

Developing the Writing for Webheads community of online language Learners at the turn of the millennium

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http://www.vancestevens.com/papers/archive/2000mli_webheads.pdf

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A parable of language learning online at the turn of the 21st century

Imagine you are Pon. Pon is in his late 40's. He's a government worker in Thailand. He wants to practice English in his spare time and he has access to the Internet. Somehow, he comes across the site of English for Internet and he decides to apply for a class there. EFI is the brainchild of David Winet, who was at the time channeling students through a site he called (www) Study.com, which had hosted online classes devised by volunteer teachers since around 1995. Dave passed Pon's email over to me along with numerous others, and I sent each an email explaining how anyone can join Writing for Webheads simply by subscribing to our efiwebheads listserv at (www) egroups.com and/or dropping by our online class. I often receive such queries and out of ten, perhaps one replies to my follow-on invitation. In this case, it was Pon who responded, with gratitude, in an email message. Despite his limited English skills, he visited the Java-enabled text chat site at (www) homestead.com/vstevens/ at noon GMT the following Sunday, the time the class has met each week since 1998.

Pon must have enjoyed the experience because during the week he sent the list a picture of himself, which I received and made into a web page containing what little Pon had told us about himself. Next Sunday when Pon came online at noon GMT, other people in the synchronous chat were able to see his picture by consulting his web page at <https://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/pon.htm>.

In fact, since it was a voice chat, we could talk to Pon and hear his family in the background. One of the people in the chat, Arif from Turkey, himself a drop in newcomer, was so impressed with being able to relate so closely with Pon as well as others in the chat that he dashed me off a picture of himself by email attachment while we were all chatting. I checked my email and quickly put the picture at our website and invited the others in the chat to have a look at <http://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/rif.jpg>

John, a professor in the chat planning to use our group interaction as part of his dissertation, then invited us to meet his family at his own web site, and I showed off my family photo at <http://www.vancestevens.com>. Rif meanwhile sent in the email making him a member of our listserv and quickly followed this with an introduction, which I combined with his picture into his own 'webheads webpage', which you can see at <http://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/rif.htm>

You, or anyone else, can see a transcript of the chat where all of this took place by visiting <https://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/ch001126.htm>. There you can read the Homestead text chat log and the HearMe voice chat text chat log where Pon, Arif, and the others all interacted with one another on that day. At the top of that page you can see a picture

of each person in the chat. If you click on a picture you are taken to that person's webheads webpage, where you can find out a little more about each person. The effect is to bring each person in the chat closer together through greater familiarity.

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Feedback loops in Writing for Webheads

Students will have provided varying degrees of information about themselves and their interests, of course. In the case of Ying Lan, a student from Taiwan who has been with us for as long as we have been conducting the class, if you click on her picture, you can find out a lot about her travels and interests. Everything she (and any student, including Pon) has written for Webheads has been corrected before being placed on that person's web page, and the writer has been invited to compare what he or she originally wrote with what is posted to the page (and some let us know that they do that and appreciate the feedback, while others repeat the same mistakes time and time again, as is to be expected).

This, plus occasional feedback in the synchronous chats, addresses the accuracy aspect of Writing for Webheads, while fluency is promoted in live chat and listserv interaction. The emphasis is on fluency in the Webheads class, as is evidenced by the body of materials generated by students over the past couple of years. Webheads have openly discussed this dichotomy, and recorded their debate at <https://prosities-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/methods.htm>.

In one of my contributions to this debate, I said, about the way we teach writing:

We give you opportunities to use and practice your English skills. Language is communication, so we also give you real reasons to communicate. All of us in this community, the teachers and the learners, give you an audience. We are interested in what you have to say and we encourage you to say it. Eventually you come to like the others in the community, and it's interesting to get to know them. You want to communicate with them and you want them to communicate with you. So you have real reasons to write and speak to them.

(And I addressed the effectiveness of what we do at the bottom of that page, in response to questions from Sophie.)

