Responding to classroom challenges : report on a blended e-Learning experiment

Responding to Classroom Challenges: Report on a Blended e-Learning Experiment

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Abstract

As the number of eighteen-year-olds continues to decrease in Japan, many institutions of higher education are faced with the problem of declining enrollment. In recent years Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) has received requests from various Japanese universities to advise them on how to set up language courses and supporting facilities in order to attract new students as well as to retain current students. As a member of the newly formed KUIS External Language Consultancy Centre (ELCC), I was sent to work at a private women's university during the 2007-08 academic year. Besides teaching English proficiency courses for a new academic department, my duties also included finding and recommending ways to improve the courses. In this paper I first provide some background about this institution and this external language consultancy project. I then describe the challenges within the context of the women's university, and the blended learning I implemented in one course in order to deal with them. Following this description is an explanation of the e-Learning component of the course, and the materials design considerations for the computer-mediated activities. Finally, I present some student comments and feedback. Although this curricular experiment represents a personal attempt to address the issues and needs of one particular department at a university, it is hoped that those involved in the process of curriculum renewal and/or materials development will find it of interest.

Introduction

As quoted in a recent study on Japanese education (Eades, Goodman, & Hada,

2005, p.5), "…the number of eighteen-year-olds will continue to decline to 1,183,000 in 2012 (an overall decrease of 42.3 percent over twenty years)." According to the same study, "Many universities which enjoyed a huge number of applicants in the early 1990s have seen that number dwindle by as much as 90%", and many private universities are in danger of "financial collapse" (p.6). Against this backdrop, institutions of higher learning in Japan have been trying to find ways to maintain solvency.

One strategy among Japanese universities is to upgrade their English/foreign language learning curriculum and facilities to attract high school graduates who are in search of practical and marketable skills in the competitive global economy. Because KUIS has gained both domestic and international recognition for its innovative approaches to language education, our campus has often hosted visitors from other institutions; furthermore, several Japanese universities have directly approached KUIS for assistance in setting up/developing their English programs, even as far as asking for KUIS teaching staff. As a result, the English Language Consultancy Centre (ELCC) was established in 2007 to outsource knowledge and expertise about the "Kanda Way".

One institution which officially enlisted the help of KUIS in early 2007 is a private women's university (hereafter referred to as "W University") located in the Kanto region. W University was in the midst of restructuring and renaming a particular department so that it would have a new focus on global studies and foreign language learning. As a member of the ELCC, I was sent by KUIS to W University in April 2007 with the responsibility of teaching in the reconstituted Global Studies

Department and improving its English courses.

An Approach to Curriculum Development

This section briefly outlines the approach to language proficiency curriculum development that have informed my professional experiences at KUIS (see Lee and Crozier, 2000; Lee 2004; Lee, 2007), and which I brought with me to W University.

A cornerstone of curriculum development for me has been to pursue a two-fold aim in accord with the various language programs at KUIS: building English communicative proficiency alongside of fostering learner autonomy. The underlying belief here is that an English language program should aim to develop not only the students' ability to understand and use the target language but also the skills useful for a life-long pursuit—if they choose—of language learning.

In trying to achieve the above, I have made effort to incorporate three principles in the design of course structure, content, learning materials, and activities. These principles stem from discussion and research among the KUIS English Language Institute (ELI) teaching staff over the past two decades. The first principle is *Interaction in Learning*. As Francis C. Johnson (1998) stated, "The nature of language proficiency as an interpersonal communication skill requires a high density of interaction with others in the process of skill development." The second principle is *Interdependence in Learning*. This refers to the cooperation among students which "will take the interpersonal negotiation of meaning beyond the usage of language to its pragmatic use." (ibid.) The third principle, Individualization in

Learning, emphasizes giving students the opportunity and freedom to progress at their own pace according to their own personal learning preferences, needs, and goals. This principle takes into account individual differences in "cognitive, affective, and experiential characteristics of entering students." (ibid.)

The Educational Context

Although I started working at W University in April 2007 with a set of pre-considered ideas about curriculum and course design, I was also mindful of the new environment. After all, it is not possible to merely transplant a "Kanda Way" without taking into account the specific conditions of an educational setting. In the spring semester, I spent my time mainly on getting to know the students and understanding the possibilities and constraints of the context.

