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Using Blogs: authentic material and ranking quality for SLA

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Abstract

Exposure real life language experiences forms an integral part of the acquisition process. Authentic materials – those derived from the culture of the target language rather than specially produced for language learners – increase the relevance of the learning experience by reusing texts taken directly from the target culture. Web 2.0 technologies increase opportunities for bringing authentic materials into formal language learning environments by allowing material to be collected, reused and shared amongst language teachers and learners. This paper aims to look at the role of blogs in facilitating the use of authentic material by English language teachers and learners and the impact of the most authoritative blogs in the wider Web and in Social Media.

To reach this objective, the blog ranking site Technorati was used to select the most popular blogs for English language learners and teachers and each blog was analysed according to the authenticity of the cultural material used for language learning. The analysis reveals that 100% of the material on 56.25% of the blogs selected was authentic material and over 70% of the material on a further 35.3% of blogs was authentic.

Secondly, the impact of these blogs in the wider Web and Social Media was measured in order to draw some conclusions regarding the role of language learning blogs outside the world of blogging and the communities they serve and provide an image of the relationship between blogs and bloggers, the Web and Social Media.

The results show an inherent bias within Web 2.0 technologies towards providing contemporary authentic material for language learning – the technology itself encourages its use – and that sometimes blogs can have an impact beyond their communities through the Web and Social Media.

Keywords: blogs, authentic materials, Web 2.0, social media, SLA.

1. Introduction and objectives

Learning a language requires meaningful learning experiences facilitated by opportunities to interact with and produce language material that involve communication, whether these opportunities occur in a formal learning environment or not, exposure to a language forms an integral part of the acquisition process.

Therefore the development of tools and web based applications that enable written, audio, visual, and audio-visual material to be produced and shared has been embraced by language teachers and learners. Whilst these developments have increased the variety and quantity of material available for language learning, quality is also an aspect that needs to be considered. Authentic materials increase the relevance of language

learning by introducing meaningful material from real life situations. Web 2.0 technologies increase opportunities for bringing authentic materials into formal language learning environments by allowing material to be collected, reused and shared amongst language teachers and learners.

In this sense, blogs are one of the earliest forms of Web 2.0 technology easily available and widely used and provide an avenue for sharing, using, reusing and adapting authentic material for English language learning. By looking at the way in which authentic material is used on blogs an indication can be gained of the potential of Web 2.0 tools for increasing the quality of learning materials readily available to teachers and learners.

Therefore this paper has two objectives. Firstly to demonstrate that blogs allow teachers and learners to share, use and reuse to authentic material for language learning in order to draw some conclusions concerning the extent to which their potential to increase the use of more authentic learning materials has been developed and secondly that a blogs authority within the English language learning blogging community is also reflected in its wider influence in the Web or via Social Media. If blogs allow teachers and learners to share use and reuse authentic material, and given that this is considered desirable, then these blogs should be of interest outside the blogging community. By measuring their impact on the Web and Social Media it can be seen if this is the case.

2. Theory

2.1. Second Language acquisition theory and web 2.0

With the rise of the Communicative Approach, especially since Krashen (1985) developed the Input hypothesis and Swain countered with the Output hypothesis (Swain, 1995) the idea that exposure to the target language as a fundamental aspect of language learning has been related to the concept of authentic material. Authentic material is material produced for consumption by native speakers. The use of authentic material for language learning in the classroom helps learning activities approximate real life situations, as advocated by the Communicative Approach (Harmer, 1991). As Gilmour notes (Gilmour 2007) current language textbooks have inadequately addressed the need for the incorporation of authentic materials in course syllabi, therefore Blogs and Web 2.0 offer an avenue for access to these materials readily adapted or prepared for the classroom and can fulfil a need not currently met by global publishing houses.

ICTs and Web 2.0 provide the possibility of unmediated access to L2 culture not only to consume but also to participate through cultural production in the second language (Rico et al, 2009). In addition, given Nation's strands of language learning, ICTs and Web 2.0 are ideal tools for developing courses and materials that reflect current thinking on modern language acquisition that is incorporates aspects of the input/output hypothesis.

Web 2.0 is defined as a platform for content creation, dissemination, remix and reuse, establishing a highly participatory and collaborative relationship with users. The essential factor in these Web 2.0 environments is communication (Reig, 2008), including tools such as adapted social networks (Elgg, Eduspace, Learnhub), communities of practice (Ning), collaborative environments (GoogleDocs, wikis, GoogleWave) and other tools such as blogs, wikis, etc. These services allow communication to flow through a network of learning. This Web 2.0 transcends the simple transmission and consumption of information to become a network of that offers options to create, share, remix, integrate and extend knowledge. The advantages in education have recently begun to be explored, with undeniable opportunities offered by

educational networks to foster collaborative work and provide all the following benefits (Haro, 2008):

- Centralization of educational activities in a single space.
- Fluency in communication between teachers and students.
- The promotion of the sense of educational community.
- A simple and efficient coordination of learning groups.
- An improvement in basic social behaviour of students (learning what to say / do, how and when)

In this sense, the inclusion of Web 2.0 technology in language teaching provides various benefits related to current thinking on modern language acquisition. They are:

- It encourages the creation of authentic contexts in which students can interact in learning, in our case, language and culture being studied.
- It offers the opportunity for active learning through cooperation and collaboration among students.
- The personalization of the learning process in virtual environments (orientation and individual tutoring tailored to student needs).
- Easy access to almost unlimited meaning-focused input.
- Require learner participation for meaning-focused output.
- Allow fluency development through online virtual communities such as Second Life.
- The possibility of unmediated access to L2 culture not only to consume but also to participate through cultural production in the second language.