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Building trust through community in Writing for Webheads

If you want to meet all the students at once, you can do so. A visit to <https://prosities-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/students.htm> lists all 53 facilitators and students in the class. The list is sorted by when each person last got in touch with the class, so you can see who is active and who is not. Best of all, you can again see the pictures that the students have sent and link to each one's website with a click on the picture. From each individual website, you can link to articles the students have written and threads they have participated in. On a page where students have exchanged ideas, you can see a picture of each participating student and, from the picture, link back to his or her web page. There is a main page as well at <http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/webheads.htm> where all the students can be seen together in a gallery, each picture again linkable to each individual page.

Since the Webheads class is a group of students and teachers who have never met in person (*at the time this was written, though since then several in-person meetings have taken place in subsequent years*) but who have forged a bond of friendship and understanding that transcends nations, putting faces to names and written accomplishments is an important part of the Webheads ethos. Faces' is one of the things that helps make our class a community that constantly attracts newcomers like Pon and Arif while suffering very little attrition (class size has doubled in the past year, with the loss of only half a dozen students). Voice and video are other media which can be propagated over the web and which also serve to help the various Webheads become familiar with each other and become aware that they are part of a living community of sentient souls, much more so than disembodied fingers relating only through tapping on keyboards.

There are other ways that Webheads demonstrate that they are a community. One of the first indications came in a manifestation of trust from one of our original students. Bahia joined us in 1998 (or earlier) and got to know us in live chat week after week, but used his pseudonym while suggesting that there were ways people on the Internet could assume your identity and hack your computer. Eventually he dropped his guard, gave us his complete name, and invited us to visit him in Bahia, which is where he lives.

(Felix still corresponds with us, and we had a live chat with him on Sun, Sept 8, 2019 - <https://learning2gether.net/2019/09/08/writing-for-webheads-21-year-reunion-with-original-members-vance-michael-felix-and-dan-bassill>).

Another indication of trust was the submission of pictures. I requested students early in our relationship to send their pictures but at first we had only pictures of the three teachers and two or three students. It took months before the next picture came in and perhaps a month for the next one, but as trust has developed, pictures have been coming at a much faster rate, culminating in Rif's sending us his on the spur of the moment in our most recent chat. Some have gone further, sending pictures of their houses, neighborhoods, and schools, and even

experimenting with mounting real media videos of themselves on their web pages https://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/felix_see.htm (the page still exists but the objects on it no longer function over the Internet).

Other aspects of the Webheads community are consistency and support. It continues to amaze the teachers in the class that some students have not only chosen to remain with us since 1998, but that they continue to turn up in live classes week after week. Ying Lan is almost always there, as a glance at our logged chats will show,

<https://prosites-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/chatlogs.htm>. Others come for a few weeks in a row and then disappear for a while, but sometimes resurface later. One student, Deden from Indonesia, has just rejoined us after a hiatus of several months. He used to write on most of our topics, but then dropped out of communication after a move to Taiwan. Suddenly he has written again, but in a way that suggests he has gone to our web site and dug out (and read) our old writing topics. We have a flurry of emails from him now, each with the title of a different topic from our website.

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Writing for Weheads and the wider ESOL language learning community of students and teachers

One very interesting aspect of community support has evolved from our success as a language learning community, which we as education professionals naturally want to explain to our peers through conference presentations. We started very modestly. I presented Webheads at TESOL 1999 as part of the CALL Interest Section Internet Web Fare that year, where teachers show web sites they have developed to facilitate language learning. Our presentation was unique because I had arranged to have a live Internet connection with my co-teachers Michael Coghlan and Margaret Ann Doty joining me at a distance and chatting via the Palace with visitors actually in New York. I made the following notes in my publications and presentations listings here, <http://vancestevens.com/papers/#1990s>

My Web sites, [ESL Home](#) and [Writing for Webheads](#), featured at the New York TESOL '99 Web Faire, March 10, 1999, CALL-IS Electronic Village. Maggi and Michael both appeared at the Palace and chatted with passers-by. Here were two student reactions (*sic*):

