Work-in-Progress :

Developing Out-of-Class e-Learning

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Conventional classes in Asia face a common problem with using English as a second or foreign language when it comes to adopting e-learning technologies.

In March of this year, I built a website for out-of-class use by several conventional face-to-face classes for English-as-a-Foreign-Language. The aims were to shift individual study away to free-up in-class group activity time. The website contained various sections of indirectly-related teaching (IRT) material, references to further reading, web-links to topics related to in-class work, and multimedia material as resources to the students, and also contained tasks for access by the students individually on their own time. Initial responses by the students were very favorable. All the students visited the site at least once. More than 90% visited regularly several times per week. Students reported they were satisfied and interested.

After adding a message/activity board to the website, in effect, completing the class website as the hub of our course activities, then problems started with poor student participation. My expectations of this message/activity board were for it: 1) to showcase students' work for peer-review; 2) to serve as a forum for additional discussion,

opinions, ideas, and comments; and 3) to give the students more opportunities for improving their peer-evaluation skills. Anticipating students' initial apprehensions at being the first to post, I designed the message/activity board to be user-friendly - I randomly selected several students' works, and with their permission, posted them; I added encouraging comments, focusing not on their grammar, but on their message; I added a "Find the Grammar Error" quiz; I invited comments on high-interest topics drawn from current news and magazines.

Their initial response to this board was apathetic. Though everyone visited the board, no one made a single posting in its first three weeks. To battle their skepticism, I began using in-class time to discuss the board. To no avail, there were still no postings. As a last resort, with five weeks left in the semester, I introduced awarding of up to 40 points per post (1000 points is the maximum for the course), and with this, a trickle of students began posting. By the end of the semester, the resulting usages of the board were disconcerting: 32% of the total expected work was posted to the board, 50% (of a class of 40 students) utilized the board in some way, 30% of whom posted more than twice, one student monopolized the

quiz, one student offered her feedback of her own work, and no student gave any evaluations, opinions, or comments on a peer's work.

My proposed next step will be to survey my students' opinions of our message board to seek student-user input on how to have it better utilized. My aim is to increase the class participation rate with greater emphasis in the area of peer evaluation and exchange of opinions. My class board can be seen at:

http://pub26.bravenet.com/forum/83be76f32 ea3/show.php?usernum=2189064753&id=

While out-of-class e-learning was successful for individual study by students, it is difficult to manage for group collaborative work. Even comments on other postings were not forthcoming. Suggestions are invited as to how to proceed. Possible tie-up with other EFL classes in other Asian countries is feasible.

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