The students who took my year-long courses were limited to those in their second, third, or fourth year at W. University; all first years were required to undergo Freshman English courses offered by the English department. Although in general my students were Global Social Studies majors, a few were from other departments who cross-registered. Besides the diversity of years, not all of my students were Japanese; some were international undergraduates from China and Korea.

Constraints of the Context

At the beginning of the first semester, the students I encountered represented a challenge in certain respects. First, most of them did not major in English, and many seemed to lack incentive to invest time and effort in my courses; this often

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manifested in uncaring and irresponsible attitudes/behaviors during class time, for example sending text messages during class or not doing their assigned home-work. Although the Global Studies Department promoted language learning and some of the students were quite (self-) motivated, for many others it seemed that the English courses were of low priority. Second, although there were a few exceptions, my students on the whole had low or low intermediate English proficiency. As well, some of the students from China actually did not have the opportunity to learn English prior to coming to Japan, and were only beginners at the time they enrolled in my courses. The low level of English proficiency made many students lack self-confidence, which then resulted in an unwillingness to participate in class activities. Third, although all students took an English placement test after they entered W university and were put into ability-based sections of the required Freshman English courses, from the second year the streaming process ended and thus any level of students could take any of the English courses offered. This meant that in one class, there was quite a mix of proficiency, and it was difficult to gauge the appropriate pacing of the course content and to select/design learning materials/activities. As evidence of the relatively low proficiency level and the gaps in ability in one class, the 45 students taking one of my courses scored 51 - 90 out of 100 possible points on an online 1000-word vocabulary levels test[1] administered in September 2008, with a median score of 69. Lastly, having three different grades in one class (2nd – 4th years) made class dynamics a significant issue. The students did not know nor readily associate with those of a different grade level, especially considering the large enrollment.

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[1]   Nation and Laufer's Levels Test
http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/r21270/levels/1ka.html

They did not seem comfortable talking or cooperating with their new classmates from different grades during the initial classroom language activities.

Besides the composition of students, there were also structural challenges. The English courses offered to 2nd-4th year students in the Global Social Studies Department were each one koma per week (one koma = one 90-minute lesson period); thus in one semester of 14 weeks, there were only 14 lessons in a course. The lack of contact hours meant that students were unable to retain the learning well (a de-motivating factor), and a very limited amount of course materials could be covered over time. Another issue was class size; I was asked to accept all who decided to enroll. As a result one of my courses had forty-five registered students, and I found myself often unable to successfully carry out the tried and true KUIS-influenced language learning activities in my repertoire. An additional difficulty was the type of classroom allotted for the course. Because the smaller classrooms with movable chairs and desks conducive to cooperative learning activities could only hold up to thirty students, I had to use a large lecture-style room with rows of locked in desks and chairs; students could not form groups or move around the classrooms easily, and this severely limited the possibilities for peer-to-peer interactions.

In searching for ways to deal with the constraints of this educational setting, I spent the initial semester experimenting and gathering information. I tried a variety of teaching techniques, learning materials, student groupings, seating arrangements, audio/visual aids, classroom management methods, and homework assignments. During the lessons, I observed and listened to the

students to understand their interests, level of English proficiency, and attitudes. Outside of class, I met with some of the more motivated students –who became my informants during the year —to ask about their other English courses and to gain feedback about my lessons. I also met with full-time native-English lecturers whose courses my students had taken in the past, and/or were concurrently taking, to discuss ideas.

Toward the end of first semester, it became clearer to me what manner of changes needed to be made in the second semester in order to accommodate learner needs, extend the learning possibilities within the limitations of the context, increase learner motivation, and get closer to the curricular goals I set out to achieve. In the course where I had the largest enrollment (45), I decide to create and trial a variation of blended learning, which will be described in the next section.

The Blended Learning Method

At the start of second semester, I implemented blended learning in one of my English proficiency courses. The first step was to request two classrooms located near each other for my class period. One classroom had approximately thirty movable chairs and desks to facilitate small group communicative language learning activities. The other was a multimedia room containing a teacher-controlled PC unit, projector, and screen, as well as sufficient notebook computers and headsets for each student. Next, I divided the learners into two ability-based sections, using as reference the placement test I administered to the students at the start of the school year (in order to decide on a suitable level for the textbook), and also the first semester grades. I randomly named one section "yellow" and the

other "green", with each section comprising 22-23 students.