- Vance: I am really happy for you! It's glad to know that you can present what we have done in the web. I really appreciate what you have done for us! - [Hilda](#)
- I am so happy to have you my teacher and my web page to be used at the TESOL conference. Best luck for your speech at conference. See you around. [Choi Hae-Young](#). March 03, 1999

I had meanwhile signed us up for Fourth Annual Teaching in the Community Colleges Online Conference, April 7 - 9, 1999, once upon a time at <http://leahi.kcc.hawaii.edu/tcc99>, for which I produced a paper and an interesting chat log showing great interest in what we were doing. Notes in my presentations listing indicate:

Fourth Annual Teaching in the Community Colleges Online Conference, April 7 - 9, 1999. See <http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/hawaii99.html> for a revised version of the paper, Writing for Webheads: An Online writing Course Utilizing Synchronous Chat and Student Web Pages. (Good thing!) I preserved the log of the presentation WebChat at <http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/hawaii99.htm>

Our students' reactions to our conference presentations were hearteningly congratulatory, so I decided that they might like to be more involved in such events in the future. The next opportunity was a live conference held locally at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi. Here I configured a number of computers for the conference attendees and made them a part of our actual class, with teacher Michael and student Ming engaging an enthralled handful of conference attendees from their locales in cyberspace. The handout and report are at <http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/papers/zu2000tesol.htm>

Our next big event was at TESOL 2000 in Vancouver, where I presented at several sessions on topics related to Webheads. Most were discussion sessions and cameo appearances at other people's presentations, but one was where I was invited as a featured presenter to give a demonstration of the community building aspects of the class. By being invited especially for this, I was provided a wired Internet connection, a large screen, and data show appropriate for an audience of around 100 in a large room. Michael, Maggi, Ying Lan, and Moral performed online from a distance while the audience viewed their interactions on two screens at the front of the room and listened to the VOIP chat over the PA system. The handouts and reports can be found at

- <http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/papers/tesol2000/tesol2000.htm>
- http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/papers/tesol2000/tesol2000_5297.htm
- http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/papers/tesol2000/tesol2000_5635.htm

Whereas we were now getting the students used to the idea of chatting with language learning professionals at conferences, where I thought the concept really came into its own was during our participation in the Fifth Annual Teaching in the Community Colleges Online Conference, April 12-14, 2000 <leahi.kcc.hawaii.edu/org/tcon2k>. Unlike our previous conference appearances, the attendees at the KCC conferences mounted from Hawaii were themselves online, and interaction between Webheads and the conference-goers was therefore closer and more stimulating for all concerned. This time we had all three teachers, Michael, Maggi, and I, as well as students Gloria from Paraguay and Ying Lan from Taiwan, plus MaggiE and Dave Kees, a student and teacher from China (Maggie from China spelled her name with an e, and teacher Maggi Doty didn't, so we often ended Maggie's name with a capital E to clearly distinguish there.).

Michael's report on the conference was at: ([www](http://www.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/TCC2000.htm)) [chariot.net.au/~michaelc/TCC2000.htm](http://www.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/TCC2000.htm) and the log of the chat can be found at

<http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/tcc2klog.htm>. If you read the chats you can see how well the students slotted in. Keeping in mind that these are non-native speakers being taken at face value in interactions with language professionals at an internationally held conference (they were acknowledged by the other participants to be the experts), you can imagine how motivating and truly communicative it must have been, and how keen was their sense of audience.

