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## **Reflections on StudyCom**

**\*\*\* On the Internet \*\*\***

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StudyCom English for Internet

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### ***The inception of StudyCom and EFI***

StudyCom was one of the first, and quite possibly *the* first, online ESL school with real teachers and regular classes. It met asynchronously at first and later synchronously in real time in a variety of virtual spaces. I had started it asynchronously under another name, English by Email (EbyE) in 1993. The World Wide Web wasn't around yet then, not even in its early text-only form. However I had just gotten this crazy new thing called "email" and was completely thrilled because, although I like to keep in touch with people, I'm terminally lazy—much too lazy to address envelopes, find stamps, and the rest of the overwhelming chores involved in actually writing letters.

How "EbyE" came to be: I was an ESL teacher at the time at UC Berkeley Extension and had an eager engineering student from Germany there named Udo Struck. He was also excited about email and was returning to his regular university in Paderborn, Germany, so I suggested to him that I could continue teaching—just as an experiment—using email. He readily consented and once back at the 'Uni', as they call universities in Germany, he was able to contact all of the other students, staff and faculty in his university with a single email (no security controls prevented anyone from doing this back then) and tell them about the opportunity to study English by email. (We didn't use the term 'online' back then; just 'email' was awesome enough.) Thus was born English-by-Email.

"EbyE" continued for several years, with students from other parts of the world joining in increasing numbers, mostly finding out about the classes by word of mouth or, yes, email.

The original World Wide Web tool created by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN in Switzerland was, like its cousins "Archie", "Veronica" and "Gopher", purely ASCII (text) based and not very engaging to the eye. Then in 1993, a rather momentous event occurred: the creation by Andreessen and Bina of a GUI (graphical user interface) for the World Wide Web (WWW), which they called "Mosaic" (Figure 1). It was the first GUI browser and set the Internet world on its ear.



Figure 1. from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic\\_\(web\\_browser\)#/media/File:NCSA\\_Mosaic.PNG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic_(web_browser)#/media/File:NCSA_Mosaic.PNG)

I learned about Mosaic at some point in 1994, and soon thereafter my brother Jon, who had worked at Xerox Parc and was very 'dialed-in' to Internet and computer matters, told me about something called "HTML", a 'markup' language with which one could pretty easily create one's own webpages. At about the same time I learned that anyone willing to spend 35 bucks could own their own web address, so I visited the ICANN data base in search of a good name. Believe it or not, "English.com" was already taken by someone whose name was Joe English! Go figure! Another name, "Learn.com", was also taken, so I settled on "Study.com".

Thus armed with a domain name, I set about designing a very simple web site, later transformed into something worthy by an online friend with actual design skills, who went by the online name of "Nettie". So in 1996, StudyCom was in business (Figure 2). We called the ESL part of StudyCom English for Internet (EFI) and viewed it as a subdivision of StudyCom. Later it became "StudyCom Languages for Internet" when we added Chinese classes run by Yaodong Chen (Stevens, 2002).

[Meet the teachers!](#)  
[Catalogue of Classes](#)  
[Apply for a class!](#)  
 Take this  
[Placement Test](#)  
 to determine your English level.  
[Live Chat at EFI Ichat](#)  
[Live EFI Chat at schMOOze](#)  
[Live IRC Chat at Talk City](#)  
[Talk to Other Students NOW!](#)  
 Questions?  
[Tell us what you think!](#)  
\*Read what others think!

Figure 2. from <http://web.archive.org/web/19961229001550/http://www.study.com/>

It was not really a ‘business’ in the monetary sense, since classes were free and the teachers were all volunteers (I did ask for donations for a time and actually received a few checks, 90% of which were, interestingly, from Japanese students. However, I never cashed any of them, as my expenses were not great, but I was touched).

Later we were extremely lucky to get an online classroom called “Chatterbox”, with text, voice and co-surfing (directed by the teacher) owing to the generosity of Peter Carlson of howyoudodat.com. The image of the room we used (Figure 3) shows how we had a student list and text chat on the left and co-surfing browser on the right. There were other tabs for PowerPoints, Flash, Application Sharing and Whiteboard.