The blended-learning itself comprised both a teacher-led component and a self-directed e-Learning component. The procedure for carrying out the lessons was somewhat complicated logistically, and I used the first week's lesson orienting the students. I also spent time familiarizing them with using computer-mediated means to learn/study language, as this was a relatively new concept for most of the students.

At the start of each 90-minute class period, students gathered in the computer room so that I could check attendance. Then, one section went with me to the smaller classroom for an integrated skills lesson using a corpora-informed textbook. Meanwhile, the other section remained in the computer room to work on e-Learning activities that they could choose from a list of provided options. The two sections switched classrooms midway through the period; for the remaining 40-45 minutes, the section I previously worked with conducted e-Learning, and the section that was initially in the computer room met with me for the teacher-fronted lesson. In this way, two types of learning experiences and two ability-streamed sections were created out of one course.

In the teacher-fronted lessons, I was able to adapt the content more to the students while still keeping both sections on the same pages in the textbook to ensure consistency. With the weaker section, I included extended explanations and broke the activities down into easier steps. With the higher section, I allowed more time for conversation-based partner activities and extension exercises.

The E-Learning Component

The next sections of this paper will focus on the more experimental aspect of my course – the e-Learning component. Computer-mediated language learning had not previously been part of my professional repertoire for various reasons. However, at W University I felt that introducing this mode of learning to the classroom would provide a number of benefits:

- Enhance language study by providing access to additional, authentic resources and input
- Create a practical tool to manage the students and the course, and to deal with general limitations of the classroom context
- Offer a choice of activities so that students can become more self-directed and personally responsible in their learning
- Allow for more individualization of learning and learning styles

To implement the e-Learning, I first created a class folder on the university network server, which then could be accessed from any campus computer. Within the class folder, I designated several sub-folders and named them according to the different English skills – *reading, writing, speaking, grammar, listening, and vocabulary.* Each week I created and copied into the sub-folders a set of language activities. I offered both a low-level and an intermediate-level activity for reading and listening because the ability gap among the students was especially great for these skills; the other sub-folders had only one activity each. Besides the skills sub-folders, there was one other sub-folder that contained links to various internet websites, again organized into skill areas. These links were selected for their user-friendly, interactive, audio-visual, and fun nature in order to stimulate the less

active students and provide further practice for the more motivated students. The last element of the class folder was a WORD file with instructions for students on how to carry out the e-Learning process. Although I gave an orientation during the first weeks' lesson, this additional reference was available in case students encountered problems.

As mentioned previously, the two sections of students each had approximately 40 minutes to carry out e-Learning. Within this time limit, students were required to complete at least one e-Learning activity of their own choice from the skills sub-folder. This meant that students may practice any of the skills they wished. As well, they could opt to work alone or with a classmate/classmates, and to ask help from others at any time. After finishing their mandatory activity, students must print out their work from the classroom printer and fill out a simple "Self-Directed Activities Checklist" (see Appendix A). The students then inserted their e-Learning work and Checklist into their individual portfolio (a plastic folder) to be handed in to me. If students had any time left over, they were allowed to anything they wished; however, I encouraged them to make use of the sub-folder containing the websites for further practice.

At the end of class time, I collected all the portfolios and looked them over before the next week's lesson. One purpose of this was to gather feedback on what types of activities students chose to do (or not to do), how they fared, and what they thought of the activities. This feedback then informed my efforts to design the following week's activities. The other reason for collecting the portfolio was to allow me to give written feedback to the students about their work and to respond

to their comments about the activities. This was a way of giving some personal attention to each student.

The design of the e-Learning component intentionally incorporated both accountability and choice. Students received 15% of their total semester grade from doing the e-Learning task; the grading criteria was completion of each week's activities, not how well students did on each task (effort over ability). Another way accountability was built in was making the activities in the skills sub-folder available on the university network server only just before the start of class time each week, and then immediately deleting the activities from the folders after class time ended. This, along with the allotted 40-minute time limit, encouraged the students to be on-task during the unsupervised e-Learning session. On the other hand, students could work on any activity of their own choosing at their own pace. Most students finished the mandatory activity within the allotted time; if they finished earlier, they could decide what to do with their remaining time. As well, the sub-folder containing the website links were kept available so that students who wanted to study/learn on their own could access resources and materials outside of the lessons.