Dave Kees had been making a point on professional lists at this time that there was something spurious about CALL conferences being held solely in fixed locations when there existed the means to broadcast them and make them interactive to the world-at-large on the Internet. After our enlightening experience with the online conference in April, I thought Webheads were becoming well-positioned to do something about this situation so I began experimenting with opening the Webheads concept up to professionals. I started a Teaching for Webheads professional group with a [teaching4webheads](mailto:teaching4webheads@egroups.com) listserv on egroups and a website based at <http://vancestevens.com/prohosting/tfw/index.html>. I modeled the web site on the Writing for Webheads concept and encouraged participants to send in pictures and join us in chats online. I geared these chats toward our next two scheduled presentations, to which I had invited not only the WfW students as before, but also the field-at-large via invitations sent out on the various professional lists I follow. I was very careful to stage a practice session exactly one week to the day and hour before the actual conference, and announce on the lists exactly what we were doing. At first I was concerned about the capacity of our voice chat client, but it proved robust enough to handle the dozen communicants who answered the call to join us.

These next two conferences were

- (1) May 3, 2000, at the Military Language Institute's Teacher to Teacher Conference 2000 "Tools of the Trade" held May 3-4, 2000 at Al-Nahyan Base, Abu Dhabi, UAE, ([www](http://www.t2t2000.cjb.net/)) [t2t2000.cjb.net/](http://www.t2t2000.cjb.net/); draft paper and handout both recovered here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MWIB3d-s3YK4Yr3-0GG6wUYU0t0-X9stw39B4C2DH0l/edit?usp=sharing>

Participants were Webhead students Maggie and Moral, both in China, at the Palace, and students Maggie and Nicia from Brazil along with teaching professionals Shabana from Dubai, Claudia from Austria, Jason at ESADE in Spain, and Chi-Chin in Illinois, all present and audible in the voice chat site.

- (2) I was physically present in Dubai, UAE, on May 11, 2000, at the May 10-11, 2000 conference, Current Trends in English Language Testing 2000 <dbm.hct.ac.ae/sponsors/ctelt2000/info.html>. Plenary sessions of the conference were in fact broadcast via streaming video, while professional and student webheads arrived as hoped in good numbers to help present the group to the delegates who attended in Dubai. The presentation materials are here:

- A version of the handout was available online: <http://vancestevens.com/prohosting/ctelt2000/gvscelt2k.htm>

- There was a paper-based version passed out at the conference:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1C33NORXHwLfEihf5SQ3grMeAOk2ksK0hYkS AKGpy24A/edit?usp=sharing>
- And there are links to the harvested chat transcripts [here](#), where you can see who was present and what was said.
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZicoyE2TI2etKlc8jmQhfup2aNqRRfNxPenBG NUpEXs/edit?usp=sharing>

Positive reaction to the live online chats by participants from ESADE in Barcelona resulted in an invitation to put on the show that summer at the 'CALL for the 21st Century' - IATEFL Computer Sig event held at ESADE, Barcelona, Spain. June 30th - July 2nd, 2000 (www.paddocks64.freemove.co.uk/CompSIG2/esade.htm). This conference included two days of MOO sessions plus mine using the very different chat clients, and since this was the very conference that Dave Kees had been complaining about, we did in fact manage to use the resources described here to open it up to international synchronous participation.

The handout is at http://www.vancestevens.com/papers/barcelona2000/gvs_barcelona2000.htm, and the logs of the chat sessions show some impressive contributions from Webheads students Ying Lan and Moral, <http://sites.hsprofessional.com/vstevens/files/efi/ch000702.htm>

At the time, I commented:

"In sum, another great presentation by Webheads at another successful conference. I was particularly impressed with the contribution of our two online students, Moral and Ying Lan, who gave what amounted to an eloquent presentation of their Writing for Webheads class and the work they've been doing in it for the past couple of years. You can read what they said at: <https://prosities-vstevens.homestead.com/files/efi/ch00070p.htm>

At each conference where several students and teachers appeared, there was some risk. It would be embarrassing if, at a live presentation, no students appeared, or if the chat clients suddenly shut down (we have experienced frequent difficulties with the Palace servers, for example, and the HearMe server has not always been available). My professional integrity would be at stake if I promised conference organizers that students would meet with conference participants and they didn't appear, but they always did.