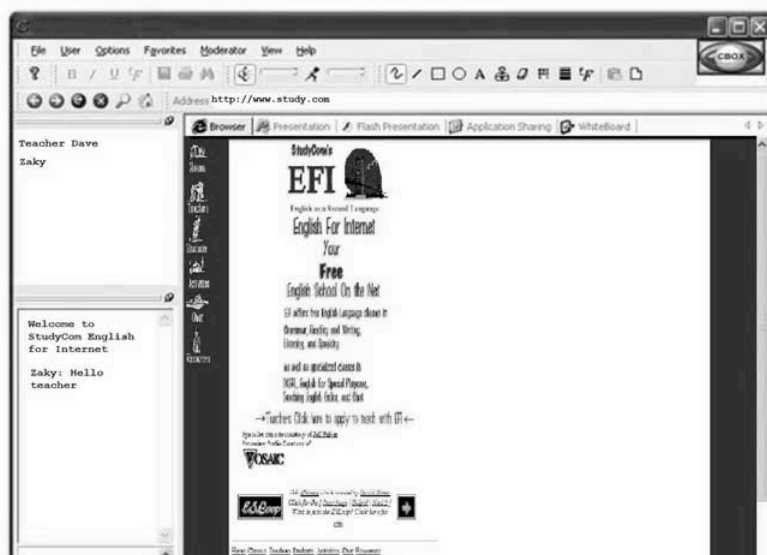


Figure 3. Mockup of the basic Chatterbox classroom for EFI (original unavailable)

With the Chatterbox tool we now had not only the StudyCom website but a linked, real multimedia, live, voice-enabled, recording-capable, classroom that, while not being the same as a real-world class, nevertheless was pretty darn cool, and in some ways better than a real-world classroom, since we literally had the whole Internet at our fingertips,

in large part thanks to the “co-surfing” feature. For those who are not familiar with co-surfing: it’s an algorithm that allows the teacher to make any webpage appear on the screens of all the students attending the class online. It is similar in that respect to screen-sharing, but superior to it in the sense that it links the student more directly to the web pages the teacher wishes to show. This little feature permitted StudyCom classes to include exercises and information about English grammar and the like from the plethora of ESL sites springing up all over the web, and even better, to include any other material whatsoever that might be useful for English learning. Thus images, videos, newspaper articles, podcasts and other audio, etc. could be incorporated instantly right into the class as it was going on.

### ***StudyCom in its heyday***

For quite a few years we had many teachers and students. The concept was new and exciting and lots of people were eager to try it out. For a long time we were listed on the first page of a Yahoo Search (no Google back then!) under “ESL online.” At the high point there were 40 teachers, the first of whom (apart from myself) was Vance Stevens, who later went on to found Webheads in Action (WiA, at <http://webheads.info>) and is still doing amazing things in the online ESL world today, including but by no means limited to pestering me to write this reminiscence.

We also attracted Michael Coghlan, who went on to become one of Australia’s leading experts in online edtech and who took on our first listening class and pioneered the use of a free voice chat plugin that anyone could embed in a web page called HearMe, allowing ESL students and teachers to talk to one another in real time. There was also Maggi Doty, who was teaching a class with Michael when they encountered Vance in the Palace on line. These three merged their classes, and created Writing for Webheads. We even did a stint of online-teacher training for the graduate-level TEFL class of Dr. Lucy Pickering, a forward-thinking professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta, now Director of the Applied Linguistics Laboratory at Texas A & M. The teacher trainees, as part of their final exam for Lucy’s class, did a poster board session on the experience of studying TEFL/TESL online through StudyCom (see Figure 4). The consensus was that the experience had been positive, and that they had realized it was indeed feasible to get useful, practical teacher-training online. We at StudyCom were quite happy to have demonstrated that not only could we teach ESL in this environment, we could also train teachers to teach it!