2.2. Blogs and authentic materials

Stephen Downs (2005) provides an excellent introduction to blogs and their use in education. According to Downs blogs first appeared in 1999 and have become an important aspect of Web 2.0 technology.

A blog is a personal website that contains content organized like a journal or a diary. Each entry is dated, and the entries are displayed on the web page in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent entry is posted at the top. Readers catch up with blogs by starting at the top and reading down until they encounter material they're already read.

Though blogs are typically thought of as personal journals, there is no limit to what may be covered in a blog. It is common for people to write blogs to describe their work, their hobbies, their pets, social and political issues, or news and current events. And while blogs are typically the work of one individual, blogs combining contributions of several people, 'group blogs', are also popular.

Blogs are connected to each other to form what is commonly known as the 'blogosphere'. The most common form of connection is to link to each to each other. Blog authors may also post a list of blogs they frequently read; this list is known as a 'blogroll'. Blogs may also be read through special readers, known as 'RSS readers', which aggregate blog summaries produced by blog software. Readers use RSS readers to 'subscribe' to a blog..

While blogs once dominated the personal publishing landscape, they now form one part in a much more diverse landscape. Many people who formerly wrote blogs now use social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook. Others use 'microblogging' services such as Twitter. And blogs, which began as text-based services, have branched into audio blogs (also known as 'podcasts') and video blogs ('vlogs').

Blogs are widely popular in education, as evidenced by the 400,000 educational blogs hosted by edublogs. Teachers have been using them to support teaching and learning since at least 2005. Because blogs are connected, they can foster the development of a

learning community. Authors can share opinions with each other and support each other with commentary and answers to questions.

Blogs are an early example of Web 2.0 technology as they are easily produced by users and participatory. They provide an avenue for sharing, using, reusing and adapting material for English language learning produced for and by English language teachers and learners. Given this it is reasonable to expect that blogs dedicated to English language teaching and learning represent current thinking within the profession on Second Language Acquisition. One of the dominant approaches to SLA is the Communicative Approach, a central tenet of which is the use of authentic material. Therefore a communicative medium produced for and by English language teachers and learners should use and reuse a high quantity of authentic material. By testing whether this is the case it can be shown not only that Blogs enable the diffusion of authentic material for SLA but that authentic material is in fact considered to be a vital requisite for successful language learning by both the producers of blogs and their participants/public.

2.3. Influence of English language learning blogs on the Web and Social Media

The authority of English language teaching and learning blogs within the blogging community is also reflected in their impact and influence within the Web as a whole as well as in Social Media. This connection is not a direct connection. Blogs are ranked in a way that reflects the medium, the more posts a blog contains and the more other bloggers link to an individual blog, the higher its ranking. This means influence is only measured within the community of bloggers and only at the level of the blog as a whole, not at the level of an individual post. Influence on the Web and within Social Media functions at the level of individual page links and therefore can reflect the influence of individual posts and their content. Blog rankings are concerned primarily with the opinions of other bloggers of blogs as a whole and the number and frequency of posts. Measures of influence or impact on the Web and in Social Media are concerned primarily with quality and interest of the content of individual posts. However, whilst the connection may not be completely direct a relationship exists between a blogs ranking within the Blogosphere and its impact on the Web and Social Media because of the way all of these mediums interact and interlink. This paper demonstrates how these three areas are interconnected in the case of blogs concerning English language teaching and learning.

In the first section of the paper the selection of the blogs was based on their ranking within the Blogosphere - a ranking that is in many ways quantitative in that it considers the quantity of posts and the influence of the blog as a whole - and a qualitative analysis of the content of each blog was undertaken based on the use of authentic material; whereas the second objective is related to the quality of individual posts or pages as measured by incoming links on the Web and in Social Media.

3. Method

3.1. Selecting the blogs and evaluating the learning material

In order to evaluate the authenticity of materials used on language learning blogs the criteria for choosing to include a particular blog needs to be established. The popularity of a blog measures the influence its contents have over a particular audience. There are essentially two measures of this: popularity through citations, as well as popularity through affiliation (i.e. blogroll).

While it takes time for a blog to become popular through blogrolls, permalinks can boost popularity more quickly, and are perhaps more indicative of popularity and authority than blogrolls, since they denote that people are actually reading the blog's content and

deem it valuable or noteworthy. Technorati (technology + literati) is a blog search engine (Technorati, 2010) that ranks blogs based on the number of incoming links and uses this to measure a site's standing and influence in the blogosphere, a rating known as Technorati Authority. This is calculated based on a site's linking behaviour, categorization and other associated data over a short, finite period of time. A site's authority may rapidly rise and fall depending on what the blogosphere is discussing at the moment, and how often a site produces content being referenced by other sites. The sites were selected by cross-referencing the top sites based on Technorati authority returned by tag searches for English language teaching. All sites rated with a Technorati Authority greater than 1 were evaluated. All blogs listed by Technorati rated at least 1 in terms of authority, thus simply by creating a blog a ranking of 1 can be achieved, therefore only blogs with an authority higher than 1 were included as this demonstrates that a particular blog had an authority greater than that that could be achieved by simply existing. Of the more than 200 blogs with posts tagged as EFL/ESL only 17 had a Technorati authority rating greater than 1.