Previously, I mentioned three principles of *Interaction, Interdependence*, and Individualization in my approach to curriculum development. The e-Learning component satisfied the first two principles by: encouraging student-student collaboration in completing the weekly activities, having a student-teacher feedback loop, and implementing a computer interface. It is argued here that student-computer interaction can be a valuable way for students to negotiate

meaning. *Individualization* was also manifest in the e-Learning component in that students could self-direct, self-pace, and self-monitor their learning as well as deliberately choosing the activities they personally enjoy.

The E-Learning Materials Design Process

Because of the desire for a more organic process of curricular and materials development, I created one set of e-Learning activities at a time and then trialed them before completing another set. Between the lessons, I read the student portfolios and noted which activities were more popular, which were not used at all, and which the students had problems with; I also took into account the students' comments about the different types of activities. After this, I worked on the following week's activities and adjusted the level of difficulty as needed. For example, a speaking skills sub-folder was initially offered, but none of the students ever tried those activities. On the other hand, a few students requested grammar exercises which I had not initially provided. Thus, four weeks into the course I added a grammar sub-folder and eliminated the speaking sub-folder. As another example, due to the interest of many students in American/Western holidays, one set of activities in October reflected the theme of Halloween while another set in December was related to Christmas.

Selecting and developing the materials/activities for the e-Learning component took much of my effort and time during the second semester, as various factors needed to be considered. The following advice of respected language educators was especially valuable and pertinent:

> "We must align technology with particular goals for language learning; have a learning focus rather than just for social communicative purposes."
> *(Mike Levy, personal communication, RELC International Seminar, April 2009)*

> "Teachers are far more important in the internet world (second language learners need help), and it's up to them to: sift through information, organize it, set it at a level and in a way that learners can understand, create a learning space, and scaffold.|"
> *(Deborah Healey, personal communication, RELC International Seminar, April 2009)*

On the pedagogical side, the e-Learning materials/activities needed to fit the following criteria:

- Be within the zone of proximal development for my students
- Be simple to do (so that students can feel success)
- Have relatively interesting and engaging content
- Have clear instructions on how to carry out a task
- Focus on/practice the respective skill areas
- Facilitate production and creation of (new) language and personal meaning
- Contain audio-visual aids to accommodate different learning styles and promote comprehension

On the technological side, the considerations for the e-Learning materials/ activities included:

- Be easy for students to access and manipulate via the computer (as many students were not very comfortable using a PC)

- Be easy for me to access and manipulate via the computer in order to design activities (as I myself have no programming abilities)
- Require no additional downloads or software
- Did not sidetrack the students (for example, overly involving the students in game playing)
- Be printable (so that students can include their work in their portfolio)

In the end, I turned to three methods to produce the e-Learning materials/ activities. The first method was to self-design the activities. For example, a free writing activity involved uploading a short video (Windows Media file) of my family's visit to a tourist spot overseas. The students were asked to watch this video and then write 10 sentences reflecting on any aspect of the video. The second method was to adapt from other sources. For one vocabulary activity, I found (from a teacher resource book that permitted copying) a picture of a house with a variety of rooms and furnishings, and scanned it into a computer file. For the activity, students were asked to brainstorm a maximum of 20 words they could see in this picture, and write them down on the accompanying handout (a WORD file) which they then printed out. The third method was to utilize carefully screened websites with Web 1.0. technology. These websites provided multi-media modes of input delivery (such as video clips, images, or audio files), and/or contained an element of interactive-ness (online language games and quizzes).

Student Feedback

I now highlight some student feedback concerning the blended course approach and the e-Learning component. Both during and at the end of the semester, data was gathered via the following: (1) the previously-mentioned Self-Directed

Learning Checklist that students filled out each week; (2) an online questionnaire (created with the Survey Monkey tool) with ten closed-ended and open-ended items; (3) a course evaluation conducted by the Global Social Studies Department, with closed-ended and open-ended items. For the first two instruments (written in English), students were asked to give their names and allowed to respond in either English or Japanese. For the department-administered evaluation, students did not provide their names and wrote in Japanese (these comments were then translated into English).