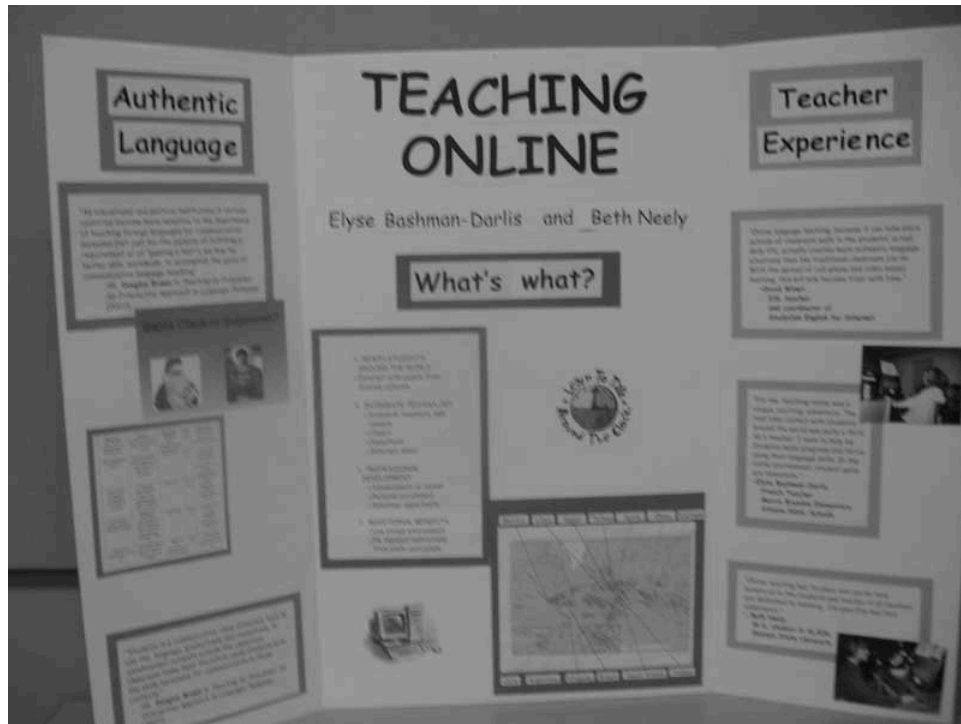


Figure 4. Posterboard about Teaching Online as taught in StudyCom's course for Dr. Pickering's M.A. TEFL Class

*The philosophy behind StudyCom*

The basic impetus behind StudyCom was to deliver ESL classes taught by trained native speakers of English, to students who prior to the Internet had no access to such teachers. Students who joined us on the Internet and resolved their many technical problems reported considerable benefit, often returning after an absence of several years to tell us how helpful the classes had been (as an example, when one of his WfW students from Japan came to Texas for post-grad studies and dropped by his parents' house in Katy, Vance Stevens called the community together online to share in the occasion and archived the event here: [http://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/sue\\_houston.htm](http://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/sue_houston.htm)).

Learning a language cannot be accomplished, in my view, in a year, or two years, or even five years. It's an ongoing thing and ongoing online classes are extremely well-suited to help, especially free ones such as those we offered. Thus, a happy but unforeseen by-product of teaching online was that many students continued attending for many years, something not generally possible in a brick-and-mortar school. Not a few of them have credited their quite fluent English skills, and the jobs they were able to get because of those skills, to their years at StudyCom (see Michael Coghlan and Allyson McColl's comments in the Addenda below).

There were a few teachers who disliked the idea of StudyCom offering free courses online, as naturally that approach would tend to deprive teachers of an opportunity to earn. I was and am quite sympathetic to those feelings. However, I felt that it was more important to develop the newborn concept, and charging for classes would get in the

way of that by restricting teachers' ability to experiment and force them to hew to students' preconceived notions of what an English class should be.

We did not for the most part design our own materials, feeling (I think rightly) that others were doing asynchronous exercises and explanations better than I ever could. Some EFI teachers did prepare lovely Powerpoints for their EFI students, but in general we made abundant use of the many wonderful interactive ESL websites (which, however, didn't offer live online teaching) for exercises and detailed grammar explanations, and of image banks, online readings and the whole treasure chest of English-language materials online—truly an embarrassment of riches. In particular I used Rong Chang's very helpful exercises and dictations (<http://rong-chang.com/>), Charles Kelly's many practical websites with interactive exercises based on Javascript (<http://iteslj.org/>), as well as many other excellent resources such as Voice of America's English learning materials (<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/>).

In addition we made abundant use of innovative 3-D sites like ActiveWorlds (<https://www.activeworlds.com/web/index.php>) and Second Life (<http://secondlife.com/>, Figure 5; see Stevens 2006 for a comparison of ActiveWords and Second Life based partly on experience in the EFI context). We also used Interspace with its cool webcam shots in lieu of actual heads (<http://www.digitalspace.com/avatars/book/fullbook/chww/chww8.htm>, Figure 6), and in the early days, the Palace (<http://thepalace.com/>, figures 7 and 8).

These were all amazing worlds where students' avatars could move around, use English to speak to other denizens, perform tasks, ask questions, give directions and carry out activities requiring use of English such as buying, selling, trading, commenting and explaining. Although these clients largely supported only text chat, they were often used simultaneously with synchronous speech tools such as HearMe. What a fantastic way to get students speaking in an 'almost-real' environment with sights, sounds and action, where they could use their new L2 to do fun and educational things!