The blogs were evaluated according to the proportion of authentic materials used in order to measure the extent to which blogs reflected a preference for authentic material. First the type of content used, that is the genres represented – for example news, fiction, or biography, then an assessment was made as to whether the material was authentic material originally intended for a native speaking audience or not.

The last 50 posts were analysed and the proportion of authentic material measured. The number of posts that used authentic material was divided by the total of 50 posts and expressed as a percentage. Only the last 50 posts were analysed in order to provide a manageable amount of material and create a sample that reflects the medium – a blogs' relevance is measured and ranked according to its most recent posts.

The selection and analysis of the blogs was undertaken in June 2010. Due to the nature of the medium, rankings and Technorati authority measures change constantly. Therefore the same analysis was conducted again in 2012 and the results displayed in Figure 1 were obtained.

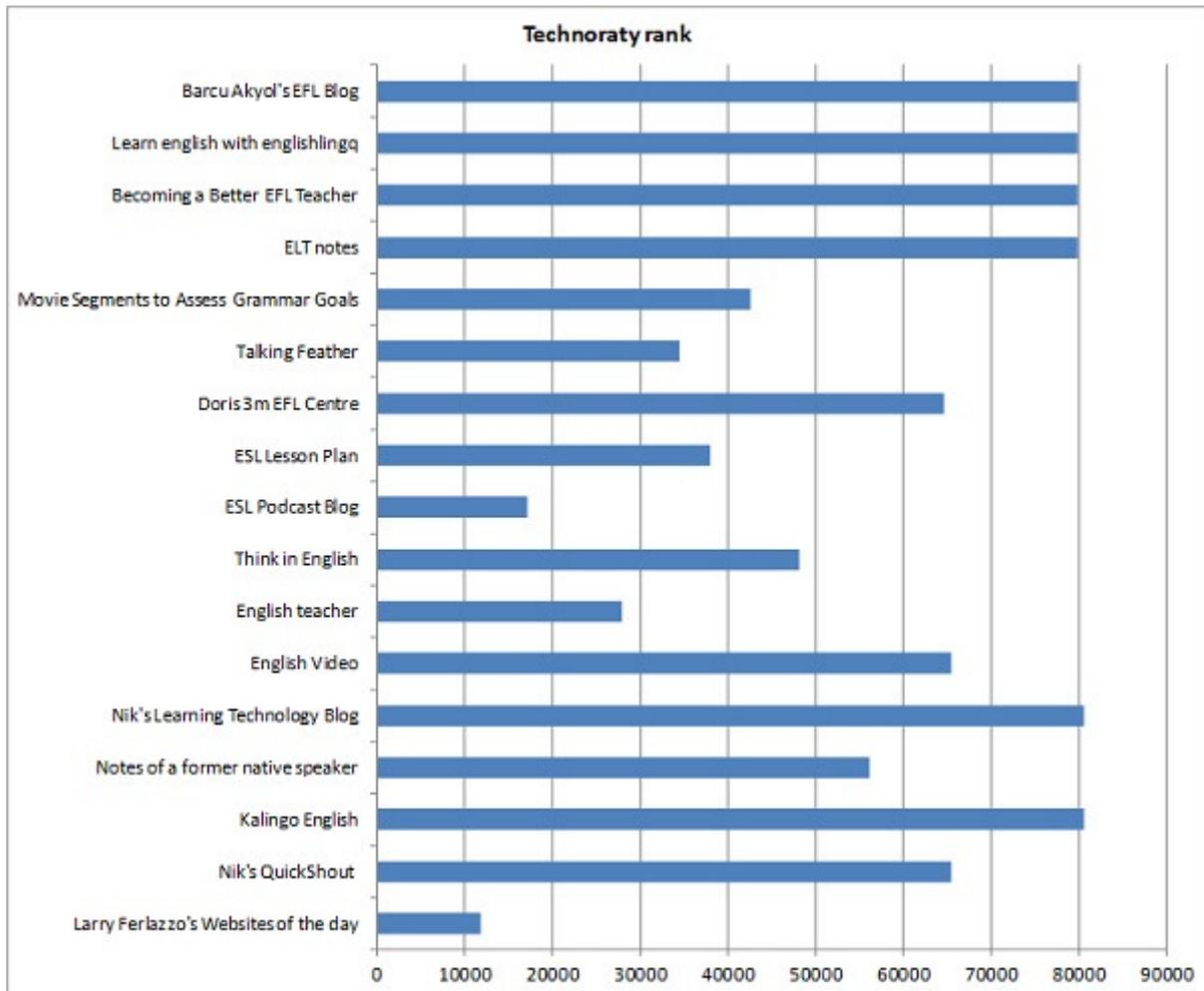


Figure 1. Technorati rank.

