



Turning a 3-hour Face-to-Face Seminar into an Opportunity for Extended Online Blended Learning

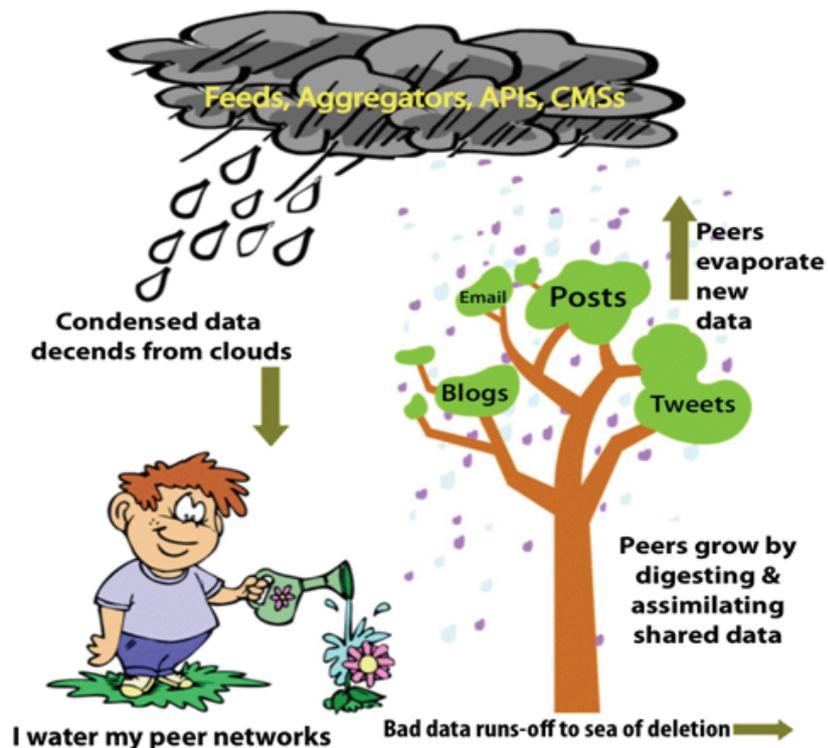
By Vance Stevens

This article reports on a 3-hour seminar which I was invited to give on March 13, 2012, at Erzincan University, Turkey. The purpose of the seminar was to raise the consciousness of Aviation College students in Erzincan about techniques for learning English and how to use online resources for self-study.

I began the seminar by explaining why I had called the seminar Erzincan CALLing. I explained that the title was a play on CALL, computer-assisted language learning, but that I was lately referring to this as SMALL, for social-media assisted language learning. Now that computers are coming to be normalized, the C in the acronym is no longer revelatory. However, I think that connecting people through social media is, and it is how computers should be used for language learning. I advised the students that one good way to use computers to learn English is to put yourself in touch with others in a PLN, or personal learning network (sometimes called a PLE, personal learning environment). I showed the students one of the excellent PLE/PLN diagrams that can be found here: <http://edtechpost.wikispaces.com/PLE+Diagrams>

My Personal Learning Network

by Dallas McPheeters • <http://web.me.com/dallasm>



Adapted from Background Image Courtesy: Fullerton Arboretum

I showed an example of how my own PLN had worked that very morning to alert me to a course that Mark Pegrum had just started on advanced e-learning. At my request, he provided the URL: <http://e-language.wikispaces.com/e-tools>



Mark Pegrum
March 12 near Perth, Western Australia

Have just started running a brand new Advanced E-learning course in Perth. I've got a great bunch of people to work with - this is gonna be fun :)

Like · Comment · Share

Beyza Yilmaz and 16 others like this.

