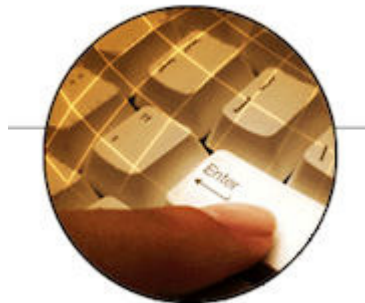




March 2009
The Consultants-E Team



[**the online learning edition**]

Dear < %[contact_first name] % > ,

Welcome to our regular newsletter exploring the world of ICT in education, online training & development. In this issue we consider online language schools – advantages, disadvantages and current trends in technology enhanced language learning. If you've missed past newsletters, they can be downloaded in pdf format from our website at:

<http://www.theconsultants-e.com/newsletter/>

You'll find the following sections in this newsletter:

- **STOP PRESS**
- **LEARNING ONLINE**
- **COMPANY NEWS & UPDATE**
- **UPCOMING ONLINE COURSES**
- **CONFERENCES**

We hope you'll enjoy this newsletter. Please note that you've received it because you signed up

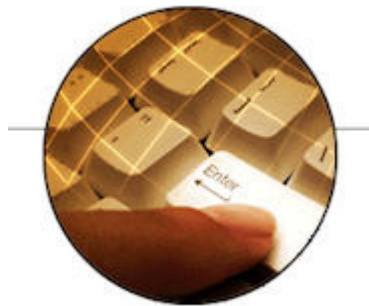
for mailings from us on our website (<http://www.theconsultants-e.com>), or have done a course with us. If you no longer want to receive newsletters or mailings, please send an email to info@theconsultants-e.com, with 'Unsubscribe' in the subject line.

STOP PRESS... STOP PRESS... STOP PRESS... STOP PRESS...

The Consultants-E were at the British Council **ELTons Awards** again this year, shortlisted for our teacher training and virtual worlds development work in SL. We won an ELTon in 2007 for our innovative ICT in the Classroom course (now the **CertICT**) and were delighted to be shortlisted again so soon.

We were also finalists in the IATEFL BESIG **David Riley Award** for Innovation in Business English and ESP for our Teaching Business English course (now the **CertIBET**). For more on **[our awards and publications](#)**, visit our website.

LEARNING ONLINE



Gavin Dudeney was recently interviewed by Michael Bowden, who was writing an article on online learning and technology-enhanced language learning. Read on to find out how Gavin answered the questions...

Why is the number of online schools and people enrolling on online courses increasing?

There's a perceived financial benefit to reducing your teaching staff costs – or paying less to language organizations – in adopting online or blended solutions to staff training in languages. The most popular model I've seen is approximately 80% computer-driven and around 20%

tutor-led. However, given the lack of quality on many of these solutions, the overall benefit may not be as cost-effective as most companies think. Just as with the multimedia schools of the nineties (particularly big in Spain) people feel that this kind of learning is flexible, easier and – perhaps – more interesting. In actual fact, research shows that many people working a blended option will study less, and will also use their work time just as they might with traditional courses. As with many things, the packaging is often not as good as the reality. However, with cost cutting happening across the board, it makes sense for companies to look at their training budget as well.

Has there been a decrease in the number of students going to English speaking countries over the past 12 months to study? Why?

I'm not really in a position to answer this one, I'm afraid – I work in consultancy now. I can tell you that most technology-driven language solutions often result in companies and individuals returning to more traditional methods once they've seen the results. This was very obvious here in Spain after the initial rush of multimedia schools such as Opening and Wall Street.

Is learning technology increasingly being used in teaching?

As someone who has been training teachers to use technology in their teaching for almost fifteen years now, I'd like to hope that was the case. But the reality I'm faced with as I travel worldwide for work every year is somewhat different. Teachers are very conservative animals, and even more so language teachers, I find. In many countries there is an obvious lack of opportunity in terms of facilities, connection, etc., and in many more I still see great resistance.

