

Speaking with... Russell Stannard

Interview by Sarah Butler & Jackie Hemingway

Russell Stannard is a principal teaching fellow at the University of Warwick and specialises in the use of media and technology in ELT. His website www.teachertrainingvideos.com, which was reviewed in ETiC Issue 1, has won several awards including the Times Higher "Outstanding Initiative in ICT Award", TEFLnet "Website of the year" and the British Council "ELTons award for Innovation". Russell is well known in the ELT world for his work on using video screen capture to provide feedback to students and has presented all over the world. He has worked on a variety of books and publications, and also writes a monthly column 'Webwatcher' in English Teaching Professional where he reviews websites of interest to ELT teachers. In this interview, Russell kindly took time from his busy schedule to answer our questions about the different areas of his work and to share his experience of working in China. (Images courtesy of Russell Stannard)

How did you first become interested in incorporating ICT into language learning?

My interest in using ICT in language teaching came from my beliefs about the way we learn a language. I have always been a bit of a technophobe but I realised there was so much I could do with technology which was linked to current ideas about language learning. For example I could get my students to record themselves speaking, I could get students to share content and write blogs etc. Technology can offer lots of affordances that can make language learning more interesting. So for that reason I decided to face technology head on. I left my job in Spain where I was Director of Studies at International House and returned to the UK to do a Master's degree in Multimedia.

Your column in *ETp* has inspired many teachers to use internet resources in their work. What criteria do you use to judge how useful a web page is?

Firstly it has to be easy. Teachers don't have lots of time to learn difficult technologies with lots of 'barriers to entry'. So snappy, easy tools that offer real learning opportunities are the things I like best. I really like tools that encourage production. So, tools that allow us to record our students speaking or get them

writing. I love tools that extend the learning outside of the lesson.

What would you suggest as a good starting point for someone relatively new to ICT?

Well that is exactly what my site is there for. It is to encourage teachers to get started and make use of technology. I would start with a tool like Vocaroo (which I know you can use in China). It is a really simple tool to use and you can use it to get your students to record themselves speaking and then share their



recordings over the Internet or via email. Or the teacher can create recordings that the students can listen to. You can find the training videos for Vocaroo at the end of this article. It is really popular with teachers around the world.

You have done a lot of work on using ICT to give feedback. How does this enable you to give better quality feedback to your students? How do you find students react to this form of feedback?

Yes, it is probably the idea that has given me the most publicity; I was even invited onto the TV! I actually had the idea in 2000 when I first saw screen capture software being used. However, I didn't actually try out the idea until 2006 because I didn't know how to use the technology.



Students love it as they get a sort of 'live recording' where they can see and hear me correcting their work. I simply open up the student's written work on my computer, turn on the screen capture software and start correcting their work. Everything I say or do is then recorded. I then send the video to the students. You can see an example here: <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/luFeedback/index.html>.

Interestingly, all the original research was done with Chinese students. If you watch the video it becomes immediately obvious why this might be a great way of providing students

with feedback and you can see why the idea has become so popular.

The feedback is visual and oral; you can provide more feedback in a shorter space of time and you can really make use of your voice and the visual elements. It is much more in line with the way that students work these days, with sound and visuals. There are studies taking place in Norway, Canada, the UK and Japan that I know about and they have all found similar results.

You speak all over the world. How do you prepare to speak in front of such a wide variety of audiences?

If I was really honest I would have to say that the obstacles to greater use of technology are pretty similar around the world. So the differences are not that great. I try to focus on easy tools that have real clear advantages to offer and that all teachers can make use of. These are popular in any country of the world. Teachers all around the world are under similar pressures and will respond to tools and ideas that can make a difference to their teaching and learning.

You have presented in China on a number of occasions. What are some of the current trends in ICT in China?

Actually I have probably presented in China more than any other country in the world except the UK. The Chinese market is still evolving. You have enormous differences between rural areas and the cities and a whole range of levels from nursery school right up to students working on their PhDs. The trend is without a doubt moving towards greater use of ICT but it is very patchy. So you have private language schools with IWBs [interactive white boards] and good internet connections, and private schools that also have amazing facilities too (I was at a private school in Hangzhou that had its own mini stadium not long ago!). On the other hand I have visited state schools in various provinces where there are 60 students in the class and access to just one computer. So it is difficult to say what the single trend is. What I have been exposed to recently and where I know there is a lot of interest is in offering on-line courses for training teachers etc. So the use of Moodle combined with video

content etc. for providing teachers with training is a trend I will continue as many teachers can't always travel and get to the training courses. In such a large country like China, where the demand for training and English tuition is huge, the affordances of distance learning provision are of real interest. I know through contacts I have with publishers and even people involved in the provision of training of teachers, that this is something that will be developing more and more.