Vance Stevens No URL?
March 12 at 10:20pm · Like

Mark Pegrum As requested, Vance :) <http://e-language.wikispaces.com/adv-elearning>
Tuesday at 5:59am · Like

Vance Stevens wow! nice work!
Tuesday at 10:06am · Like

Mark Pegrum Glad you like the look of it, Vance. I've run VLE-based, blog-based and wiki-based courses before, but this is my first experiment with Twitter as the main communications platform. The students are happy to try it out, though, so we'll see how it goes. If you have any suggestions, let me know!!
Tuesday at 11:27am · Like

Vance Stevens At the moment I'm showing it to my own workshop participants in Erzincan Turkey <http://erzincancalling.pbworks.com/w/page/51764673/FrontPage>

The plan for my workshop in Turkey was quite ambitious. The full plan can be seen at <http://erzincancalling.pbworks.com/>. The plan was only partially achieved, but what was accomplished was enough to set the group on a path for extended blended learning, should they choose to follow that path. The workshop took place in a computer lab with around 50 computers, almost all of them taken by the 45 students and half a dozen teachers who attended. This is what it looked like:



In such an environment, it's difficult to get to know one another and to elicit participation from even a small percentage of those present. So I explained that we would be applying a tag to everything we produced during the three hours. The tag would be *erzincancalling*.

We began with Wallwisher at <http://www.wallwisher.com/wall/erzincancalling>. Wallwisher is one way to get feedback from a large group without participants having to create an account somewhere and log in.

I asked the students to post their names on Wallwisher and to say whether they were primarily creators or consumers of content online. I sorted the notes in my version of the wall so we could see the creators and consumers. As the position of all the notes gets scrambled any time the wall is refreshed, I captured my re-ordering by making a screenshot of our Wallwisher using the Jing tool, available for free from <http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html> (another similar tool is available from <http://www.screenr.com/>).



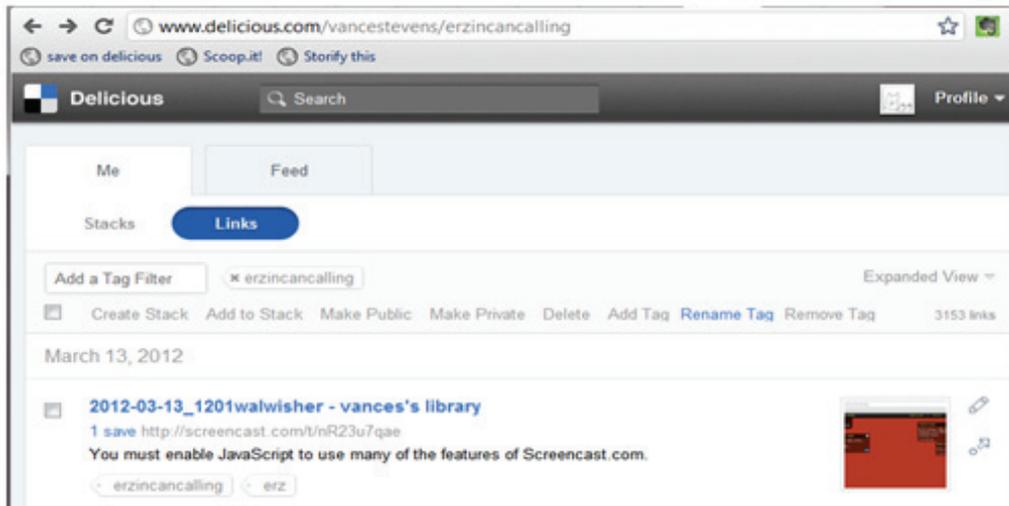
These tools again enable us to communicate with large groups by making a screenshot or even a video of something happening on your computer (for example, "Here is how you do something ... I'll show you and if you need to see it again, I'm recording it."). The recording is uploaded to Jing and then has a URL. The URL can be distributed to everyone in the group so they can all see what the teacher (or student) wants to show the group.

The above screen capture was uploaded to Jing, but its URL would be hard to communicate to the group. The URL for this one was "screencast.com slash t slash nR23u7qae". It's hard for a teacher to SAY that, and if I write it down and display it, it's hard for students to copy it down exactly, with upper and lowercase characters intact. So here are three ways I can communicate URLs to the group.