Figure 5. StudyCom Headquarters in Second Life, 2006



Figure 6. Interspace: a tool developed by Nippon Telephone & Telegraph ca. 2000 (Note the live webcam heads within the 3-D space.)

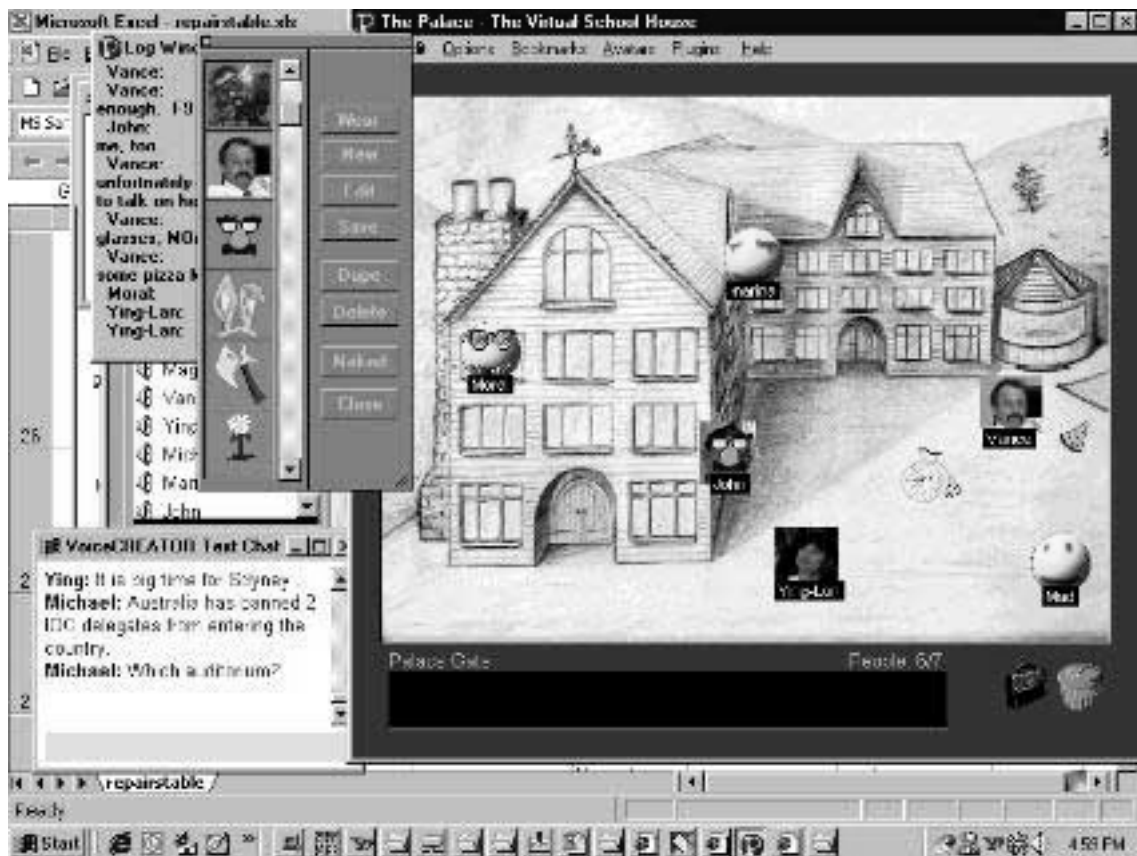


Figure 7. The EFI "Virtual Schoolhouse at the Palace (2000) from <http://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/ch000910.htm>



Figure 8. The Virtual Schoolhouse meeting room at the Palace, from <http://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/ch000910.htm>

In the image above, Maggi has drawn on the whiteboard of the meeting room a picture of the push cart she had got to help her keep her balance while she recovered from an accident, and she taught other participants there how to draw on the walls. Now, 15 years later, she would have shared an image from her smartphone, but this was the cutting edge of illustration in synchronous environments as StudyCom got into full swing at the turn of the century.

In 2010, inspired by Mike Marzio's ground-breaking, native-speaker-interview based [real-english.com](http://real-english.com), we started an exciting experiment with Qik (since bought out by Skype, but see <https://web.archive.org/web/20100102003407/http://qik.com>), wherein we streamed live interviews and live guided tours to students around the world. Even more interesting was when we enabled live student comments and questions so that the students could interview the subjects themselves rather than watch the teacher do it. We conducted a number of on-the-street interviews of passers-by in this way; nice to be able to query the locals from 10,000 miles away, and excellent as a cultural exchange medium!