Student Comments About the Blended Course Approach

As mentioned, students filled out an anonymous course evaluation at the end of second semester. I was not present in the classroom on the last day of class when the department secretary administered the evaluation, but received a copy of the open-ended comments (in Japanese) afterwards. Although the multiple-choice section of the evaluation asked only general questions about the teaching and the learning, the following student comments about the blended nature of the course appeared in the free response section.

- *I started to understand the English lessons after the class was divided into two sections.*
- *For someone like me who is not good at English, to be able to study in a small class made it easy for me to understand.*
- *The divided class allowed many chances for me to speak English.*

To gain more insight, I created an online survey that 40 out of the 45 students completed outside of class during the subsequent semester exam period. The

following shows the results for the question concerning the blended learning approach:

TABLE 1

Question 8: *This semester, the class had a green section and a yellow section. One section used the computer while the other section learned with the teacher. What did you think of this way of learning?*

It was useful	It was not useful
92.5%	7.5%

When asked to elaborate on their response in either Japanese or English, students' explanations included:

- *The few people was able to practice speaking smoothly, and it was good.*
- *I think it is good way. Because everyone's level is different.*
- *I felt it fresh. Your section is conversation only, but thinks that it is good that we can learn the other fields.*
- *I was able to focus on the lessons with fewer people.*
- *It was easier to speak because of fewer people.*
- *We can learn a lot of things.*
- *It was easier to learn with people at my level.*
- *It improves efficiency.*
- *At first I felt this style was inconvenient but I got used to it and felt the class went smoothly.*

A few students did express negative feelings:

- *It was difficult.*
- *I don't like all the computer time.*
- *I think that one class should have one section. Because, we needed more time.*

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Student Comments About the E-Learning Component

Much of the student feedback about the e-Learning component was from the weekly Self-directed Checklist that students filled out. In Appendix B, the comments are organized into three categories. As a whole, the comments provide insight as to the mental/cognitive processes that students underwent while doing the activities, and the strategies they enacted to make sense of their learning.

The online survey, which asked seven questions pertaining to the e-Learning, also elicited useful data. The following presents those questions and the most typical student responses.

TABLE 2

Question 3: *Which type of English e-Learning activities did you <u>like</u> the most? Why?*

(Students could check more than one answer.)

Vocabulary	Reading	Grammar	Listening	Writing	None of These
67.5%	30%	22.5%	12.5%	7.5%	0%

- *Useful for daily life. (V)[2]*
- *It is easiest. (V)*
- *There were cute visuals. (V)*
- *I like looking for words with images. (V)*
- *Interesting stories. (R)*
- *About a famous person I know. (R)*
- *I can know new things. (R)*

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[2]　The sample student comments listed concern the top four choices. V = vocabulary activities, R = reading activities

Question 4 part I: Which type of English e-Learning activities were useful to you? Why?

(Students could check all that applied)

Vocabulary	Reading	Grammar	Listening	Writing	None of These
42.5%	30%	30%	27.5%	30%	0%

- *We can communicate with just words. (V) [3]*
- *The activity is about my level. (V)*
- *I can understand vocabulary without dictionary. (V)*
- *The reading was easy to understand. (R)*
- *I want to read faster. (R)*
- *I think reading is TOEIC practice. (R)*
- *I could review grammar. (G)*
- *I remembered how to use "was/were". (G)*
- *Writing requires the most interpretative power. (W)*

Question 5 part I: *Which type of computer activities were NOT useful to you? Why?*

(Students could check all that applied.)

Vocabulary	Reading	Grammar	Listening	Writing	None of These
10%	12.5%	5%	40%	12.5%	35%

When asked why, the most common reason students gave was that they were not good at listening and thus disliked those activities and/or found them too difficult.

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[3]   The sample student comments listed concern the top four choices. V = vocabulary activities, R = reading activities, G = grammar activities, W = writing activities

Question 6: *There was a file called "English Learning Websites for More Practice". Did you try any of the activities in this file? Why?*

(Students could check all that they tried.)