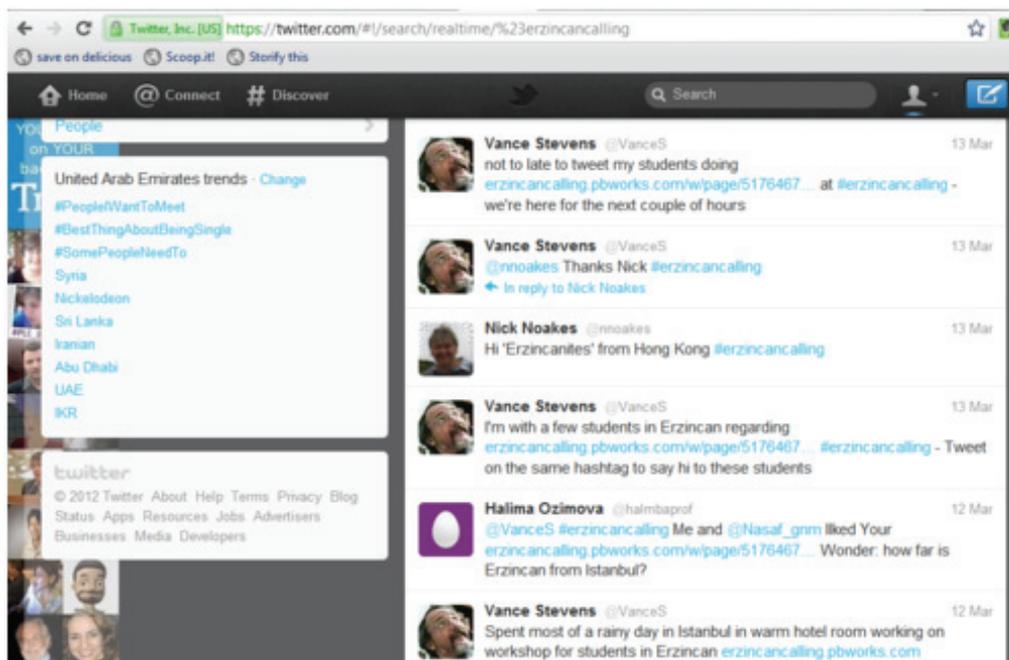
1. Since I am keeping a wiki, and for anyone who is on that page, I can write the URL in the wiki and invite the students to refresh the wiki, find the URL, and click on it.
2. I can use <http://tinyurl.com> to turn a complicated URL into something that is easier for me to say aloud so that students can enter it into their browsers.

3. I can TAG the URL in Delicious and then students can find it by visiting the link where all our tagged items in Delicious will always appear. Since our tag is erzincancalling, we can find all URLs with that tag at: <http://www.delicious.com/tag/erzincancalling>.

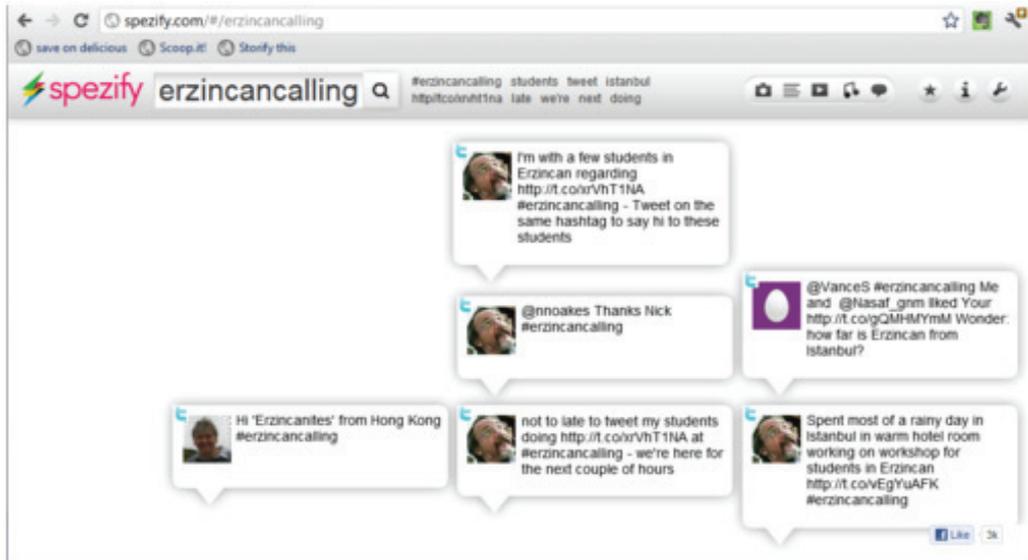
If the teacher wants to show an item just tagged, it's best to use the teacher's Delicious account, <http://www.delicious.com/vancestevens/erzincancalling>, as shown in this Jing screen-capture:



In order to make use of our tag, I tried to keep the participants active during the seminar. I asked them, for example, to take photos with their cell phones, upload them to Flickr, and tag them erzincancalling. The idea was to retrieve these photos from Flickr by searching on our tag, and then display them again on that tag in <http://taggalaxy.de>. This didn't work well in the time allowed, but some of the photos are available in my photo-stream: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/vancestevens/>. I also tried to get the group tweeting on our hash tag. During the workshop, no one actually did this apart from me and two teachers from Hong Kong and Uzbekistan who tweeted using #erzincancalling. This screenshot shows the result:



If there is a lot of tagging activity during a workshop, then we can usually aggregate these tagged items in various spaces as explained here: <http://erzincancalling.pbworks.com/aggregation>. As it turned out, we were only able to attract our tweets to our Spezify page <http://spezify.com/#/erzincancalling>.



At this point in the workshop, one student asked me a good question, “What did all this have to do with learning English?”. So I decided to elicit from the students web sites that they knew of that would help them with that. Again, in groups of so many students, it is difficult to elicit responses quickly and effectively from each person, so this time I used an Etherpad clone, a URL where all students could go and write their answer to our poll question (What is your favorite website for learning English?) at the same time.

- There's more about the Etherpad clones here:
Lowensohn, J. (2010). EtherPad dies this week: Here are six great clones. CNET News. Retrieved on March 6, 2012 from http://news.cnet.com/8301-27076_3-20004686-248.html.
- We found that Synch.in didn't work well (limited to only 8 participants)
- We moved to <http://titanpad.com/WFs4aBbomd> and got the results we wanted

In the break, someone inadvertently (or for fun!) deleted all the contents of the TitanPad, but one of the great things about this program is that you can get everything back by using the time slider. While the students were still having their break, I restored what they had contributed and copied the good contents into a Google Doc. When the students returned, they spent the next 15 minutes adding themselves to the Google Doc on my computer. And then suddenly it was lunchtime and the students all left after thanking me very much for the presentation :-)



And that is where most presentations like this end. The students leave. All is soon forgotten.

But NOT with this one ...

The most powerful takeaway from this presentation is that the presentation does not need to end. Now the learning can begin!

The students asked me to show them something that would help them learn English. I did. We created a Google Doc. We shared it. We gave it a TinyURL <http://tinyurl.com/erzincancalling>. It's still there. All the students can read it and write on it. All their English teachers were added as contributing editors as well.

This report was put in a blog at <http://erzincancalling.posterous.com>. The students have been asked via the Google Doc and via their teachers to subscribe to that blog. If they do that, I can promote them to authors. It's possible that they might comment on this post or make posts of their own. If they do that, then an email is sent to all subscribers of the blog. When subscribers reply to the email, their comments appear automatically on the blog and an email is again sent to all subscribers that comments were made and they can reply by email if they wish. Students can also post to the blog by email and any attachment they include will be embedded in the blog.

This is one of the things I wanted to show them in the workshop, but even though time ran out, there is no reason in a connected world that time has to run out on learning :-)