In this graph the lower the result the higher the Technorati ranking, the highest possible ranking is 1 meaning the highest ranked blog

3.2. Measuring the impact of the blogs in the Web and Social Media

The ranking of the blogs within the Blogosphere assigned by Technorati was compared with ranking measure for the Web and Social Media. In order to do this Webrank Stats was used as this takes a variety of measures, including Google Pagerank, Alexa, Compete and Quantcast Rank, Pages Indexed and Backlinks in Google, Bing & Alexa, as well as a tool called Sociometer which measures social reach in terms of tweets, likes and other parameters.

4. Results

Firstly a brief description of the learning material and the proportion of authentic material used are given for each of the 17 blogs followed by some concluding analysis regarding authentic material on blogs. Secondly the results concerning the impact of the blogs in the Web and Social Media are presented, interpreted and analysed.

4.1. Analysis of the blogs

The following is a brief description of each blog.

4.1.1. Larry Ferlazzo's Websites of the Day

- <http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org>

- Content: As this is a collation of resources available on the internet the author links to every genre available, although some are more dominant than others. News web sites for text articles and photos are particularly dominant as are sites dedicated to education. However, given the enormous quantity of links and topics covered no one genre dominates to the exclusion of all others.
- Authenticity: Apart from the specific EFL teaching resources topics, all of the other lists refer to authentic materials.
- Proportion of authentic material: 92%

4.1.2. *Nik's Quick Shout: Links and Opinion on Learning, Technology, Web 2.0 and EFL*

- <http://quickshout.blogspot.com>
- Content: The site uses the tools described above to teach all aspects of the English language using a variety of cultural genres including poetry, animation, literature such as Shakespeare, history, drama, eBooks, karaoke, lyrics and music, films, TV and travel writing. The web sites and online resources the author uses cover all media available through Web 2.0.
- Authenticity: Whilst as stated above this blog doesn't deal directly with content the tools it reviews allow direct access to authentic materials as well as the creation of materials by students in the target language. These can be used as a form of evaluation, review and recycled as teaching material for other classes.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.3. *Kalinago English*

- <http://kalinago.blogspot.com>
- Content: The blog uses a wide variety of topics to teach English, all based on the interests of the author's students. Her teaching method is to only use topics and content that comes from the students, their interests and needs. Therefore the topics are very contemporary and can also be very specific. For example one post is dedicated to using the success of the singer Susan Boyle. Each topic includes a detailed lesson plan, materials and teacher's guide.
- Authenticity: A great deal of the blog is dedicated to providing lessons and materials for English teachers; therefore whilst many of the materials are authentic they are adapted for the classroom.
- Proportion of authentic material: 84%

4.1.4. *Notes of a former native speaker*

- <http://jonintaiwan.blogspot.com>
- Content: Mostly announcements of conferences and calls for papers as well as reviews of academic articles and books.
- Authenticity: This blog is useful as an announcement service for academics. 7 of the previous 10 posts were conference announcements and calls for papers.
- Proportion of authentic material: 0%

4.1.5. *Nik's Learning Technology Blog*

- <http://nikpeachey.blogspot.com>
- Content: This blog is about using tools rather than the content teachers choose to use them with. The topics with the high numbers of posts are images, speaking skills, listening skills, reading skills, writing skills but the topic video has the most posts.
- Authenticity: Whilst the blog focuses on tools rather than materials, the Web 2.0 tools the author discusses allow the integration of authentic and student generated materials into many aspects of language learning.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.6. *English Video*

- <http://engleo.com>
- Content: The videos vary in content. Some are traditional English lessons on video. Some are like audio listening exercises with pre-watching and post-watching exercises and others simply explain a particularly language point.

- Authenticity: The videos are developed especially to teach English and most integrate authentic materials as a teacher explaining a particular language point. There is also a drama series but it was produced to teach English.
- Proportion of authentic material: 78%

4.1.7. English teacher

- <http://englishteachermargarita.blogspot.com>
- Content: Comic, cartoons and video based dialogues.
- Authenticity: The author uses a large quantity of authentic material, every lesson centres around at least one authentic video as well as a comic or cartoon and a student produced video.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.8. Think in English

- <http://auroenglish.blogspot.com>
- Content: Movies and music feature heavily followed by writing genres such as comics, fiction, poetry and pupil's blogs. However, avatars and virtual life are also used extensively in many activities. The emphasis is on interactive activities that allow the students to use the language they have acquired to produce something online whether it be a birthday card, an avatar or a comic.
- Authenticity: All of the activities posted use authentic materials gathered from the web.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.9. ESL Podcast Blog

- http://www.eslpod.com/eslpod_blog
- Content: Text discussing podcasts you then have to pay to use. There is some discussion of general EFL issues but this mostly a marketing tool for a user pays service.
- Authenticity: Whilst without a paid subscription you can't hear all of the podcasts there are a couple of samples available that give a taste of the format of each podcast. The podcasts typically include two, sometimes three, hosts presenting authentic audio material the producers have gathered from the internet, radio, TV or film. This material is then discussed by the hosts and activities are presented that draw on the material to focus on a particular language point or skill. This format exposes students directly to US culture as they are learning an aspect of English for the first time.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.10: ESL Lesson Plan

- <http://www.esl-lesson-plan.com>
- Content: The lesson topics are based on current events, websites the author has found, songs etc. Whatever the author has found, used or been told about that week. Many use web sites or various ICT applications. He also includes quite a bit of information about academic events such as conferences and publications.
- Authenticity: The author integrates authentic material into nearly every lesson, however the blog does not focus on material rather his experiences as a teacher and the ideas he has for lessons.
- Proportion of authentic material: 90%

4.1.11. Doris 3m EFL Centre

- <http://doris3meflcenter.blogspot.com>
- Content: The author is most interested in using virtual worlds to teach languages so the cultures represented are those of her students and follow collaborators.
- Authenticity: The content of the blog is mostly English lessons delivered through PowerPoint presentations but also some lessons based on videos and texts that are authentic examples English speaking culture, for example, YouTube videos in which the target language is used.