Figure 9. Qik interview on YouTube, <https://youtu.be/0tFHHRtdu0Q>

Despite continuing to experiment with new and promising tools and methods, StudyCom activity started to slow down after about 2007. The excitement of being an early participant faded for many would-be volunteers, and other much more professionally designed and organized sites (many based on the “freemium” model whereby some parts are free, but others require payment) dominated the search pages and made StudyCom harder and harder to find. Additionally and perhaps more importantly, the notion that students would flock to live online lessons generally and native speaking teachers specifically, has not yet become the norm. Students would probably prefer live teachers in real-world classrooms, and for the moment in online-world classes they seem to be more comfortable with teacher-less ESL sites or some delay in the teacher-student response time (as is the case with MOOCs). It may be that future developments in technology will make live online classes more compelling and comfortable than they perhaps are at present; at least we can hope so. Whatever the cause, the student population started to fall bit by bit.

I sold the domain “study.com” in 2014 and it was purchased by a group that has turned it into a truly broad educational site rather than one focused primarily on language acquisition, so I am quite happy about that. I myself am continuing to teach online, now mostly on [Chatonic.com](http://Chatonic.com), a multi-feature website that has most of the tools Chatterbox did (e.g., co-surfing) and is, as was StudyCom English for Internet, free to students and teachers. You can find me on Chatonic most Sundays in either of two rooms: “studycom” or “studyenglish”. I am also continuing my research into novel online teaching methods, such as the humorous and edgy yet didactic approach to acquiring the devilishly difficult language that is Mandarin at PopupChinese (<http://popupchinese.com>, Winet, 2014).

### ***StudyCom after study.com: A peek into the future***

StudyCom has always been at the cutting edge, but the playing field has shifted since the turn of the century. Here are some directions I see us pursuing in the future.

Augmented Reality devices such as Google Glass (soon to be improved after a slow start) can add information to what the student sees; for example, displaying the English word for various objects in the student's world as she is walking around and looking at them.

Virtual Reality headsets such as Oculus Rift will provide an even more 3-D realistic experience for students (James, 2014). Furthermore, pairing these with robots will allow "telepresence". For example, imagine a student whose body is in Beijing walking around New York City with the aid of a robot there, who transmits a live picture of everything it sees in the Big Apple and turns when the student wearing the Oculus Rift turns, walks when the student walks, and of course speaks with English speakers the words uttered in China by the student (Sofge, 2015).

Mobile Education using smartphones can drastically reduce the gap between in-class experience and out-of-class experience for real-world students, merging the two into a seamless whole of learning and raw sensory input. Just to give a humorous example, recently a student texted me that he was late because he was stuck in traffic. Naturally I was skeptical—until he shot me a 6-second video of the endless non-moving line of cars in front of his. Try doing that ten years ago! Of course in that case I was the learner.

Holograms can create an extremely realistic environment for learning. Kip "Yellowjacket" in Second Life created holograms there which were marvelous for setting different scenarios at the click of a mouse for students to role-play in (bus station, restaurant, jail, whatever!). I think eventually we will have holograms like in Star Wars, allowing a palpable feeling of the teacher's presence even though he/she may be thousands of miles away.

Haptics or remote touch, through the use of digitally-enhanced gloves and body suits, can enable the teacher to give a virtual high-five or an encouraging pat on the shoulder (or if allowed by law, a swift kick in the hiney – naturally rules about appropriate and inappropriate touching would apply in such a Virtual World too!)

In preparing this article, we asked former teachers from StudyCom to contribute their memories in the addenda that follow. It's been a great ride and it's not over by a long shot.

David Winet  
Berkeley, May, 2015.

## Addenda

### **Addendum #1: Allyson McColl, teacher at StudyCom**



Allyson in a screenshot from: <http://learning2gether.net/2015/05/03/learning2gether-about-study-com-with-david-winet-michael-coghlan-and-vance-stevens/>

I think StudyCom was wonderful, for the learners and for the teachers. It was ahead-of-its-time and there was, and isn't, anywhere like it in any other language. I looked hard enough for the equivalent in French.

It gave the students a unique platform with access to qualified teachers, native-speakers, and other learners.

Let's be frank. It also gave them a super chatroom where they spent half their time private messaging. I sowed panic the day I announced, casually, that we archived all PMs and discussed them at our weekly Teachers' Conference.. :) I was buried in PMs...