This often works down the digital divide, with older teachers clinging on to their lesson plans and photocopies – but that's not entirely the case, and perhaps the notion of 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' is not as clear cut as Prensky first assumed. I see plenty of younger teachers also not using technology. In many cases it is the sheer lack of training of any kind that holds people up. In most other professions, ICT training is the norm, whilst English teaching seems to willfully ignore it – this is why we developed the Cert ICT course, which is now validated by Trinity College London.

Where technologies are being successful they tend to be built on familiar tools – the interactive whiteboard would be a good example, and I've seen them used excellently in the UK state education sector where a significant budget was set aside for training. Until we learn to balance hardware/software budgets with training budgets there is little hope for improvement in the current situation.

What are the range of issues related to learning technologies for schools, universities and enterprises?

I think I've probably covered that above – there are issues of training, and issues of helping

people change their approach to teaching, lesson preparation and 'archiving' to adapt to the use of technologies in their centres. There are plenty of other issues too: from learners in companies who spend all day looking at computers and don't want to do more of the same in language classes, to technical support, reliability of infrastructure, etc.

But it still seems to be the case that technology is classed differently to anything else in our teaching environments- as an add-on or extra. Until it is fully-integrated then it won't really play a fruitful part in most people's learning. Stephen Bax writes well on this normalization in his article 'The Future of CALL':

<http://www.iateflcompsig.org.uk/media/callpresentpastandfuture.pdf>

What are the possible threats for training departments and language centres? How do they intend to compete in the market?

As I said above, people's experiences with multimedia schools sent them packing in droves back to traditional language centres where they deal with a regular teacher and measurable conditions. I don't think this is going to change in the near future. These training departments and language centres are potentially much better – by combining their tried and tested approach with a pedagogically-sound implementation of technology I think they have a very rosy future. What they need to do is to ensure that they employ teachers who are au fait with ICT and comfortable integrating it fully into their teaching. As with the death of the newspaper, I think the death of these more traditional centres is over-sold, even in the current economic climate. I suspect that they may well suffer in the short term as people tighten their belts, but I don't think this will be a long-term downturn.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning?

There are certain perceived advantages – flexibility, price, personalized learning... but frankly most of the research will show that these are not nearly as important as we might feel. Most people on e-learning courses study at fixed times and from fixed locations – there is very little study being done wirelessly on the beach! Online language courses will work for some, of course, in much the same way that you *can* 'learn' a language from a Linguaphone course. It takes a certain kind of person with a certain disposition.

Disadvantages in online language courses are relatively obvious, I think – lack of easy group practice, lack of eye contact, lack of many paralinguistic features which make the possibility of group gelling and real communicative practice much harder than they might be in a face-to-face context.

This is not the case with teacher training courses online, where dealing with knowledge is perhaps more important than 'communication'. There are plenty of opportunities online for real, meaningful language practice – Second Life with its international communities of native speakers springs to mind here – and these may be much more real and useful than anything that may be achieved in an online classroom.

Having set up and managed the technical side of an online language school for many years (in a past career) I have come to the conclusion that you cannot really learn a language online, but you can improve one. Were I to be deciding to learn a new language today, I would be visiting the local language schools – part of the experience is the social life, and whilst many online courses will give you plenty of practice in the basic skills, few of them have the community side in place to successfully emulate the experience of learning with a group of like-minded people.

What is the criterion for a successful online school or course?

Well, the major one for me would be the one that they're all missing (at least to my knowledge) – and that would be that the social community should be the absolute centre of any school or course, and not something tacked on at the end. Most online schools I have seen have hundreds of exercises for grammar, listening, reading, etc., but pay absolutely no attention to the community side of things – getting together, speaking, sharing and developing, and this is where they will always fall down.