- Proportion of authentic material: 72%

4.1.12. *Talking Feather*

- <http://Talking-Feather.com>
- Content: The blog is entirely devoted to information given in text form about the history and culture of Native American Indians. Whilst the form of the lessons is traditional, the content allows access to a culture most L2 learners no little or nothing about apart from a few stereotypes from Hollywood movies. Most of the writing and all of the myths used are written Native Americans. This blog is probably the only place in which Native American culture is used to teach English.
- Authenticity: Another reason for the popularity of the site is that it provides direct contact with American Indians who relate their culture and experiences for EFL learners. Whilst the lessons use material especially developed for EFL students the posts and comments by American Indians are authentic and provide a rare opportunity for EFL learners to have direct contact with a minority culture in the United States and Canada.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.13. *Movie Segments to Assess Grammar*

- <http://moviesegmentstoassessgrammargoa.blogspot.com>
- Content: The author uses all genres of movies. His only criteria are that the movie is relatively well known and ideally familiar to as many of his students as possible. They are nearly all big budget Hollywood films. This is an example of very traditional EFL activities wedded to a great use of video to motivate the students. All of the activities the author has developed for the movie clips are typical textbook activities, matching vocabulary to pictures etc. So this is an example of a blog that uses the format of a textbook adapted to the multimedia possibilities of the web.
- Authenticity: The blog uses all authentic material; the movies are not adapted for EFL learners.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.14: *ELT notes*

- <http://eltnotes.blogspot.com>
- Content: Online journal in which the author posts her thoughts and those of others on educational theories and approaches for teaching English as a second language.
- Authenticity: The videos she posts of talks by various educational theorists are authentic, and may be of use in very high level classes in which learners are able to consciously reflect on their own learning and discuss it in a second language.
- Proportion of authentic material: 0%

4.1.15. *Becoming a Better EFL Teacher*

- <http://betterefllteacher.blogspot.com>
- Content: The author mainly uses news articles and some animated videos when related to an article.
- Authenticity: All of the news items are authentic materials from news web sites and the author provides a link to the original source. However, of the videos posted, they are all especially developed for English learners and use scripted dialogue rather than real conversation recorded.
- Proportion of authentic material: 76%

4.1.16: *Learn English with EnglishLingQ*

- <http://www.englishlingq.com>
- Content: The authors discuss almost exclusively current affairs and contemporary issues. For example the topics covered by various podcasts include Canadian life, current affairs, entertainment, the environment and everyday life. This is an excellent resource for listening activities and provides

a great insight into Canadian culture and Canadian perspectives on current affairs. The podcasts provide a dynamic and up-to-date image of Canadian culture through structured EFL activities.

- Authenticity: The audio podcasts are authentic radio style broadcasts; they are not adapted for EFL learners. The podcasters talk freely on their topic, in the same manner as any radio based talk show. They do not follow a script or adapt their language. They are authentic listening materials that provide a not-so-often found Canadian viewpoint.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%

4.1.17. Burcu Akyol's EFL Blog: Impressions, reflections, reviews, tips and resources from an English teacher

- <http://burcuakyol.edublogs.org>
- Content: The author mainly uses news articles and some animated videos when related to an article. The posts related directly to teaching include a mixture of text, links and videos related to the topic of the post. For example, in a post entitled 10 classroom management ideas that worked in my class, each tip is accompanied by a photo and some of a video to illustrate the particular tip.
- Authenticity: In all of the posts on teaching tips and lessons the videos used are authentic, are not adapted for English learners and the photos reflect aspects of the culture relevant to the lesson.
- Proportion of authentic material: 100%.

4.2. Analysis of the blogs: authentic materials

Many genres are represented on the blogs, movies, television and music, current affairs and news, as well as traditional English lessons broadcast by video or podcast. One blog is dedicated to the teaching of grammar through movie clips; several others adapt current news and activities for teaching English. Many use songs for teaching activities. One covers ICT, both hardware and software, for the teaching of second languages including news and advice for using ICTs and Web 2.0 for teaching English. Dialogues are also used in a wide range of contexts, especially in the podcasts and videos. Some are dialogues adapted to the class, but most are authentic dialogues recorded in real life situations.

Of the 17 blogs selected 9 (Figure 2) used authentic materials for every post that is their common practice for producing their blog is take authentic material and present it for language learning. The majority of posts on a further 6 blogs used authentic materials, 3 over 80% of the time and the other 3 over 70% of the time. There were 2 blogs that didn't use authentic material at all because whilst directed towards the English learning community they had a different function; one informed readers of upcoming academic events and the other reflected the thoughts of the author on current thinking regarding language teaching. Therefore of the 17 blogs deemed authoritative for English language learning by Technorati, 15 employed authentic materials for teaching and learning – 9 for all of their postings and a further 6 interspersed authentic material with a much smaller selection of material produced specifically for language learning. The average proportion of authentic material on each blog was 81.88%.