But, for those who were interested, it was a fantastic resource. As well as 'on site', I'd always run a Yahoo Messenger Group. I accepted all applicants. It wasn't a coterie. It allowed for lots of ...er... 'extension work.' Loads of StudyCom students were, basically, shy... Too shy to type, far too shy to talk. One to one, and exploiting the direct, personal, contact, they had a real go at making a connection with a real, live, English-speaking, native, and were then more likely to take the plunge back into the general chat. I saw it work.

The technology was innovative, and we were all sufficiently unsophisticated to be excited by it. Gradually, of course, its limitations became annoying. Yahoo Messenger seemed thrilling! Now the newer technology is even slicker, but there's been a loss. The endless 'Sorry..I can't hear you. Could you repeat that, please' has gone; and with it the tiny, frustrating, steps towards real relationships. You continue to talk to your toddler and to your deaf, old, aunt because you truly want to communicate with them.



My anecdotes at our Hangout this afternoon (Winet, Coghlan, and Stevens, 2015) were an attempt to describe the indescribable. I've met several StudyCom students in real life; I've been invited to engagements, weddings, and graduations a-plenty. I've had students in my own home, I've been to theirs, and I've met Central Americans in Paris on the 'meet-you-half-way' principle. Apart from what David offered to students, he gave tremendous opportunities. I know I got several paying gigs on the basis of my online teaching experience. More importantly, I developed a lot of confidence behind the 'online' curtain and that stood me in good stead in the classroom.

I think, David, you can be justly proud of your baby. It was a HUGE thing in many people's lives. I can cite loads of examples: the couple who married; the successful Fulbright Scholarship applicant. I read a few applications for StudyCom participants, but the one successful one I proofread jumped right out of the page and bit me...; the non-native teachers-of-English who flourished at the ends-of-the-earth (well, Nepal), students who logged in from Korea; the only-man-in-Ethiopia-with-computer-access...I could go on.



### **Addendum #2: Malcolm James, teacher at StudyCom**

I find it difficult to believe it was over 10 years ago that I first discovered StudyCom. I was in the process of training to teach, quite late in life. I had had a varied career up to that point and prior to an accident as a car mechanic had never considered teaching. My initial plan was to teach in the automotive sector but, having very few formal qualifications meant I had to go back to basics to gain current qualifications in maths and English before I could begin teacher training. I also had to learn how to use a computer for the first time so I joined a class at the local library and bought a cheap second hand PC. It was then I found StudyCom.

At first I was a lurker in the background, reading the text chat, or watching and listening to the people chatting. I started helping with points of grammar, spelling and pronunciation. This soon made me realise how little I knew about my own language and how brave these students were trying to learn it. I observed in Teacher Dave's class and those of some of the other regular teachers. It was at this time I decided I would like to change direction and try for a CELTA qualification to teach English to speakers of other languages. I enrolled on the course and although I was the oldest person on the course found others in their thirties and forties who were also changing careers.

After a few months helping out in StudyCom I asked if I could take a regular class on Sunday afternoons. I would find a topic such as a news item to discuss or a random grammar point to teach. Mid week I would often go into the rooms while taking a break



from my study. The midweek groups were mainly housewives, a majority of whom were Hispanic. There was a lady from Puerto Rico, one from Mexico, a teacher from Spain, and a few other Hispanics. There were also two ladies from Iran, one a teacher and the other a doctor. We all seemed to meet at the same time and we jokingly called it the Hispanic hour. I didn't focus on teaching with this group; we just chatted about world news and the ladies joked about husbands and families. These sessions were very useful to me as it was an insight into cultural boundaries. Whereas most of the women from western societies were able to openly discuss boyfriends and relationship, the Asian learners could not because having a boyfriend in the western context was frowned upon.

There were very few men in those groups though I remember a lecturer in statistics from Brazil who was a true gentleman and a Chinese guy we called Dragon who had an Americanized Chinese accent. We also had a few Middle Eastern men who seemed more interested in chatting up the ladies rather than chatting with others in the group. Occasionally the subject matter got a little out of hand and I would have to intervene.

A few months later in StudyCom I met an Iranian lady living in Canada. I mentioned I was still learning about computers and she offered to help. She helped me understand MSN Messenger and Yahoo chat and how I could show a website on StudyCom. With her help I was able to show a topic for discussion.