In the light of the ELF discussion, it seems likely that most people we teach English to are actually going to go on to spend more time speaking to other 'non-native' speakers of English than they are to 'native' speakers, so an hour a week of speaking to a 'native' teacher using a synchronous audio tool such as Skype seems to me to almost be a waste of time. People need to get together and talk to each other, to laugh and share and discuss – you simply don't get this in an online tutorial with a teacher. So yes, by all means have good solid exercises, games and everything else – but don't bother opening an online school, or engaging in distance language teaching unless you give people a chance to talk to each other. There are other criteria, obviously – well-trained and experienced staff who are paid well for what they do, training, great materials...

How can a prospective student find out whether an online school/course is of a high standard?

I think there are few ways of judging at the moment. Most young people will use social networks and other Web 2.0 tools to stay informed about what's good and what isn't. People of my generation tend to talk to friends... I would be looking for a company that has been around for a while, long enough to prove that what it offers is good enough to survive. I would then be looking at if they are recognized by an institution for the work they do. I would put feelers out on my social networks – has anyone studied with them? I'd ask to talk to a real human being at the other end of the phone who could answer my questions in the language of my choice, and I would find out about the organization – who they have working for them, who the writers are, who their big clients are. I'd have a sample class and a sample tutorial.

But really, at the end of the day, you can only really know once you're studying with them – it might work for you, it might not. At least there will always be a language centre nearby if it doesn't!

In the next newsletter...

Using video in the classroom - the Web 2.0 Approach.

Note: You can download all our Newsletters at: <http://www.theconsultants-e.com/newsletter/>

Past issues...

- Road Warrior (December 2008)
- Twittering On (September 2008)
- Social Networks & Communities of Practice (February 2008)
- A Potted History of Technology in Teaching: The Future (December 2007)
- A Potted History of Technology in Teaching: The Present (November 2007)
- A Potted History of Technology in Teaching: The Past (October 2007)
- Information Overload (June 2007)
- Second Life II (February 2007)
- Second Life I (November 2006)
- Interactive Whiteboards (June 2006)
- Tools for teaching a language online (January 2006)
- ICT Skills for educators (October 2005)
- VLEs: Virtual Learning Environments (May 2005)

COMPANY NEWS & UPDATE

- Argentina Summer School
- Virtual Teacher Support Networks - Asia
- SLanguages 2009
- Escola Oficial Barcelona - E-Learning Study
- Avatar Languages Teaching Community
- IATEFL - British Council Cardiff Online

Argentina Summer School

In January we ran a face-to-face training course for the British Council in Argentina. Featuring participants from Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Argentina, the course focussed on the use of technologies in teacher training and was supported by a dedicated Moodle site for participants to continue to develop on their return home.

Virtual Teacher Support Networks - Asia

Since January we've been working on a project with the British Council in south Asia which involves the setting up of Virtual Teacher Support Networks to support local English teachers in: the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan. Our roles as consultants was to visit each country and meet key stakeholders in a bid to evaluate the project to date and help it move forward. The three-week research trip was highly enjoyable and informative and we have now presented our report to the British Council. We look forward to seeing how this project comes together over the coming months.

SLanguages 2009

Following on from last year's second SLanguages conference, we are pleased to announce a call for papers for this year's bigger and better event, to be held 8th May 11:00 PDT to 9th May 11:00 PDT on EduNation II and III.



The conference aims to bring together practitioners and researchers in the field of language education in Second Life for a 24-hour festival celebrating languages and cultures in Second Life, and will include a variety of social events as well as an exciting mix of plenary and simultaneous sessions throughout.

[More on the conference](#) can be found on our website and on the [official SLanguages website](#).

Escola Oficial Barcelona - E-Learning Study

We're currently working with the Escola Oficial de Idiomes (Drassanes) Barcelona to help them move forward with plans to offer extra materials to all their learners online and - eventually - the option of blended courses. We're producing a review of materials preparation tools such as Hot Potatoes, plus tutorials in the most popular packages in a bid to help teachers produce

their own online materials.

Avatar Languages Teaching Community



We're also working with an online language school - Avatar Languages - to develop and seed an online teacher development community for the teachers working in the school. Teachers of various languages will be able to interact online and continue their professional development with particular reference to the tools and approaches used at the school.

