



## In the spotlight



If you'd like to tell other teachers of English about what's happening in your region, please [contact us](#).

### \*30 September live events\*



[Programme details](#)



### Community News



[September Update](#)



### Barbara Dieu claims she's no geek



but she sure knows her stuff



### A New Publication



[Revista X](#)



### Another take on TESOL



Eliana Santiago G. Edmundo



### Inglês Instrumental: desafios e conquistas



An enthusiastic discussion



### The Brazilian Connection

## Barbara Dieu claims she's no geek

### An interview with Bee.

*Whenever I have a question about technology, I always go to Bee. She's always ready to share ideas and offer really sensible advice.*

*Barbara has been with us right from the very start so it's great to have her words and ideas here as we approach our first birthday.*

### J: Hi Bee, can you tell us how you first got interested in technology?

**Bee:** I didn't take classes in technology nor do I consider myself a geek. I just learnt the ropes as I went along, clicking here and there, according to my needs and interests. My first computer (with a viridian screen), replaced my typewriter and served for organising and storing the content I produced for my classes. I also used it when I felt like procrastinating, playing all sorts of games against it. In 1992, there was nothing very exciting about it – it was a tool which just amplified and extended what I had been already doing for years - better and faster.

However, it was when I got connected online that a whole dynamic and interactive brave new world was unveiled before me and I got irreversibly hooked. From then onwards life has never been quite the same. The Internet has provided me with leading examples, permanent access to topical information and contacts worldwide which have helped me and encouraged me to unleash my imagination, go off the

### Hornby Summer School Brazil

Call for tutors

### Hornby Summer School Brazil

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### Using NLP Techniques in the EFL Classroom

Mario Rinvolucri

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News

### School Link Educational Project

Eliana Santiago G. Edmundo reports

Seleciona o Mês ?  Seleciona o Ano ?  Go

beaten track and **create**.

As I started learning the language of this new medium and engaging in experimentation, I had to use the tools and negotiate meaning and differences as I interacted with people from different cultures and backgrounds. This exposure made me question my pedagogical role, reflect on my practice and reinvent my ingrained teaching habits - a quantum leap!

Although this may seem like a destabilizing or a painful growing process for some, I do not regret a single moment. I think that I have become more flexible, aware, open and active.

The Internet has also helped me to connect with people and experts from other areas of interest on a peer-to-peer basis, and establish a participatory identity more easily than in the hierarchical, centrally controlled relation that tends to dominate our professional sphere.

It is not the technology in itself that attracts me, but what it allows any common mortal like me to do. All the tools out there hold immense potential for designing networked learning environments, facilitating self-direction, lifelong learning, personal / professional development and growth.

#### J: In what ways did you first integrate computer usage into your teaching?

**Bee:** When I started in July 97, I did not even know how to send an email. Just to give you an idea of my total ignorance in the field, the first thing I printed in delight was a page from Alta Vista with links to teaching resources, a relic I still preciously keep.

My son, who set out to teach me the basics, moved the mouse much too quickly and got impatient at my questions. Every time the computer froze, I panicked at the thought I was under a massive attack of alien viruses and I had to put up with my children's impish grinning and teasing.

Two months later, however, I eventually came across the E-pals site and managed to contact a teacher in the USA who agreed to collaborate on a common cultural project between our classes. For a year, he acted as a dedicated guide, mentoring me through mail while our students corresponded and wrote a common virtual book.

#### [See details of the project](#)

Last year, it was my turn to coach a *newbie* teacher and her class in Naples. What is nice is that both exchanges resulted in face-to-face encounters and ongoing friendships. Back in 1998, our class visited the West Coast the USA and met some correspondents, and last year we acted as hosts to a group of Italian students in Rio and São Paulo.

Various classes have taken part in different collaborative projects with other students around the world, by emailing, participating in thematic forums, writing articles, blogging or engaging in multimedia creation like producing a site and interacting with a designer to draw and build a virtual Brazilian village online.

[\*\*A complete breakdown and explanation of each project can be found here\*\*](#)

Although on the web pages created for students and colleagues I provide exercises and links to grammar and vocabulary practice at various levels, I have always tried to complement my courses with a more holistic approach - projects that increase student contact with the language beyond classroom walls, support their learning, and facilitate their interaction with the world at large.

The main value and attraction of these new technologies is that they create possibilities for communication based on the background, values and needs of learners. Users have the choice to interact, participate in conversation and practice the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment through projects that focus not only on authenticity and authorship, but agency as well.

**J: Do you think that there are any factors unique to Brazil in terms of computer usage?**

**Bee:** Although I live and work in São Paulo, I must say I do not have a clear idea of what the computer usage panorama in Brazil is. This is true, first, because of the size of the country and the enormous diversity in the educational and social landscape; and secondly because when I started, I was very much on my own and did not have access to local knowledge-generating communities. I tried then to find things on the net - information and experience to fulfil my needs. I must admit I have spent more time sailing globally than locally. But then this outward navigation is the very nature of the net.

What I have noticed, however, is that there are very few independent teachers, nor are there spaces for publishing material, ideas and experience in an open and free way online for others to read, discuss, adapt and learn from.

I have not seen many papers or articles by Brazilian EFL scholars online either and have not met many EFL Brazilian teachers in online worldwide events. It seems to me most activities and discussion take place either face-to-face during internal meetings and workshops or behind walled gardens, the access to which is made either by enrolling in an "educational portal" and paying a fee or by belonging to a select group of practitioners. Education is big business here and in many ways, the lack of open access to it.

unfortunately, reflects and promotes the social and educational inequalities of the country.