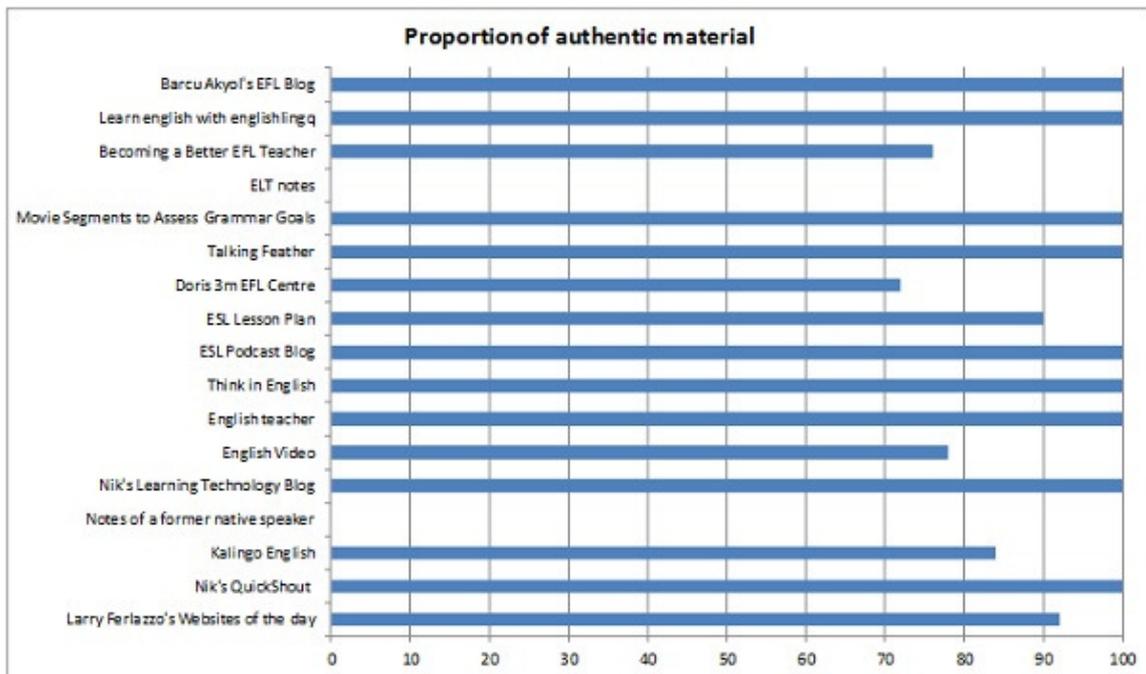


Figure 2. Proportion of authentic material.

This is not surprising. The nature of the environment and how Technorati measures blog popularity means that the blogs that have more frequent entries and more inbound links are rated more highly. This means that blogs that use relevant, contemporary materials are rated more highly by blog search engines and therefore receive more traffic which in turn further increases their rating. Authenticity is structurally encouraged in the medium and the search engines that serve it. This is good news for language teachers and learners. Blogs provide direct access to authentic contemporary cultural artefacts taken from the language being learnt. This is theoretically predictable given the nature of the medium and this brief investigation shows it to be reflected in reality.

4.3. Impact of the Selected Blogs in the web and Social Media

The graph below (Figure 3) lists each blog according to its ranking with the Webrank Score. The highest possible ranking is 10. This is a global measure that includes both Web rankings and Social Media rankings.

