

## **1 – Introduction**

The use of technology has not only changed the shape of our society but also the approach to language teaching (Lord, 2008). It can be a potential source of input, interaction, and output for learners of a foreign language. Blogs, a relatively new concept, have received a lot of attention regarding their use in scholarship and teaching (Martindale; Wiley, 2005). In this activity, I will explore how to create and use blogs as an educational tool in an interactive way.

## **2 – Planning the Class Blog**

*1.1 – Name of the activity:* Class Blog.

*1.2 – Audience:* High beginner and up, all languages.

*1.3 – General goals:*

- . Promote learning in a collaborative way;
- . Help teachers better understand their learners' learning process and their needs in writing;
- . Create a sense of community where ideas are shared (Xu, 2008);
- . Promote comprehensible output (Swain, 1995): output stimulates learners to move from a semantic to a more grammatical processing, helping learners develop their syntax in the target language.

*1.4 – Specific goals:*

- . Improve learners writing skills;
- . Give learners opportunities to continue their learning outside the classroom;
- . Develop the learners' cultural awareness;
- . Give learners opportunities to create and use the language in a meaningful way.

*1.5 – Steps in building the Class Blog:*

*1.5.1 – Before creating the Class Blog:*

- . The Class Blog can be used for a variety of activities, such as to stimulate discussion through hot topics; promote cultural awareness; post exercises online instead of handing in papers; post announcements; and the like (see 2.1 for suggestions of interactive activities). Teachers should have a clear understanding of the purpose of the Class Blog they are creating.

. Topics should be chosen carefully in order to promote a dynamic interaction among learners and between learners and the teacher.

. Teachers should choose the name for the Class Blog before they start building it online.

#### 1.5.2 – Creating the Class Blog:

. Blogs are free, easy to manage, and do not require any special computer skills. Teachers should follow the instructions on the website. They are simple and self-explanatory.

. The following websites are usually used for educational purposes: <http://www.blogger.com> or <http://edublog.org>. Teachers can control access to the blog, upload photos, images, and videos. Anything posted on the blog may be edited or deleted at any time.

### **3 – Working with the Class Blog**

Now that the Class Blog is set up, it is time to start posting the activities. That depends on the teachers' interests, their creativity, and on the learners' needs and goals. As for the first post, it is a good idea to choose a fun and non-threatening activity, one that all learners would feel comfortable and willing to participate in. Introducing each other is a good way to start. Teachers may post a brief description of the aim of the Class Blog followed by their own introduction. The learners, then, respond to the post by introducing themselves.

#### 2.1 – Suggestions for posting on the Class Blog:

- a) *Cultural awareness*: Teachers may post descriptions of cultural facts, such as important holidays, superstitions, wedding celebrations, traditions, and the like. Teachers may ask learners to give their opinion about it, compare the information posted to their own culture, or give examples related to what is posted. This activity develops critical thinking and cultural awareness, and it is a lot of fun! Teachers may post images and video clips, giving learners an additional visual input.
- b) *Current events*: Teachers may choose to post an article from the Internet (for example, an article from *The New York Times* or from the BBC News) or a link to podcasts through which learners can listen to native speakers broadcasting the news. Learners comment and give their opinions about the article posted.
- c) *Narrative stories*: Teachers may ask students to write about different topics. In order to practice the past tense, for example, learners can write about something funny that happened to them. Teachers may start by posting their own funny story.
- d) *Compose poetry*: Students may compose poems. Working on a new genre gives learners a different perspective of the target language. In the poems, teachers may want to focus on creativity, lexicon, content, or theme. Teachers may start by posting their own poem.
- e) *Exercises*: Instead of hand-in paper work, teachers may use the Class Blog to post exercises.
- f) *Events in town*: teachers may use the Class Blog to spread the news about events in the target language that is taking place in town, such as shows, plays, lectures, a new movie, or a TV show.

- g) *Resources for students*: Teachers may post links to websites and podcasts from which learners can practice the target language.

Note: See Appendixes A and B for a sample posted in my Class Blog for learners of Portuguese as a foreign language.

### 2.2 – Feedback:

Feedback provides learners with opportunities to notice aspects of the language that they have not yet noticed. This is an important aspect of the acquisition process (Gass & Selinker, 2001). After reading the learners' responses, I send them their original text with my corrections through e-mails. The corrections are in red ink which helps them spot their mistakes easily. Learners can go back to their original texts on the blog and correct them. In class, teachers may choose to discuss some common mistakes that learners make on the Class Blog.

