [Del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us), the "social bookmark manager" whereas the Orchard runs on Gregarius <<http://gregarius.com>>, an open source news feed aggregator.

The Exchange rests on the simple idea of proposing a Del.icio.us tag reserved for EFL/ESL projects that are open to the public. The Dekita Open Exchange suggests you tag any open EFL/ESL project with **P2P-EFL-ESL-X** whenever you encounter one online. If you do, this will be immediately noticed because the editors subscribe to the feed for the tag. This feed is available at <<http://del.icio.us/tag/P2P-EFL-ESL-X>> and includes every link that gets tagged as P2P-EFL-ESL-X anywhere on Del.icio.us, thus allowing interested parties to find those projects.

To register a course on the Dekita Exchange site, a teacher sends the Dekita editors a link to the page or blog post where information is supplied on at least the first three of the following points:

- students' geographical location
- beginning/end of course
- links to student weblogs or equivalent interactive work
- students' age and their competency in English
- number of class sessions per week

The link sent should be a unique URL of its own (permalink). A blogroll in a sidebar fails to include crucial information such as the students' geographical location, the duration of the course, and later on you cannot retrieve the former addresses once you change classes and post new links to the sidebar.

This post <<http://lycee.wordpress.com/classes/2ndes07>> might serve as a good example. Check the sidebar on the right hand side of this blog and observe that each class and year has a different link which corresponds to a distinct URL to a page which lists the students' blogs. In this way there is no need to delete blogrolls or open an account on another blog when you have a new class. You keep your references and work together.

The screenshot shows a WordPress blog page for '2ndes07' dated February 7th, 2007. The main content area includes a title '2ndes07', a date, and several paragraphs of text describing an English class blog. There are two 'EXCHANGE' buttons at the bottom of the main content. The right sidebar contains a 'Pages' section with links for 'Classes', '2ndes07', '2eres07', '2ene00', and '2ndes06'. Below that is a 'Categories' section with links for 'Elogging', 'ECML', 'finw', 'NZ', 'Photographs', 'social networking', and 'Uncategorised'.

Once you have the reference page of your course, it will then be added to the Dekita Del.icio.us account and tagged **P2P-EFL-ESL-X**. Thanks to some tinkering on Textpattern <<http://textpattern.com>> (the open source CMS Dekita is built on), the tagged courses from Del.icio.us are streamlined directly into the sidebar of the Dekita Exchange page.

While the Exchange compiles an up-to-date list of courses in which EFL/ESL students participate on the live Web, the Orchard <<http://dekita.org/orchard>> provides immediate access to individual posts and artifacts produced in such courses through a number of merged feeds. Learners can subscribe to these emerging conversations through the feed reader of their choice. There are many different approaches to the use of web publishing tools in ESL/EFL courses. The Dekita editors however, only aggregate to the Orchard posts that are written for a wide audience and that lend themselves well to conversation (as opposed to a circumscribed classroom exchange).

To view individual student feeds from a course click on a folder. To read the most recent posts coming from that course, click on a text link. Learners may choose one of the course folders in the sidebar or skim the posts on the main page, follow the links, and leave comments on other learners' blogs. Since the courses aggregated on the Orchard are listed in the [Dekita Exchange](http://dekita.org/orchard), as a teacher you may want to visit the Exchange to learn more about them and contact your colleague.

It is possible to subscribe both to the Orchard RSS feed or to a particular course by grabbing the feed from its page (right click on the RSS link, select copy link location or copy shortcut, and paste the copied URL to your aggregator).

<p>Below, English courses from the Dekita Exchange are listed. Click on a folder to view individual student feeds from that course; click on a text link to read the most recent posts coming from that course!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Blogging from the tropics  Our Class 2007  Internet English - Fall 2006  My Communication Class  The 003 Blog - Fall 2006  Blog Project  William's Class (NZ) SAKURA SAKU English class 2006 	<p>If I could...</p> <p>Posted: June 17th, 2007, 4:07pm UTC by cedob</p> <p>If I could I definitely would travel to Hawaii... First because of the surf spots, second because of the beautiful landscapes, third because of the perfect weather the Hawaiians have, and fourth because I think nobody should die before visiting this beautiful American state. The perfect waves that break on the Hawaiian coast attract several pro and amateur surfers in the whole world. The North Shore of Oahu, one of the islands that compose the Hawaiian archipelago, is known because of its famous waves. This region is basically composed by the Pipeline, the Sunset beach, and the Waimea bay.</p> <p>The waves of Pipeline are left tubular waves that can measure up to 10 feet of height and which break on a super flat bench. That is why the Pipeline waves are the greatest and the most famous pipes on the planet; in addition of being very dangerous, thus they just should be surfed by experienced surfers. On days that the sea is agitated, the canal to enter in the sea is very small, so the surfer must know very well the sea conditions. Here's some scaring photos of this perfect surfpoint :</p>
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5.2. Writing Matrix

Writingmatrix is a project of less sophistication than Dekita but it models how teachers can easily and informally implement collaboration projects among students dispersed on the Internet simply by acting on a good grasp of the concepts outlined here.