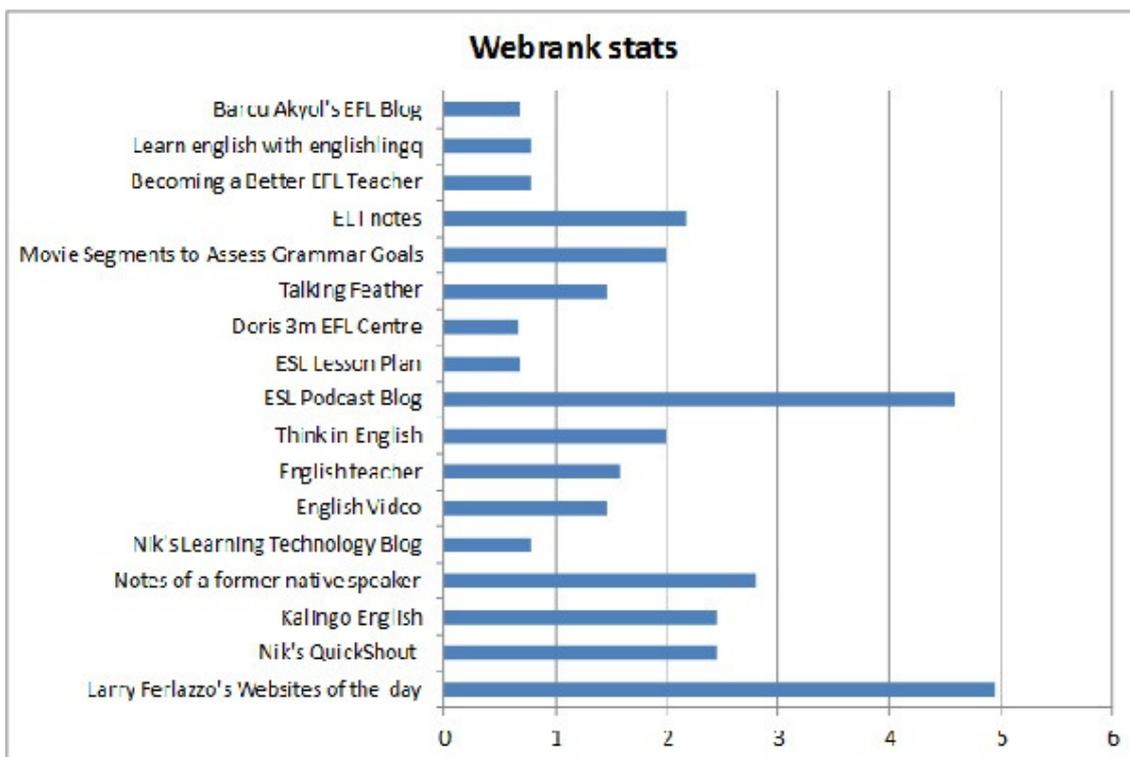


Figure 3. Webrank stats.

As will be discussed below, the relationship between Technorati ranking, ranking in the Blogosphere, and Web ranking is not completely direct. Whilst for most blogs their ordinal ranking in by Technorati corresponds with the Webrank stats ranking, four blogs –23.5% of the blogs selected– do not follow this trend and Rank higher on either Web rankings, Social Media rankings or both, than they do in Technorati rankings.

The following graph (Figure 4) shows each blog according to pages indexed and backlinks as measured by Google. Whilst the relationship between Technorati ranking and Google's pages in indexed ranking is quite direct, the lower the higher the Technorati ranking the better the Page Indexed ranking by Google, the relationship between backlinks and Technorati ranking is not quite so straightforward. Kalingo English, Nik's Learning Technology Blog and Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog all scored better backlinks ratings than Technorati Ranking in the Blogosphere or Google Pages Indexed ranking.

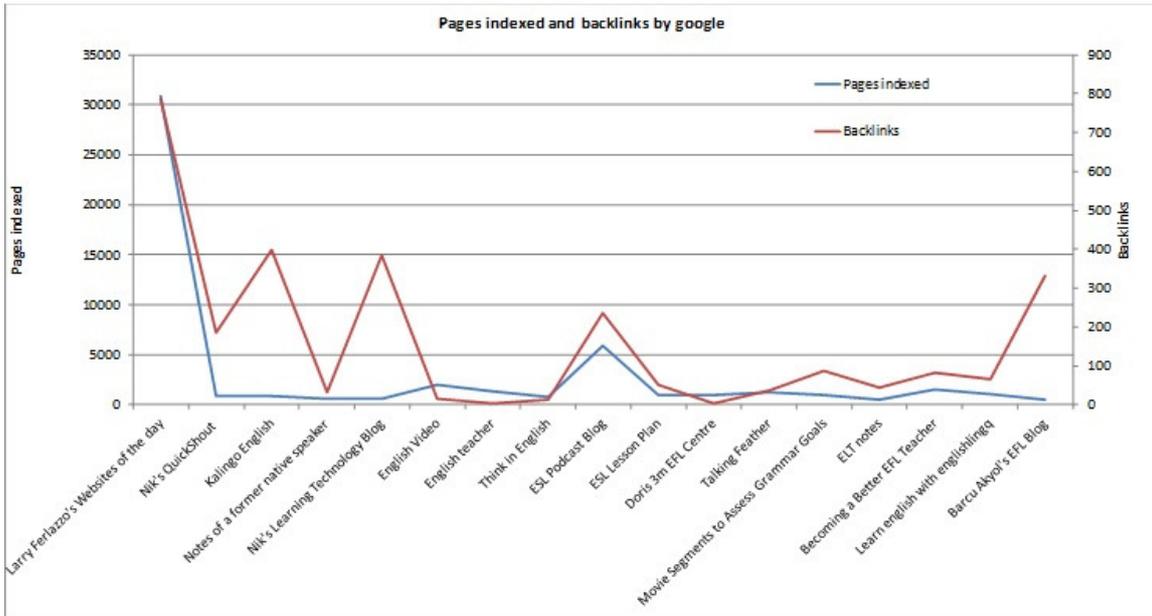


Figure 4. Pages indexed and backlinks by Google.

If we add Sociometer's measure (Figure 5) of ranking influence in Social Networks this picture is repeated with the exception of Kalingo English, which ranks well in backlinks but not so well in Technorati Ranking, Google Pages Indexed or Sociometer. In addition Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals ranks well in Sociometer but in all the measures ranks consistently with its Technorati ranking. Nik's Learning Technology Blog and Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog also ranked more than could be expected given their Technorati ranking according to Sociometer.