Vocabulary	Music & Songs	Listening & Video	All Skills	Reading & Listening	I did not try any of the activities
37.5%	35%	20%	15%	12.5%	22.5%

- *Music is common to the world.*
- *I like music so it was easy for me to study.*
- *I enjoyed the animation of the website.*
- *I enjoyed all skills because it is a form of game.*
- *I like studying with websites.*
- *I didn't have enough time.*

Question 7: *Did you try to help your classmate(s) on the computer activities? Did you ever work together with your classmate(s) on the activities? Please explain.*

Yes	No
62.5%	37.5%

- *It was fun to work with classmates.*
- *When I didn't understand, I worked it out with the help of someone close by.*
- *I can do English a little but I'm not good at computers, so we can help each other.*
- *I talked difficult points with friends.*
- *We taught difficult words to each other.*
- *We practiced speaking together.*
- *I did my best by myself.*
- *I couldn't help my friend because my English is bad.*
- *I can concentrate better by myself.*

Question 9: *Is using the computer/internet to learn English in class a good idea? Please explain your feelings.*

Yes	No	Don't know
90%	2.5%	7.5%

Positive comments about the e-Learning:

- *There are good materials on the internet, and we use less paper.*
- *I could find/work on my weak points using the computer.*
- *It breaks up the 90 minutes and wakes us up.*
- *I can contemplate.*
- *We can choose from many materials.*
- *We can improve our individual level by choosing activities suitable for ourselves.*
- *Everyone seems to study as hard as they could.*

Negative comments about the e-Learning:

- *Since we have a native English teacher, using the computer seems to be a waste of time.*
- *There seemed to be not quite enough learning materials available.*
- *When I see a website from another country, I feel less desire to use it.*
- *Using a computer is difficult for me.*

Discussion

As indicated by the quantitative and qualitative data, although a few students felt discomfort and pointed to the short-comings, the majority thought that the blended approach was an efficient and effective way to manage the course.

Students appreciated that the number of students in one classroom was reduced, and that a variety of knowledge and learning modes were made available.

As for the e-Learning component, again with only a few exceptions the students found it to be a good way to conduct learning. The responses on the Self-Directed Learning Checklist revealed that students not only evaluated the activities but also reflected on their own learning, for example their strengths and weaknesses. Students became more aware of what they really know and do not know through carrying out their learning. Some comments indicated a desire to pursue a particular route or strategy to improve, which is an important manifestation of goal-setting and self-directedness.

Concerning the online survey data, it was interesting to discover that vocabulary activities were evaluated as both the most likeable and useful, the main reasons being that these activities were heavily visual, easy to do, and highly communi- cative despite being only on the word level. Most students were able to successfully complete the vocabulary activities, which contributed to a sense of self-efficacy and motivation. Reading activities were deemed the second most likeable and useful. The main reason for this was that reading exposed students to new and interesting knowledge about various people and cultures. The fact that listening activities were deemed the least useful was surprising. I had thought the audio samples were within the students' ability, but I underestimated the difficulty of the materials, and students' general lack of experience with listening; students would have benefited from prior exposure to listening strategies and skills.

It was gratifying to discover that only about 20% of the students did not access the optional English learning activities provided by the website links. It seems that the majority of students did feel some degree of motivation to practice their English further after completing their mandatory activity. Again, a number of students were compelled to work on improving their vocabulary, and often used music/songs as the mediator.

I was also pleased to note that approximately 60% of the students did work with others on the activities. From the start, I offered this choice but did not demand collaboration. In the end, students took it upon themselves to interact as they needed. In the middle of the second semester, for one lesson I put the two sections together and allowed all the students to work on the e-Learning at the same time. My intention was to observe directly whether they still had problems accessing or carrying out the activities. During the class time, I walked around to help or to answer questions. At one point, those students attempting a challenging World Quiz (which required them to search online for information about various countries) started shouting answers to each other from across the room. They got quite excited about working on different parts of the quiz and sharing/confirming their findings instantaneously. Although e-Learning brings up images of people sitting quietly and isolated at individual computers, it can prove to be a promoter of peer interactions.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to provide some perspectives on the curriculum development process as applied to a particular context, and discussed the

application of a blended course to deal with classroom challenges. Although incorporating blended learning was new for me and many design issues needed to be overcome – especially concerning the e-Learning component – it appears that students felt engaged in, and benefited from, a more level-appropriate, self-directed, and individualized learning environment. As Blake (2008) aptly states:

> "Computer technology will be a key component to most everything accomplished in the 21st century. The language profession needs to capitalize on its advantages and strengths by using the best teaching practices, which in turn, should be informed by SLA theory whenever possible."