Writingmatrix was instigated originally by a group of four teachers who engaged their students in writing using blogs. The four teachers (Nelba Quintana and Rita Zeinstejer in Argentina, Sasha Sirk in Slovenia, and Doris Molero in Venezuela) each had their students tag their posts for this project with the term **writingmatrix**. The four teachers then set about tutoring one another and the students in turn how to use tagging and RSS to aggregate each other's blog posts. The project, still ongoing as long as there are students who wish to try it out and respond to one another's postings, worked well in its first phase inception, as can be seen from some of the many artifacts which the Writingmatrix project left online:

- The Writingmatrix collaborative wiki: <http://writingmatrix.wikispaces.com>
- A 2-hour workshop at the TESOL Arabia Abu Dhabi chapter Tactile Tasks and Technical Tips conference by Vance Stevens on-site, and Rita Zeinstejer online from Argentina, on April 21, 2007 on "Writing in a flat world: better blogging through social networking." [The workshop was recorded in Elluminate](http://www.slideshare.net/vances/writing-in-a-flat-world-betterblogging-through-social-networking/) and the slides are here: <http://www.slideshare.net/vances/writing-in-a-flat-world-betterblogging-through-social-networking/>.
- An online presentation on May 18, 2007 at the WIAOC online conference by Vance Stevens, Nelba Quintana, Rita Zeinstejer, Sasha Sirk, and Doris Molero--"Writingmatrix: CONNECTing students with blogs, tags, and social networking"--links to recording and slides: <http://webheadsinaction.org/node/174>

In the first phase, several hundred students in the three countries tagged their posts Writingmatrix and they and their teachers then conducted Technorati searches on this tag to gain an appreciation of how many students in their own locations and in the other countries were tagging in the same way. The search results gave all students in the project access to each other's blogs. This initial stage of the project focused on introducing the students to blogging and tagging and on the fine points of ensuring that their blogs were visible to one another (they have to be made "public"; in other words, they have to be configured to respond to pings, not necessarily the default setting in blog software one might use).

By the end of school terms in the three countries, the students in many cases had not yet exploited the opportunities to interact with one another, because they had started on the project too late in their semesters to make more than a few blog postings, and sometimes due to attitudinal factors mediating against their interest in students from other cultures. But having overcome the initial hurdles and learned the technique, it is likely that the teachers involved will renew their efforts with greater expertise with future students, and be better able to teach toward the system described here. With greater efficiency in the early stages, teachers might be able to then encourage their students to start Bloglines accounts and follow systematically what their peers in other parts of the world are writing, and use trackbacks and pingbacks to see more clearly who is commenting on their blogs. At a later stage Del.icio.us can be used in the way suggested above, and to show students who else is reading their posts and how they are tagging them.

These methods should lead to greater interaction among students, not only to the benefit of reading and writing in the target language of English, but also to increase awareness of and interest in each other's cultures. What makes this project particularly interesting is that it could be easily implemented by others using any tag of choice with minimal coordination between groups (or teachers could have their students tag their posts writingmatrix and thus informally "join" the Writingmatrix project).

6. Conclusion

Though different in scope, the Dekita and Writingmatrix projects are similar in that they are two examples of what is possible when we are aware of and can exploit syndication, aggregation, and mashup of content in distributed learning environments over the Internet. In order to maintain such awareness, it is important that education practitioners keep themselves current with not only the eclectic range of tools that are available to them now on the Internet, but with the concepts underlying their appropriate use.

These concepts necessitate real paradigm shifts and adjustments in thinking for contemporary teaching professionals, from push to pull mind sets, and from reliance on print literacy to an awareness of multiliteracies (Stevens, 2006) and transliteracy <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transliteracy>>. Although the print literature on the transformational effects of blogging on students and learning is scant, there is a preponderance of anecdotal evidence in what might be called the "multiliterature" of not only blogs but podcasts and YouTube and TeacherTube <<http://www.teachertube.com/>> videos regarding some of these impacts. Teachers who have reconciled these tensions are more likely to prepare their students for a future where, as it is said, many jobs have not yet been invented.

We close with one sample of this anecdotal evidence, a suggestion by Kathy Clesson that teachers who use technology with their students do indeed render those students more amenable to integrating technology into they way that they pursue their own lifelong learning (from Toledo, 2007):

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