

Podcast: Information Technology and Reading

Interviewer: John Allan Expert: Dr. John Sivell

(00:18)Where do you work and what's your professional focus there?

- Brock University, Dept of Applied Linguistics
- teaches in courses for the TESL Certificate for TESL Ontario Accreditation, and in the MA in TESL
- hold TESL Ontario Accreditation both as an ESL Instructor and as a Teacher Trainer
- member of the Registry of CLB Experts
- two courses of special interest to me are the *Reading and Writing* course in the TESL Certificate program, and the *Reading* course in the MA program

(00:58)What is CLB? How can people use the CLBs?

- Canadian Language Benchmarks
- a system that one can use to evaluate the difficulty level of tasks and materials in English
- educators can locate materials and activities that are suitable for a particular learner or group of learners

(01:30)What do you think are the key goals that reading instructors should aim for?

- combination of three elements: high awareness of existing online resources, confidence and skill in using those resources, and confidence and ability in modifying existing resources or creating their own new ones

(03:20)Do you believe that present-day electronic/online teaching and learning initiatives are relevant to those goals?

- Yes, particularly in class when training teachers to become reading teachers
- materials-development wikis in courses for future reading instructors
- everyone benefits from everyone else
- I have using wikis for teaching teachers reading for several years now

(04:50)Can you provide us with an actual example of online teaching materials that use this technology?

- online reading (etc) materials such as the multi-skills materials prepared by LearnIT2Teach for LINC level 2 (at <http://learnit2teach.ca/linc2/>), or
- the growing bank of teacher-made reading materials available at the TESL Canada Teacher Resource Centre (at http://www.tesl.ca/Secondary_Navigation/Teachers_Resource_Centre_TRC_/Reading_Worksheets.htm)

(06:10)What are the strengths of each of these projects?

- LearnIT2Teach, professionally created materials and high production values
- TESL Canada TRC, individual teachers are invited to create materials

(07:00)Is there another place where teachers can submit their own materials?

- The ROLLR repository (note: this site is now being replaced by Tutella.ca)

(07:38)How have elearning opportunities influenced your own teaching as an ESL teacher educator?

- on the one hand, because copyright requirements are strict, so that teachers must always use copyrighted materials legally and legitimates, but teaching organizations do not always have the financial resources to purchase class sets of as many diverse reading materials as teachers might want, reading instructors are increasingly called upon to create their own materials (writing passages and exercises from scratch, or developing exercises around *realia*); so, the challenge of creating or adapting materials constantly going up, and these are tough tasks ... but on the other hand, the free online materials just mentioned are a boon to teachers, especially if they can not only use them as is, but also adapt them.
- Teachers not only will have to store materials but devise ways of sharing them

(08:59) How does IT relate to teacher made materials and sharing?

- in relation to developing the necessary skills for creating or adapting materials, the possibility of teamwork via wikis in teacher education classes is very promising... I have always included an element of such work in my reading courses, but the wiki medium enriches that process considerably

(09:23)Is there any other way that it affects your classes?

- It allows teams to work together and learn together
- It develops teacher confidence in using electronic/editing tools

(10:13)Thinking back, can you recall how you first came interested in such possibilities?

- Célestin Freinet ... his interest in high quality teacher-made materials, including materials made by teams of teachers for use by all... he would have **loved** both the LearnIT2teach material, and the material in TESL Canada's TRC site
- look at the technology and determine what it can do for you and your students
- essentially technology is your servant

How would you tie this into present day technologies?

(12:30)If you were to narrow all of this down to just one piece of advice for ESL reading instructors today, what would you say?

- Never through anything away... the way to develop richness and flexibility in teaching is to have the best possible bank of materials on hand. The computer hard drive (with a good back-up) is the kind of thing that Freinet would have been crazy about! Even materials

that did not work as well as hoped the first time may well turn out to be excellent when tweaked on the basis of on-going experience. And materials developed for one specific groups may well prove useful if appropriately adjusted... but of course, to do that, you need a good sense of the CLB and the LINC guidelines. But even more fundamentally, keep everything!

John Sivell professional profile web page: <https://www2.brocku.ca/humanities/humanities-research/humanities-research-institute/hri-associates/john-sivell>