We were by then becoming a true community, truly supportive of one another, with real commitments being made and kept. The students apparently found that what we did improved their English, and they were helping us with our professional development. And now we were expanding into a parallel community of interconnected teachers and associated professionals, and arranging intersections between the communities of language learners, language professionals, and conference goers, and bringing these all together at one place in time, many places in cyberspace.

Two questions I am frequently asked by participants when I give presentations at their conferences are: How do you handle evaluation? and Where do you get your funding?

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The question of Evaluation of Writing for Webheads

The first question is directed at most people's concern for how students should be assessed for matriculation through a program, but I always turn the question as if it were asked with regard to student evaluation of the program. I like to say that our class size continues to grow and most of our students are still with us year after year, some very actively and others passively, but they must like what we are doing or they wouldn't continue to accept our email, and even the less active ones often feedback their satisfaction with what we are doing, so, I say, evidence shows that we teachers are being evaluated fairly well.

This question does however call into question traditional institutional values in education and their relevance to online education. Traditional education is geared to being time and space-bound. In most institutions, students have to compete for seats in physical classrooms and get through courses paced by terms and semesters, and whereas this is important for situations where resources are constrained by physical plant and internalized systems, the concept of online learning leaves the barn door wide open (and lets the fresh air in as it frees students to graze in the fields).

Webheads is a course in focus only. It grants no certificates, though it might bestow knowledge enabling someone to go on to gain a certificate. Its participants are motivated only by interest, and they work completely at their pace and whim. The interesting thing however, is that the students stay with the course even if they only return to active participation from time to time, and express their appreciation for whatever it is they are gaining from the course. In other words, they act as if they are at home on the Web and their home is a part of a community. They spend a lot of time at home, but now and then they branch into the community for whatever reasons to take advantage of resources conveniently found there. Webheads is a part of their community. Like parts of your own community, it is not here now and gone at the end of the term. It's always there and can be visited when the mood strikes. And this is what we are seeing with Webheads as the experiment continues into its 3rd year.

The question is, what relevance does this have to traditional education? The direct connection is tenuous in cases where programs are judged on what they produce, according to parameters that can be measured conveniently. Where students are prepared to accept more affective measures, such as pleasure derived in the course of improving one's proficiency in a language, and to the extent teachers are prepared to lay them on, courses like Webheads can be a viable option. Or, such courses could create motivating and communicative learning environments as adjuncts for more traditional courses.

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The question of funding for Writing for Webheads

Regarding the second FAQ, Webheads requires no funding. It has never taken any money from students and the teachers are all volunteers who participate because they enjoy developing their skills in Internet-based tools that they think are useful for language learning. The tools are themselves freely downloadable from the Internet and can be used without charge. In fact, the special environment for students created for Writing for Webheads has all been done with readily available Internet downloads plus the software you would expect to find on a standard PC; e.g. a word processor that will also create HTML documents. To these ingredients we add the empathy and creativity that would be normally found in a dedicated teacher of languages and come up with a web-based community.

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Web 2.0 tools in Writing for Webheads at the turn of the millennium

What are some of these tools? Webheads has experimented with numerous chat environments over the years, and have settled on a few that everyone involved seems to prefer.

First, what are the criteria for preference? (1) The environment should be easy to access, or to download and install if necessary. (2) It should also be one that everyone can access. We tend to go to whatever location that can accommodate everyone who shows up in the chat, if possible. And finally (3) the environment should have some compelling advantages over others. Almost all environments have their advantages and disadvantages, and we can look at these for each of the tools we use with Webheads.