Some learners are self-conscious about what they write. Teachers may help them with their responses before posting them online. All responses posted online can be edited at anytime by the learners.

It is a good idea to post comments on the Class Blog about the learners' responses as a whole. This assures them that the teacher is engaged in their responses, stimulates them to continue to participate, and contributes to create an online community atmosphere in which ideas are exchanged among participants.

### 2.3 – Frequency of the posting:

The frequency in which activities are posted depends on the purpose of the Class Blog and on the teacher's audience. Whenever I post a new activity, I send an e-mail to all my students, with the link to the Class Blog, acknowledging them about it and inviting them to participate.

### 2.4 – Possible drawbacks:

In my experience, I have had very good reactions from my students regarding the Class Blog. They are willing to participate and are enthusiastic about what will be posted next. A few learners, however, have had the following reaction:

- a) An older learner feels that he is not familiar enough with blogs in general and is reluctant in posting personal opinions online. He prefers to hand in his responses.
- b) Another learner could not figure out how to post her responses by herself. I spent some time with her showing how the Class Blog works.
- c) The fact that the posts are organized chronologically rather than by context may bother some students who would like to see the Class Blog organized in a different way.

***Enjoy! Blogging is fun!!***

### **References**

GASS, Susan M.; SELINKER, L. *Second language acquisition – An introductory course*. 2. ed. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001.

- LORD, G. Posting communities and second language pronunciation. *Foreign Language Annals*, volume 41, n. 2, Summer 2008, p. 364-379.
- MARTINDALE, T.; WILEY, David A. Using weblogs in scholarship and teaching. *Tech Trends*, volume 49, n. 2, 2005, p. 55-61. Disponível em: <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rein0012/5361/2/weblogs.pdf>. Acesso em: 13 ago. 2008.
- SWAIN, M. Three functions of output in second language learning. In: COOK, G.; SEIDLHOFER, B. (Eds.) *Principle and practice in applied linguistics*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 125-144.
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## Appendix A

This information was posted on a Class Blog for my students of Portuguese as a foreign language. The aim is to introduce them to common gestures used by Brazilians. The Class Blog is accessible at <http://praticandoportugues.blogspot.com>.

MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2008

### Gestos Brasileiros



Os brasileiros usam gestos típicos para dizer coisas como: "*tudo bem*" e "*dinheiro*".

Veja o vídeo e descubra os gestos para:

Tá legal! ( = Está legal!)

Me liga depois! ( = Me telefone depois!)

Dinheiro.

Tô nem aí ( = Não me importa!)

Tá doido! ( = Você está louco!)

Cafezinho ( = café pequeno)

Tá jóia! = Tá beleza! = Tá bom!

Mais ou menos

Tô de olho ( = Estou prestando atenção)

Tchauzinho! ( = Tchau!)

Clique abaixo para ver o vídeo:

<http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=YMo-GpnbfWA&feature=related>

Para saber mais sobre gestos brasileiros, clique no link abaixo:

[http://www.maria-brazil.org/brazilian\\_body\\_language.htm](http://www.maria-brazil.org/brazilian_body_language.htm)

Agora, para você responder:

*Você conhece estes gestos? Os americanos também usam estes gestos?*

*Que gesto você acha estranho ou engraçado?*

Posted by Denise Osborne at [6:09 PM](#)

## Appendix B

Some of the students' responses in relation to Appendix A can be found below.

Post a Comment On: [Língua Portuguesa](#)

### "Gestos Brasileiros"

 [James](#) said...

Oi, Denise!

Os gestos brasileiros são muito diferentes dos gestos americanos. Nós temos nossos próprios, mas eu acho que os gestos do Brasil são mais expressivos! Mais em breve...

Um abraço --

James

August 21, 2008 4:01 PM

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 [Pamela](#) said...

Oi Denise - sim, sei muito dos gestos. Só não sabia os gestos para "Tô nem aí" e "Tá jóia".

"Tô nem aí" parece lógico mas "Tá jóia" é um pouco engraçado, porque o que a orelha tem a ver com ser bonita? ☺

Gosto muito de a página web "maria-Brazil". Vou usá-lo para aprender mais sobre a cultura brasileira. Obrigada!

August 21, 2008 8:05 PM

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