Writing

Name: Collaborative blogging

Aim: to develop writing skills by working together in small groups

Contexts: secondary, EAP, ESP

Level: B1 – C2

Type of tool: blogging service

Type of materials: OWN

Planning: medium – the set-up stage is crucial to the long-term success of the activity on-going – the nature of the activity is that it should run across a reasonable period of time e.g. a semester or academic year.

Preparation 1:

Decide which blogging service to use. This could be based on your own experience (good and bad) and, therefore, your ability to provide assistance with administering the blog.

Decide how to divide your class into small groups (max. 3 – 4 students).

Procedure:

1. In the classroom:

Explain that the class is going to write a blog. The blog is to be a learning journal tracking the course participants learning experiences both in and outside the class. The class will be divided into groups which will work together to write their contributions to the blog. Each group will be responsible for contributing to the blog when it is their turn on a rota. Other groups will add comments to the posts.

Divide the class into small groups as per your preparation. Ask the groups to discuss their experience of blogs: either writing or contributing to one, or reading blogs. The groups report back. Make a note of those students with previous experience. Record on the board any ideas that could be useful in the next discussion.

Ask the groups to reconvene and discuss and prepare to present what they think would be appropriate guidelines for:

■ What to write in the blog.

■ How often each group should contribute.

■ What is and isn't appropriate, both for blogs posts and comments added to those posts.

■ How to respond if somebody other than a class member comments.

They should also think of a name for the blog.

The groups present their ideas. Discuss with the entire class and reach a consensus.

Have an anonymous vote to agree the name of the blog.

Preparation 2:

Set up the blog using the online service you chose previously. Create a user profile for each group. Decide on the degree of administrative permissions you wish the groups to have. For example, should they be able to approve comments made on their posts or is that something you wish to keep control over?

Prepare the rota.

Add the agreed guidelines as the first post on the blog.

2. In the classroom:

Show the class the blog and the guidelines post. Distribute the user profile names and passwords and the rota.

3. Outside the classroom:

Groups take it in turns to post to the blog a record of the classes, their thoughts about what they have learnt, how they have applied it, what they found difficult and would like to review, any relevant content that they have researched independently, and whatever other types of information agreed in the set-up discussions. The other groups read and contribute comments. Any group can reply to the comments although this must include the group that wrote the post. You should also monitor the content and comment.

Variations:

An alternative to the learning journal blog is to create a fictional situation or character about whose life and experiences the groups can blog. The scenario or situation of this character should be very similar to that of the students writing the blog. This has two main benefits. Many language students find it easier and less inhibiting to assume a character when they use the target language. The other benefit is that groups learning for professional reasons, such as business English students, can write about issues and situations in their working lives while maintaining commercial confidentiality.

Notes:

Although LMSs offer blog functions, asking a class to contribute to a blog that is publicly visible on the internet can create a greater sense of ownership and responsibility amongst the students. This can lead to increased participation and provide a momentum that gives the project a life of its own. The role you decide to play will have an impact. Try to be as hands-off as you can.