A typical Sunday or conference session starts out with the participants finding each other online. To 'find each other online' we use a client that detects the presence of 'buddies' online. We normally use ICQ, available free from ([www](http://www.mirabilis.com/)) [mirabilis.com/](http://www.mirabilis.com/). Other clients that will also tell you when your buddies are online include Yahoo messenger, <http://www.yahoo.com>, MSN Messenger, <http://www.msn.com/> and AOL Messenger, <http://www.aol.com>. ICQ is the best of these I think for several reasons. One, it keeps various records of your ICQ interactions on your computer and allows you to transfer these to other computers. It time stamps your interactions, which is useful if you sit down at your computer and find a message and wonder if it was there from a minute ago or an hour ago. It allows you to easily set up conference chats, and during chats, it lets you see what people are writing as they write it (and as they erase, etc.; this can be

itself communicative and can also save time when you can anticipate what someone is about to write). Finally it buffers your conversations and chats and lets you save them as log files (you can do this with the other applications, but you often have to cut and paste to a separate application).

At around the time of an appointed chat, buddies will show up online on each other's computers and as they appear, they ask each other where everyone is meeting. I myself will have gone to all our chat areas, so I'll be watching them all in different windows on my screen. These are our Homestead text chat at ([www](http://www.homestead.com/vstevens/)) [homestead.com/vstevens/](http://www.homestead.com/vstevens/), our HearMe voice chat site at ([www](http://www.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/hearme.htm)) [chariot.net.au/~michaelc/hearme.htm](http://www.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/hearme.htm), and our Virtual Schoolhouse at the Palace. The Homestead site is a straight-text Java applet which was simply dragged onto a web page bashed together using the Homestead Page Builder. The HearMe site simply has a few lines of code included in a normal web page that displays a listening console and gives participants the ability to speak to one another via the Voice Creator plug-in to our browsers as well as to write interactively in text chat mode. The Virtual Schoolhouse is an avatar-based text chat which lets interactants play with objects to enhance communication.

We have also played a little with Active Worlds and various PC to PC phone clients, but Active Worlds is resource hungry due to constant 3D modeling, and the phone clients never worked as well and as simply as HearMe. Each of these venues has its advantages and its own unique atmosphere, and one of them will turn out to be the most useful for us on a given day, or we might use them in combination with one another. A particularly engaging experience for example was when I met other Webheads in Active worlds while talking to them in the voice chat client. Active Worlds allows you to move around a 3D world. Having voice communications is handy because there is a lot of explanation necessary regarding how you jump from one world to another, fly, land, select an avatar, and so on. *The experience of being able to talk someone through this via VOIP online, taken for granted 20 years later, was magically unique and eye-opening at the time.*

Lately we have been using the HearMe voice chat site for most of our synchronous communications. The HearMe Voice Creator is a plug-in to your browser that allows you to use it in simplex voice transmission by pressing the F9 key and speaking, as you would a cb-radio. To make it work you simply register with ([www](http://www.hearme.com)) [hearme.com](http://www.hearme.com) and include the few lines of code you receive by email in one of your web pages. This displays the console on your website and prompts first-time users of HearMe to download the plugin when they first visit. The code connects all users through HearMe's central server, and makes it possible for them to speak to and hear each other using the microphones and sound cards attached to their computers.

There is also a chat text option for those without sound cards or with comprehension difficulties, and it is this feature that makes it particularly appropriate to second language learners (though most pc-to-pc phone clients have some form of text chat). I also like to call the text chat window the "edgewise window" since it's where you type to get a word in edgewise, in case you can't get the floor in the voice chat. One great advantage of the text chat window is that it tends, at the end of a session, to contain the entire chat (other text chats seem to work in limited buffer areas, so that the first part of the chat is lost as it's crowded out by the most recent chat

recorded). We have been able to save whatever has been written in the text chat log after each HearMe session, and during periods of Internet instability, or when the voice chat was crowded with people, the text chat window would often contain connected prose and make good reading.

Sadly, we have received email telling us that the Voice Creator will no longer be supported at the HearMe server after December 11. But while we were able to use it, this facility gave us the opportunity to do what we had not been able to do before - hear each other's voices. It helped us to build our community by adding a vital human dimension to who we are, and to do this in a convenient, spontaneous, and easily implementable way. Hopefully, we will find a replacement which will let us continue this dimension of our interactions. We have already set up a potential replacement at Excite: (www)

excite.com/communities/chat/voicechat/client/launch_vc?room=efiwebheads
(and 20 years later, we can do this through any number of tools; e.g. Zoom).

