

# **Facebook as a Tool for the ESL Classroom**

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## **Back ground and statistics**

Facebook is the second largest personal homepage website in the world, founded in 2004, with over 300 million active users with an average of 250,000 new registrations daily, 50% of which log on every day. A social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family, coworkers or fellow students. Facebook is technology that facilitates communication and the sharing of information, using a digital map of people's real-world social connections.

Users can add or subtract "friends" and send them messages, and update their profile to notify friends about their status or the status of a group or project. Users can join special groups or networks organized by class, groups or department, for example a "Video Directors Club" where students would organize and shoot their own English language video to be posted for all members of the group to view and critique.

## **News Feed**

A feature which appears on every users homepage which highlights information including profile changes, upcoming events, class assignments, birthdays and things of that nature.

## **Photos**

Facebook allows users to upload an unlimited number of photos and organize them into separate albums. In my opinion the photo application is one of the most useful for classroom sharing and discussion. After all almost everyone in this day and age has a camera in their cell-phone. Students in my University tend to enjoy taking photos and either discussing them in class or they will post them to their Facebook profile for others to see and make comments. When someone does post a photo there is an application for users to comment on each photo and the comments tend to become an online discussion or thread.

## **Videos**

Currently, over 45 million videos have been uploaded to Facebook pages with approximately 100,000 new videos added daily. Video websites such as the popular Youtube have an option to share any video posted directly to Facebook. Facebook users can also create their own videos and upload them to their profile. Posting videos has been one of the more successful activities as far as creating discussion both on Facebook and in the classroom. That being said, a lecture on what is, and is not appropriate for the website should be given at the beginning of the project. I've found that at least one student in each and every class likes to push the envelope and post borderline material.

## **Chat**

There is an instant messaging feature on Facebook, an indicator will tell you which of your friends are online at any given time and it's then possible to chat back and forth in real time.

Whenever I see a student online I like to send simple messages which sometimes turn into lengthy conversations which would never be had otherwise. The element of shyness is eliminated.

### **Groups**

Groups can be created for your students, as I mentioned earlier or there are a number of existing groups specifically for teachers who wish to use social networking sites as a classroom tool. One which I recently came across is “Educators Using Facebook”. Teachers from all across the globe can share experiences and ask advice from peers easily. Recently I received a list of “webinars”. One simply has to log in to take part in the online seminars with titles such as, “Faculty as leaders”, “Enhancing Facebook to achieve institution wide results”.

Facebook is social since students become “friends” they share a sense of belonging. Stronger bonds can be built between classmates as well as between instructors and their classes.

Create a Teacher profile. Many of us already have Facebook profiles. Especially amongst foreign teachers working overseas, it’s a great way to stay in touch with friends and family. However a separate “teacher” profile must be created to use with classes. Sharing your social and family lives may not be appropriate. Creating a third profile for your former students is a great idea to allow students to stay in touch but not be bothered with communications between you and your current classes.

Students create a profile. Students need only an e-mail address to create a profile. Depending on the age of your students and policies regarding student teacher contact, students can create a limited profile, that is only fellow students of their choosing can view photos and videos. I find however that the limiting of profile access also limits the opportunities for in class as well as online discussion. Each teacher must decide what is appropriate. A parental notice, signed and returned by the parent may be in order, this way the parents are aware of online activity.

Making class lists can help you manage your courses. For example with one click you can send a message to an entire class.

Creating groups is a fun way to include students in activities, manage basic information, photos, videos and membership. The officer position can be awarded to different students throughout the class for excellence or participation.

Facebook is growing rapidly, especially with young adults, most of whom already use a social networking site. Be it Facebook or Cyworld, most students are aware and already engaged. To use these sites as tools in the classroom is the next logical step for teachers interested in keeping up with current trends and engaging students on various levels.