IATEFL - British Council Cardiff Online



And finally don't forget that if you're not lucky enough to be able to get to the IATEFL Annual Conference (this year in Cardiff, UK) then you can take part in the online version of the conference from the middle of March 2009. Our own Gavin Dudeney has been working on this project for the past three years and it really is a unique opportunity to experience some of the conference from home. Click the banner to visit the site...

UPCOMING ONLINE COURSES

CertIBET - Certificate in Business English Training 14 April 2009 - 23 June 2009

70 hours over ten weeks

The CertIBET (Certificate in International Business English Training) aims to meet the needs of business English trainers to enhance their skills and expertise, to increase their employability prospects in the sector, and improve their ability to deliver a quality product to potential

clients. The CertIBET course looks at a range of useful techniques, tools and resources for teaching Business English to learners, in 10 modules. [\[more...\]](#)

this professional qualification is jointly managed and validated by



**CertICT - Certificate in Teaching Languages with Technology
14 April 2009 - 15 September 2009**

120 hours over twenty weeks

The CertIBET (Certificate in International Business English Training) aims to meet the needs of business English trainers to enhance their skills and expertise, to increase their employability prospects in the sector, and improve their ability to deliver a quality product to potential clients. The CertIBET course looks at a range of useful techniques, tools and resources for teaching Business English to learners, in 10 modules. [\[more...\]](#)

this professional qualification is validated by



**E-Moderation: A Training Course For Online Tutors
01 March 2009 - 30 March 2009**

30 hours over four weeks.

This course is aimed at teachers, trainers, tutors, facilitators, lecturers and mentors from any discipline and any level of education, who are interested in developing the skills necessary to become an effective e-moderator in online courses. [\[more...\]](#)

**Moodle Starter: An Introductory Course to learn how to use Moodle
01 May 2009 - 30 June 2009**

40 hours over eight weeks.

This course is aimed at teachers, trainers, tutors, facilitators, lecturers and mentors from any discipline and any level of education, who are interested in learning how to set up and use Moodle to offer online courses. The course is run entirely online, in Moodle itself. [\[more...\]](#)

**Moodle Smarter: An Introductory Course to learn how to use Moodle
01 May 2009 - 30 June 2009**

40 hours over eight weeks

The **MOODLE SMARTER** training course teaches you to use some of the more complex Moodle tools and functions, which are not covered in our [Moodle Starter](#) course. The course is hand-on and experiential – from the first week of the course itself you will be working in a Moodle installation which is either already hosted by your institution, or hosted by us for you (preferable). You will add new elements to your Moodle course as you learn about them each week, via tutor support, peer discussion, documentation, and a range of online videos. For the duration of the course you will be provided with your own webspace with your own Moodle installation if you do not already have one. At the end of this time you will be shown how to export your course so that it can be used in your own installation. [[more...](#)]

**WebQuests
01 July– 30 July 2009**

30 hours over four weeks.

The WebQuests course examines the theory and practice of WebQuests, and looks at real examples of WebQuests created for language learners. Participants design, plan and create their own WebQuest, for use in their own teaching context with their own learners, and put their WebQuest online using free WebQuest generator tools. [[more...](#)]

**Short courses: Podcasting, Wikis, Second Life, eNetworks, Blogs
[see dates on our website]**

10 hours over two weeks (each course).

Podcasts, wikis, blogs and Second Life are ICT tools which are being used by increasingly numbers of teachers in the classroom – these separate short courses will teach you how to use them with your own learners! Each of these short two weeks courses looks at one ICT tool (podcasts, wikis, blogs or Second life) in depth. You will learn not only how the tool works, but how to set up projects with and for your own learners. Each course is hands-on and practical. With plenty of tutor guidance and support, you will learn to set up a project with these free Internet-based tools for your own learners. You will leave each course ready to try out the tool with your own classes. [[more...](#)]

That's it for this edition. We hope you've enjoyed the newsletter.

**March, 2009
The Consultants-E Team**