The cultural topics were the most interesting. The Asian women were interested in male-female relationships in the west. The topics also included domestic violence towards women and the western women asked about arranged marriages. I had to help by making a distinction between arranged marriages and forced marriages; this topic was often raised. Occasionally we might discuss different religions and if we had a balanced group it was a useful session but, as moderator on a couple of occasions, I had to steer the conversation away from anything too controversial. Some of the funniest sessions were when we discussed former boyfriends and girlfriends, which fascinated the Asian women, and the western women often made jokes about things like their first kiss or their first date.

These topics from a teaching point of view were very useful to me while on the CELTA course and later in my classroom teaching. In the UK the majority of my students were from the Indian continent with a mixture of Muslim Sikh and Hindu housewives. When we had lessons covering the family or relationships I knew what areas we could explore and what not to.

The classes in StudyCom also gave me my first insight into the various difficulties certain language groups have with English, whether it was pronunciation, grammar, reading or writing. I was able to incorporate this into my CELTA course. I was able to explore teaching theories or topics such as teaching pronunciation in my classes in StudyCom.

While StudyCom helped me during that time to become familiar with teaching both in the classroom and online it also helped many students, not only with language but also cultural awareness. It also helped with stereotyping, which many of us are guilty of, intentionally or unintentionally. I am still in touch with a few members, two of whom are now English teachers, and I have been lucky enough to meet a couple of them here in the UK. My time at StudyCom was most enjoyable and only came to an end when I changed

computers. For some reason no matter how hard we tried my new computer would not run the site's chat program. I still miss those days in the online classes, and even just joining in the chat outside of class times.



### **Addendum #3: Michael Coghlan, teacher at StudyCom**

In its early days StudyCom went by the name English for Internet (EFI). I first discovered the site some time early in 1997 when I was searching for ESL materials to use with my classroom-based ESL groups in Adelaide, Australia. I noted that EFI was calling for ESL/EFL teachers to take classes online on a volunteer basis. As I knew little about how to teach online at that time, I saw this as a potentially rewarding professional development opportunity, I decided to take the plunge and put my name forward. David Winet responded and asked if I would be interested in taking an online listening class as my first assignment.

If I knew little about online teaching, I knew even less about how to use audio on the Internet. However, David was persuasive and I agreed to try it. What followed was an exciting time of exploration of how to produce listening materials. Armed with little knowledge, but just enough to be dangerous, I frequently pestered David with questions about how to master the intricacies of Real Audio, which was the most used audio software of the time. With David's infinite patience, I managed to get some basic materials ready for student use in June, 1997. They included information about how to use Real Player, and Pure Voice (a voice attachment tool that worked with the Eudora email client), and a selection of links to sites that offered various listening exercises.

This very first page can still be viewed at <http://michaelcoghlan.net/TOEFLHOME.htm>. As the URL suggests, the exercises were designed to assist students who wanted to practice their listening skills in preparation for the international TOEFL test that enabled entry into many universities. Actual lesson assignments can be viewed at <http://michaelcoghlan.net/toefllessonsplan.htm>.

The classes were small with typically 6-8 students. As I recall, classes were offered in blocks of five weeks. All student activity was asynchronous, with the option of attending a live synchronous session once a week on a Sunday at the Palace, a forerunner of the later more sophisticated 3D virtual worlds. In fact the Palace was a 2D virtual world where participants were represented by avatars who could move around the 2D space and where text chat would appear in chat bubbles next to your avatar. In truth, most of the interaction in these early Palace sessions had little to do with class or study content.

They tended to be general and very social chat sessions where students could practice their written English skills, and form bonds with others in their class. From these early Palace experiences I learnt the enormous value of allowing students social time to connect with their teacher and other students to form a sense of community. The later work of Gilly Salmon and her seminal work on emoderation bore this out. (<http://www.gillysalmon.com/five-stage-model.html>)

Some students would take the extra step to meet online with me in Yahoo Messenger, or ICQ – to my knowledge the earliest tools that enabled live synchronous conversation. These were usually one-on-one sessions where students could ask questions about the set listening exercises, or practice their conversation skills.

After more or less mastering the available tools for producing audio for listening exercises I moved on to taking a Reading and Writing class. The first version of these classes can be seen at <http://www.michaelcoghlan.net/RWHOME.htm>. Note the predominance of text and the almost complete lack of images and video! This was absolutely typical of many websites at the time. To my credit though I did encourage students to contribute photographs to a class community page at <http://michaelcoghlan.net/TOEFLClassinfo5.htm> but that was a high level skill in those days and few managed to send through photographs for me to post.