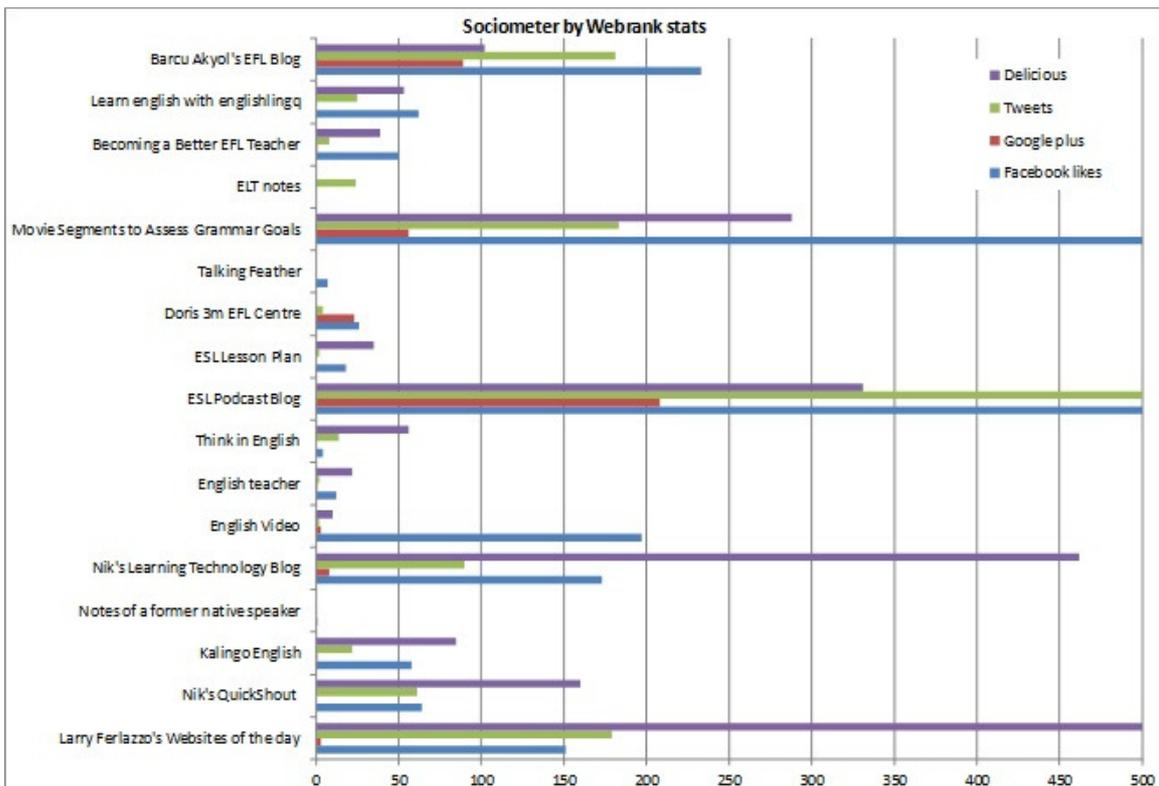


Figure 5. Sociometer by Webrank stats.

Therefore all of the blogs rank across all three measures in the same way apart from the backlinks ranking by Google, in which Kalingo English, Nik's Learning Technology Blog and Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog all scored better, and Sociometer's ranking in which Nik's Learning Technology Blog, Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog and Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals ranked better than their Technorati ranking would indicate.

So whilst for the majority of the 17 blogs selected there was a direct relationship between Technorati ranking and the backlinks and Page Indexed Web rankings as well as Sociometer's Social Media impact ranking there were several exceptions.

Nik's Learning Technology Blog, Barcu Akyol's EFL Blog ranked better than expected for backlink rankings and Social Media rankings, Kalingo English ranked better than expected for backlink rankings and Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals ranked better than expected in Social Media.

These differences reflect the quality of individual posts on the blogs that ranked better than expected on the backlinks and Sociometer rankings than their Technorati ranking. Backlinks shows the interest on the web by linking to a particular page within a blog, as does Sociometer in that it measures interest within Social Media for a particularly post through measures such as *likes* or *tweets*.

5. Conclusions

A blog has the structure of an online journal or diary so it is an effective way for English teachers to share ideas, materials and experiences between themselves and their students which are current and relevant. It allows the use of various types of media such as images, video, audio, text, as well as user interactivity in all of these different media. This means a blog can provide material, discussion and advice concerning all four skills necessary for second language acquisition: speaking; listening; reading; and writing. This, together with the absence intermediaries such as editors and publishers means that English learners can experience direct contact with contemporary English-speaking cultures in a way appropriate to their language ability yet still enjoying access to authentic materials. This increases the opportunities for English teachers to enhance learning and motivate students.

The blogs analysed are also all excellent examples of a crucial aspect of teaching, sharing good practice. This is an essential aspect of continuing professional development. Previously the ideas and experiences of teachers could be shared only amongst colleagues; blogs enable ideas and experience to be shared with any teacher or student with access to the internet anywhere in the world. The blogs analysed here harness the immense creativity of ordinary EFL teachers and make it available cheaply and easily to the entire profession.

Several of the blogs analysed rank better on the Web and in Social Media than in the Blogosphere. This demonstrates interest for some of the content of these blogs greater than the influence of the blog itself within the blogging community and is further evidence of the potential of blogs as one of Web 2.0 tool that can be employed for English language teaching and learning.

Although blog ranking engines such as Technorati provide a good measure of authority within the community of bloggers, other metrics need to be considered in order to build a more complete image of the impact and influence of English language teaching and learning blogs in the Web and Social Media.

The richness and variety of the authentic material used on the blogs and the degree of innovation applied to adapting ICTs and Web 2.0 tools to teaching EFL shown by EFL bloggers demonstrates the potential that has been unleashed with the democratization of information production.

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