FACING UP TO YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

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1 author:

Stephen J Hall
Sunway University

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CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

FACING UP TO YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

Stephen J. Hall
Sunway University, Malaysia

Many English language learners are active in the language online. They construct their own ideas of who they are in places like Facebook. In this story, the large part of the learner's life was and is Facebook. As a teacher I react happily when told that something I taught has changed how a learner appreciates a big part of his or her life, including their online self. Let me use the name Raju, for he who interrupted the start of my lesson on digital literacy in an English for Information Technology class. Raju commented that I was too old to really understand Facebook and being online. Another student chimed in with "Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram are our world sir, not yours". I replied that language and communication are also about being aware of what we do online with effective vocabulary and well-chosen images.

I asked Raju to take over the computer I was using. It had a large screen display, which all the class could see. He then searched online for himself, including Facebook. There he was and some of it was not very pretty, as he was clearly an active, very lively party-goer. He switched from Facebook and there were still other images on other platforms- more of the same. I then suggested he search for me as I know I have a structured, carefully designed *digital footprint*. The class discussion then moved to the differences in what was online for each of us and the kind of adjectives and responses the images could create. We describe ourselves with words and images on line.

Raju then asked an important question. "Will these words and images of me go away? Can I delete them? If not someone who wants to hire me might find them." When I replied that it is difficult to erase images and past traces, he replied that he was going to do something about this.

In the lesson a week later, Raju said he wanted to show the class what he had done. He had built a website which included positive descriptions of himself as an Information Technology entrepreneur. He had created a new Facebook page

and he shared lots of adjectives describing his self- image with his class mates. He came to me and said that he would never again use age to comment on being digitally literate. He remarked that what we had learnt together helped him to become more aware of himself as an online citizen.

Objectives:

1. To develop an awareness of one's present digital footprint and possible reactions.

2. To reflect on how we see ourselves on line and to use positive adjectives in building an image.

3. To identify, use and create a specific online persona for future professional use.

Procedure:

Task 1

Ask the students to read the story and answer the following questions:

1. What did you learn from Raju in the story?

2. If you were the teacher described in this story, what would you have done to Raju and why?

3. Why do you think the author wrote this story?

Task 2

1. Ask the learners to access their Facebook pages on their phones.

2. Write a short sentence or groups of adjectives based on what they see. Then as a class, brainstorm and share personal description adjectives.

3. The teacher can use different colours to show positive and negative qualities. This provides support for those with less vocabulary.

4. For advanced learners there can be discussion on the gradations of positive personal and professional qualities, such as confident, active, outgoing etc, Then, in pairs, get learners to write adjectives or a slogan for what they see on their Facebook socially and publically.

5. Discuss the gaps if any between the ideal and what is on line at present. Stress links between images and words. Share and pair will make for more vocabulary learning focussed on positive descriptive adjectives.

Task 3

1. Ask learners to look at a favourite website of a person they admire. Discuss why it appeals. Elicit adjectives which the first page or landing page of the website creates. Describe the importance of accurate language for belief, bonding and buy-in by readers. The role of the look of the page should be balanced with the content.

2. Using the vocabulary from responding to the websites, each learner writes a tagline or three or four adjectives for themselves. They can think about the career they want to have and the qualities needed for that future job.

Task 4

1. If resources permit, learners can create their own revamped Facebook page, blog, website or resume.

Reflection:

Few users of Facebook and other social media are aware of how much information is being data mined and are really conscious of how they may be seen. Many younger users may not see the implications for possible careers and may not know how to describe themselves for future employers with well-chosen adjectives.

A conscious literacy which links images with self-perception and an understanding of positive adjectives for personal qualities can make a difference. The activities also generate vocabulary for resume writing.