

Teaching ESL/EFL with the Internet: Catching the Wave
Feyton C., Macy M., et al;
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At Norwalk Community College, we recently secured a computer lab dedicated to ESL and foreign language instruction. While there are many computer labs around campus, they are generally reserved for computer science and business courses or as open/walk-in labs. One might expect that, given our college's tireless preaching about the virtues of information technology, our ESL teachers would be flocking to the new lab with their students, eager to get them learning on line.

In fact, this has not been case. Even with some workshops, one, in particular, with a noted computer assisted language learning expert, as well as lists of commonly accessed ESL/EFL websites, textbooks with CD accompaniment, and my cajoling about the wealth of material online, my ESL faculty are just not yet convinced of the computer lab's pedagogical role, aside from its basic word processing and email functions. There are two factors that might explain their reluctance: one has to do with taking enough time out of busy teaching schedules to explore the Internet's language learning potential; the other is not having a good resource book to walk them, step-by-step, through different kinds of Internet-based language learning activities.

Teaching ESL/EFL with the Internet: Catching the Wave, a very recent Merrill/Prentice Hall publication, is just such a good, practically focused guide to Internet use in the ESL/EFL classroom. It is the collaborative effort of a diverse group of educators from the University of Southern Florida. These include faculty in secondary education, information technology, curriculum development, linguistics and intensive

English. The diverse perspectives this group offers have all contributed to a very accessible, intelligent and well-planned resource text that should be on the desk of every ESL/EFL educator.

The book is divided into 6 chapters: four cover the main language skill areas; a fifth is devoted to exploring cultural topics such as superstitions, food, the roles of animals, while the sixth provides some assessment rubrics. There is also a glossary of common computer terms and general notes on using computers for instructional purposes. Each unit begins with an overview/rationale followed by teacher and student tips. Conceptually, the book fully embraces the communicative and creative bases of language learning, regardless of level.

A typical lesson begins with a page of explanatory points covering skill area, level, website addresses, length of time required, and computer requirements. A “Teacher’s Guide” page lays out very clearly the steps involved in the activity with succinct notes and pointers. A worksheet follows where students respond to questions, write notes and fill in outlines based on what they have gleaned from the given website. Finally, there is a page devoted to expansion activities and an especially noteworthy feature, “Modify the Level,” which suggests how teachers can adapt the given activity to specific levels of competency.

For example, in a beginning level listening activity called “Beach Life,” students are directed to a web site of famous biographies and asked to read about the actor John Wayne. They then play a one-minute audio recording (accompanied by video stills) about John Wayne and answer questions about what they heard. (They can play it as many times as they want.) Suggested follow-up activities include viewing a John Wayne movie,

writing short bios of famous people from students' own countries or, for an advanced level, discussing and/or writing about the cowboy as role model/hero in American culture.

An advanced writing activity, "Rising Tides," asks students to visit the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website on global warming and read about such topics as "Climate," "Impacts," and "Action." When they have accessed sufficient background information from the site, they are directed to do further Internet research on their own, focusing on one aspect of global warming of interest to them. The culminating activity is to have them write a newspaper article (with the main points to be covered in a typical news article provided). The authors suggest that a beginning-level class could focus on one of the EPA website links and/or students could be asked how they could help reduce pollution known to contribute to the greenhouse effect.

Because *Teaching ESL/EFL with the Internet: Catching the Wave* is primarily a teacher resource book, it should provide as much flexibility as possible in terms of how the lessons can be used. It succeeds admirably in this respect by offering both computer neophytes as well as seasoned users interesting and challenging websites with straightforward ideas for class use. This text states very explicitly what the learning objectives are in a given activity, yet encourages both the teacher and student to be creative. The authors are to be applauded for bringing this exciting text into the realm of everyday teaching. For some it will be a good starting point in using the Internet; for others it will prompt new possibilities and further exploration on line. This is a book that will complement a wide variety of ESL/EFL programs and courses.