The most convenient chat available to us at this time is our text chat at Homestead, (www) homestead.com/vstevens. This page was created in minutes using the Homestead Page Builder. All that is necessary to set up a chat facility is to open a Homestead account, build a page using the Page Builder, and drag the icons onto the page that you wish to appear. In my case, I dragged on a chatroom, a guest book, and a counter, all of which have been quite useful. One advantage to using Homestead is that it has not been blocked in China, whereas Tripod and Geocities both are, so it is accessible to the widest range of students. In addition, it is simple to use. All that is required is that users enable Java and visit the url; there is nothing to download or install. A disadvantage is that it doesn't buffer much chat or automatically log any chat at all, so to keep a chat log, someone has to copy frequently from the chat window and paste to another location. This is sometimes difficult to do if there are frequent interactions in the chat. Consequently, a lot of our Homestead chat has been lost.

The other text chat space that we use often is the Palace. The Palace is an avatar-based chat that we have found suitably compelling. The Palace has a bad reputation among some, but we have almost entirely avoided problems by using the EFI's Virtual Schoolhouse. Our instantiation of the Palace is provided by Coterie, (www) coterie.com, and screen shots of the schoolhouse can be seen at the Palace website (and are sprinkled through our chat logs archives).

The Palace requires that the browser be downloaded and installed from (www) thepalace.com/products/client/index.html. After installation is it possible to join chats as a guest, but it is more fun if you register for free at <http://www.thepalace.com>, because this gives you access to cute avatars and the freedom to roam palaces sometimes off-limits to guests. We like the Palace because it gives us many options for expressing ourselves and our personalities paralinguistically. Most people enjoy creating their own avatars, and I can show students how to make one easily from their own 44 x 44 pixel photos (creating a 44 square pixel photo is the hard part). There are lots of objects you can wear or bring into the chat (Michael likes to leave parrots laying around), and you can whisper secretly behind people's backs (or talk about them in Hear Me). In the chat itself, people talk in cartoon bubbles, so it's not a busy chat. You can easily see who's talking at a given time. The chats are logged in a separate optional window, so students can follow them, and we can save them, though the chat buffer has to be cleared every

half hour or so or it will overflow (dumping the earlier parts of the chat). Of all our chat clients, we like the Palace best, though because of the browser download and installation, not all Webheads present are likely to be able to go there, so we usually end up in one of our other online spaces.

As you can see, Webheads have been having a lot of fun passing time together the past few years while learning a lot about the tools freely available on the Internet that make it possible for people to meet and form communities synchronously and asynchronously online.

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To conclude briefly ...

This article was resurrected from a version sent out for publication, though the author was never notified of its disposition. Meanwhile it presents a microcosm of the world of language learning and community formation online as it was at the turn of the 21st century during the very early days of Web 2.0 and the remarkable affordances that accrued to educators who were able to exploit the situation at the time.

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Date of the original posting was: December 3, 2000

Resurrected June 28, 2021 from this location

<http://www.vancestevens.com/papers/webheads/ventesol.htm>

(but this one has all the broken links still; the links have been corrected in this version, and other minor annotations made)

This article differs significantly from the version published below:

Stevens, Vance. 2001. **Developing a Community in Online Language Learning**. In Syed, Zafar, and David Heuring, eds. *Tools of the Trade: Teaching EFL in the Gulf*. Proceeds of the Military Language Institute's 1st annual Teacher-to-Teacher Conference, May 3-4, 2000, Abu Dhabi (UAE) pp 85-101. http://www.vancestevens.com/papers/archive/2000mli_webheads.pdf
Also

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352787825_Developing_a_Community_in_Online_Language_Learning_2001

And from the draft of the published version here

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MWIB3d-s3YK4Yr3-0GG6wUYU0t0-X9stw39B4C2DH0I/edit?usp=sharing>

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