One difficulty with the use of ICT in China is the restriction of access to many sites such as *YouTube* and blogging sites. During your experience of training teachers in China have you found this to be an issue and if so how have you dealt with it?

Yes, I have. For example I was training teachers with using Blogger in the past but I know that it is now blocked. The obvious option is to look at Chinese alternatives to Blogger or Facebook. However the tools I most train with like Vocaroo, myBrainShark and of course JING, which I use for feedback, are not restricted. So in most cases it has not affected the training I do. I use YouTube but it is not something I ever focus on in my training. JING is the main tool I work with. It has enormous potential for feedback, reflection and getting students to speak. It is free and there is no restriction on it. It is really worth looking at and is by far the most popular tool on my site.

Chinese students tend to be generally reticent in the classroom. Do you have any recommendations for using ICT to develop students' confidence and to encourage students to be more active?

Yes, I sort of agree with you but I also think that once Chinese students see the value of something, they really go for it. Here in the UK, I mainly teach Chinese teachers and students and once they see the potential of using tools like JING, myBrainShark or PresentMe then they start to really engage with them. The key is making sure that the students/teachers (I train and teach both) understand the value of a particular tool and see why it can improve their teaching and learning. Again, starting with a few simple tools is key.

Does China differ to the UK in its approach to integrating technology in teaching?

In some ways, yes. Firstly because the Chinese market is very diverse and there are a whole range of different initiatives taking place. Also, because the state provision tends to be very centralised and passing exams is an absolute priority. Having said that, teachers in China, just like teachers in the UK, could do with more support, more training and more time to learn about ICT and, in that way, there are not so many differences. Teachers are under pressure, and opportunities to experiment, make mistakes and try out different things are limited in both contexts. I really wish that every teacher could have an experimental class for say 1 or 2 lessons a week where they could adopt and try out new ideas without the pressure of getting the students through a curriculum or through an exam.

You are now researching podcasting. How useful do you think podcasts are in learning?

Yes, along with feedback and reflection, it is my other big interest. I love the idea of getting the students to record podcasts at home. This means that they are actually speaking outside



of class. I like the students to practice and prepare in the lesson but actually do their recordings at home. They then share the recordings with me and I can listen and provide feedback and play the best examples in the class. It might be telling a story, talking about someone they admire, providing simple information about themselves, working in pairs, talking on a given topic. I use the idea all the time. I work with a variety of tools like myBrainShark, which is a free podcasting tool, and with JING. Again, I have done most of these experiments with Chinese teachers and students, and they have been really interesting. The more speaking we can get our students to do, the better.

What do you think is the next big thing in technology and language learning?

God, I wish I knew. Tablets and computers will merge and become the same thing. I guess on-line distance provision will just grow and grow. So all the tools that help to develop on-line courses will become more and more popular. Skills with tools like Moodle which is a virtual learning environment or Adobe Connect (a sort

of on-line classroom or virtual classroom) will become really important and anyone who knows these tools well will be very employable. These are the immediate developments I see.

What's next for Russell Stannard?

This summer is going to be amazing. I am doing a lot of work with the British Council. I will be starting a project to develop training materials for teachers in India and also going out to Armenia to do some training. I am also working in Iceland, Poland, Greece, Turkey, Norway and Spain over the next 6 months, so really exciting.

The question I didn't get asked that I would like to answer!

I don't think I have ever had such a detailed interview. You covered loads of ground. Just to say, if any teacher wants to get into technology and wants to start with a few easy tools then start with Vocaroo and then look at tools like myBrainShark, JING, PresentMe and perhaps Wallwisher. I promise these tools will change your teaching and learning forever.

Help videos to get you started with technology:

MyBrainShark: <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/brainpod/index.html>

Vocaroo: <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/vocaroo1/index.html>

JING: <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/Jing/index.html>

Wallwisher: <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/wall/index.html>

PresentMe: <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/presentme/index.html>

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