In experimenting with computer technology, I have come to realize its potential as:

- A method for managing a classroom
- A gateway to more authentic contexts for language use
- A source of learning affordances
- A means for promoting self-directed leaning
- A tool for building an online self-access center
- An environment for social interaction and cooperative learning

One major limitation of my e-Learning approach was that I confined the technology to Web 1.0. Although my students did work with each other within the classroom to carry out certain activities, they were not involved in any cyber socializing that could have extended their language learning further. Certainly there was a conscious effort to shelter my students from interactions with outsiders, for reasons of security and privacy. My lack of skills and knowledge

about Web 2.0 (blogs, forums, wikis, etc.) also defined the e-Learning activities I was capable of producing. The next challenge for me as a professional educator is to embrace a more "sociocognitive approach to CALL" (M. Warschauer & R. Kern, 2000), and discover pedagogically-sound ways to "shift the dynamic from learner's interaction with computers to interaction with humans via the computer"

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Appendix A: Self-Directed Activities Checklist

Date	Task Name(s)	Skill(s) you practiced			Printed work?	Your Comment About the Activity
9/25		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
10/2		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
10/9		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
10/16		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
10/23		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
11/6		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
11/13		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
11/20		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
11/27		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
12/4		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
12/11		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
12/18		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
1/8		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
1/15		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	
1/22		writing grammar	vocabulary listening	reading speaking	yes　no	

Appendix B: Collated Student Comments from the Self-Directed Learning Checklist

About the Activities/E-Learning	About Their Own Learning	About English
It was a little difficult	I want to read faster	I like (to do) grammar
I couldn't understand well	I must remember more words	Grammar was difficult
This was easy	Today I tried a different activity	Vocabulary was difficult
It was a little confusing	I could learn look up/new words	I don't remember many fruit names
It took a long time to read	I must study grammar more	I don't remember spelling
The activity was fun/enjoyable/interesting	I found out many things about the world	It was a little difficult to make sentences
It was hard to find the vocabulary	Today's skills were difficult for me; I was shocked!	I thought I could write the words without a dictionary but I had forgotten the words
I was able to write the vocabulary well this time. I found 25 words!	I can remember many phrases/sentences	I guess if I don't know the words I can't do the activity so I wanted to try another vocabulary activity
Today's task is unusual pattern; I can know more about myself from the health quiz	It's not good to do the same types of activity all the time	I'm not good at listening to English so I played the recording many times
I don't know many words in this reading	It was fun to work with other classmates on the world quiz	If I listen carefully I can figure out the meaning more or less
This activity is the same level as now for me	It was difficult to write 36 words from looking at the picture but I learned a lot	I realized that I don't usually write sentences so I forgot all the grammar
The pictures were fun to look at so I enjoyed finding words from it	I really like reading activities because if I read I can know new things	I found out that vocabulary about babies/baby things are different between English and Japanese
Words were difficult	Good material for brain training!	I'm not used to listening to English
Finding words from the picture was interesting	I will challenge to do intermediate level reading next time	It was hard for me to use even the words I know
This is interesting video/story	I could study how to make sentences	I want to learn to understand sentences I read
To use computers is difficult for me	I found out many things about the world	It was hard to make past tense verb
I can understand these skills and enjoy listening		I got used to listening to English
I can read it speedy		I remembered about how to use "was" "were"
I didn't understand a few things		I thought the words were easy but I couldn't remember the spellings
These are good/useful words and phrases for daily life		I found out the pronunciation of "pineapple"
I can study vocabulary enjoyably		I don't understand the use of -ing…it is hard.
I couldn't catch the words to the song		I don't understand how to use "do" "does"
I learned about Christmas		
It was fun to think of the different meanings of one word		
The reading was easy to understand because it was about a famous person I know		
It was hard to write sentences but when I tried it I found I enjoyed it. I like writing		
I want more time		
The pictures were cute		