Brazilian EFL teachers are in general hard-working, dynamic and creative. Most I have met are very keen to improve themselves and are very committed to their profession in spite of the very low salaries and working conditions they have to face.

However, most need time, resources and encouragement to embark on this learning adventure. Being able to facilitate learning and creating rather than receiving or just delivering knowledge is a matter of social politics, control and power. Only by engaging in conversation and collaboration, adapting the tools to their own needs and producing their own online products instead of swallowing unquestioningly pre-digested and top-down material that is sold to them, will teachers hone their critical skills, become computer multi-literate and engage in change.

**J: I'd like to know a bit more about your dekita.org project.**

**Can you tell us a bit more about it and the kind of response you've had since it was launched?**

**Bee:** Dekita.org (<http://dekita.org>) is an example of a cross-cultural communication international platform that became possible because of the Internet and web technologies. [Rudolf Amman](#) from Mie University in Japan and [Aaron Campbell](#) from Sangyo University, also in Japan, invited me to join the venture last April.

Dekita.org was built from scratch on [Textpattern](#), an open source content management tool and the content, layout and direction is being shaped according to shared ideals and perceived needs. We are experimenting with the latest syndication and tagging tools to make it easier for learners, educators and other interested people to locate student Web-publications and participate in the conversation.

By highlighting blogging and web-publishing projects around the world, we aim at bringing together EFL / ESL learners in meaningful and authentic ways.

In the P2P (Peer to Peer) [Exchange Project](#) we have just launched, we'd like to facilitate connections so that users can practise the language on their own, develop and further their interests, and find their own voice, beyond tasks and assignments, connecting, writing and communicating independently from assignments, curricula and school limitations.

The response is still slow. Some teachers are not wired or have not yet fully adopted new technologies in their classrooms. Many are just using them to extend the

traditional practice but there is a growing number that are becoming aware of what can be done and have joined our [mailing list](#) to discuss the possibilities.

**J: I guess you're not surprised with all the statistics about the number of blogs created each minute. Can you tell us a bit about the appeal of blogging and why do you think blogging caught on this quickly?**

**Bee:** According to experts, some sites date back to 1993 and can be identified as weblogs *avant la lettre*. The word weblog was apparently coined in December 1997. - so it's not that much of a novelty. It's more of a slowly evolving medium, finding the form most suited to the users' needs.

Since 2003, weblogs have become very much the new medium for personal web-publishing. During the Iraq war, for instance, soldiers in Baghdad and people "on the spot" supplemented the official news sources with personal narratives and diverse perspectives. During the tsunami and the New Orleans tragedy, quoting CyberJournalist.net's Jonathan Dube, bloggers have "forged a tribal news network by gathering raw information, pulling together aid resources, helping to connect people looking for missing loved ones".

Blogging has given the opportunity for individuals not only to express their views to an audience but also to interact with it. Blogging helps us develop and sustain a large number of loose ties with people from all over the world. I got to know many of the people I collaborate and correspond with today through reading their blogs and interacting in the comment area. Blogging allows you to produce your own multimedia environment: you can personalize it, add photos, sounds and even video.

So, I'd say that the greatest appeal and strength of blogging lies in this openness and freedom of speech. It's the "power to the people", "the can do", creative pull.

The blogging tool gives you the possibility to act, intervene, create your own content, share it with others, develop your voice and makes you believe that you as an individual, connected to others who share the same belief, can help, make your voice heard and produce change.

**J: How do you make use of blogs in an educational context?**

**Bee:** There are many ways you can exploit blogs and when used consistently, they record the learner's process of learning and progress towards autonomy. It would be a pity to utilize blogs to replicate the traditional teacher controlled interaction you have in many classrooms or just post assignments for a mark.

Blogs can be used with students:

- as reading practice, to find out about the different cultural contexts
- to contact other learners/experts or tutors
- to document the contact with the target language outside the classroom
- to narrate the ongoing learning process, expectations, activities, ideas, plans
- to document personal research
- respond to and comment on controversial issues or topical news of their choice
- to network with others according to shared interests

Blogs should also be used to encourage student responsibility over their own learning. Blogs are in many ways new tools, so a different pedagogy, media, and multi-literacy pedagogy must be adopted.

**See examples of class blogs on the right column of this page**

Blogs can be used by teachers, to build their identity online, reflect on their own practice and use this open space to discuss with others.

Here are some more examples of education blogs in English

[\*\*Will Richardson Web-logged\*\*](#)

[\*\*Graham Stanley - Blog EFL\*\*](#)

[\*\*Barbara Ganley - BG Blogging\*\*](#)

And in Portuguese:

[\*\*Sus Gutierrez\*\*](#)

**J: Bee, any predictions for the future? What do you see in your crystal ball as being the next computer-based development?**

**Bee:** Hey, I am in no way a fortune-teller let alone a guru to identify emerging trends. Now if you want me to have a go at it... Based on what I see happening on the net today and what I have experienced, I'd say there is a shift from timed, isolated and fragmented learning activities inside content delivery systems, towards more open-ended instructional methods and more dynamic ways of learning through collaborative and interactive projects.

For teachers, professional communities of practice have been growing in popularity in the last few years. They provide a more fluid, organic space for dialogue and collaboration than traditional top-down structured learning workshops and courses.

**J: Thanks Bee and I hope you can join us for our birthday live events!**

You can often find Bee at:

[Webheads in Action](#)

[Tappedin](#)

[Learning Times](#)

Bee's buzzwords to Google are: webfolios, mobile learning, connectivism, P2P, social networking, folksonomies, multiliteracies communities of practice.

[Barbara Dieu](#) was interviewed by Julian Wing.

*September 19 2005*

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