As with the Listening classes, the Reading and Writing classes were held in five-week blocks with most work done asynchronously, and again with the option of attending the weekly meeting at the Palace.

A significant spin-off of these EFI classes for me was that I began using the materials I developed, as basic as they were, with my students in my paid day job. I remember too that occasionally some of my day students would show up at the Palace – my two work-worlds were neatly coalescing.

Around this time I became aware that another EFI class taught by Vance Stevens was meeting weekly in the Palace just before my class. What happened over time is that Vance's students would stay online to join my class so in effect the two classes blended into one and Vance and I would co-facilitate these combined sessions. I'll let Vance Stevens take up the story from here, as this is where and how the concept of the Webheads was born!

#### **Addendum #4: Pat Harvey, teacher at StudyCom**

I have no idea how I found the site in the early days. I had been thinking about doing some online writing and English skills work, and had started looking around. I saw David's ad for teachers and that was it. I decided to focus on intermediate and advanced writing, business English and then the university prep writing courses. There was so much material available that I created heaps of lessons for the students. Creating the material and doing interactive editing with 'keeners' was great fun. Checking the mail every morning became a grand part of the day. My fondest memory was the Sunday morning meetings which all too often wandered a very long way from the teaching of English, but really did enhance my world view.

***Commentary from Vance Stevens, OTI editor and former teacher at StudyCom***

I asked David Winet to contribute this article when I discovered that he had sold the domain name study.com in 2014. As noted in the addenda above, I was not alone in feeling that his applications of technology to online language learning environments stretching back before the turn of the century have always been ahead of their time. Dave has struck the many teachers he has worked with as an innovator, and an inspiration in his use of technology for language learning.

Having worked with Dave in the early days and made frequent use of his expertise since, his sale of the study.com domain struck me as the end of an era in which Dave was an early pioneer. I therefore suggested he archive as much as he could in this article, and to help jog his memory, we made it a truly social effort. In the course of preparing this article we contacted several colleagues who had participated in EFI as teachers, and have added their reminiscences in the addenda above. We also convened a Hangout on Air to discuss with Dave his work on StudyCom (Winet, Coghlan, & Stevens, 2015).

This article is thus a result of many inputs, from Dave himself as well as from other teachers who have been impacted by and who are appreciative of his work. Some of these are represented in the Addenda that accompany this article, and in my own addendum here —

I learned about StudyCom when I met Dave at a CATESOL conference in Sacramento in 1996. I was interested in participating since I had just taken a job full-time as an EFL software developer in Silicon Valley. I missed teaching, and I saw in StudyCom an opportunity to learn about online learning and keep up my skills in a calling I soon returned to. I had the impression at the time that I was one of several teachers Dave had recruited to join him in this effort, and I only learned in the course of working with Dave on this article that I was in fact the first teacher to have done so.

But I was not the last. In 1997, after I had transferred to the UAE, I met two other EFI teachers who were conducting classes at the Palace, Michael Coghlan and Maggi Doty. This was a fortuitous meeting because we eventually merged our classes into something we called Writing for Webheads, or WFW (the name Webheads having come from an ICQ chat with Dave where he had remarked that we were all a bunch of webheads; see Stevens, 2001). Like Dave, I had learned HTML just a year before and developed a website for the class at <http://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/webheads.htm>. As Michael Coghlan noted above, I had trouble at first getting students to submit photos to the website, but once one did, then another followed, then 4 more, and so on, and eventually we had the gallery of faces shown at the URL above (this gallery surfaces remixed in images that can be located on Flickr using the tag Webheads, as in this image from a build in Second Life). This all happened 5 years before Facebook.



From: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/daf/274627586/in/album-72157594336964602/> Credit: Dafne Gonzalez, 2006

I did much the same in a teacher training context in a movement called Webheads in Action that started out as an EVO (Electronic Village Online) session in 2002 (<http://webheads.info>). I reported on the kinds of tools we were using at that time in Stevens 2004 and at <http://www.vancestevens.com/findbuds.htm>. Our community of practice has persisted and has most recently evolved into Learning2gether (<http://learning2gether.net>), and it started with StudyCom.

It's important to note that David perpetuates his work under the concept StudyCom, whereas the new domain site can be viewed at <http://study.com/>. In this article we have kept to the convention StudyCom when writing about what we used to think of as 'study-dot-com', or English for Internet.

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