# Issues and challenges in a live online project-based Japanese program

(プロジェクトベースで行なう日本語のオンライン授業の紹介)

*Reiko Aya*

American School in Japan: Elementary School Japanese Language teacher

*Machiko Romaine*

Nishimachi International School -Sub K-9 Japanese Language teacher

## Introduction

This paper was presented in Japanese at the 2014 Paperless: innovation and technology in education conference, based on the findings of the final project the presenters conducted while studying to obtain the Certificate of Educational Technology and Information (COETAIL).

College level, live, online courses at the Seton Hill University in Pennsylvania have been offered to high school and college students through the Blended Schools Institute (http://li.blendedschools.net). Among the courses offered through the university, online language classes are particularly useful because the native-speaker teacher can be in a different country. This paper showcases the online entry level Japanese 100 course, where the instructors live in Tokyo, Japan and the students are based in Pennsylvania, USA. The class is made up of a mix of high school honor students and college students, who live in different areas across the state. This class is held three times a week, with two self-study hours allotted during the week.

In this learner-driven, project-based, technology-enhanced class, students created various video clips to reach out to their community. Voice-recorded and/or written self-reflections and peer suggestions were also shared. The platform called Elluminate Live! (Blackboard Collaborate) was used for conducting the classes. Applications like YouTube, Vimeo, VoiceThread and PuppetPals, were used for students to work on and present their video projects. Evernote, Dropbox and Adobe Acrobat Pro X were used for collecting and storing student work, recording the assessment results and giving feedback to the students.

At the Paperless conference session, the presentation concluded with a hands-on application trial time of bContext. This iPad application was free as of February 1st, 2014 at the iTunes Store. The application is an interactive whiteboard that makes recording, screencasting, sharing slideshow presentations for e-learning, HW review and/or flipped class situations possible (see <https://vimeo.com/50246389>). Other similar applications such as Skitch , QuickTime Player and Screencast-O-Matic were also mentioned.

## Reports and discussion

There were several issues that came up during this online course. Many of these challenges dealt with students' motivation to work hard on this course and technology literacy rather than language learning. During the course the students were required to write reflection papers after each project. The instructors realized the students needed more guidance to further develop their critical thinking skills, and help the class better understand how to write reflection papers.

The challenges and solutions on the following aspects were also presented and discussed. The importance of technology literacy and having students demonstrate their understanding in their final projects; Communicating effectively with a class of mixed high school and college students; Giving streamlined tasks with sample work to guide the class to master the required tasks; Helping students to reflect on their work, and what is needed to move on to the next level.

One of the main challenges shared was creating a community around language learning. At the entry level, students may not yet have a vested interest in learning about Japanese culture, requiring a social networking approach in this live online class.

At the Paperless conference, there was active exchange of knowledge and information with the audience about the implementation of appropriate digital applications. Most of the conference presentations were given in English, as only a handful of Japanese language teachers were present, but everyone that came to our session agreed that there is a need for an internet-connected community for Japanese language instructors to share ideas and resources.

## Conclusion

The authors, as instructors, found that student learning beyond the target language mastery is required for having success in this course. Student mastery of various digital applications – in addition to further development of critical thinking skills – is necessary for writing an insightful reflection paper.

Students may have benefited from a social networking community – where they could have connected with other Japanese learners to discuss questions and share ideas – that may have encouraged a deeper interest in the culture and language learning. However, the course curriculum, which used a popular but traditional textbook, gave little space to build a social networking community for students.

## Further direction

Based on Professor Tohsaku's recent book 'Nippon 3.0 の処方箋', the presenters were made aware of

the need for creating a networking community for Japanese language instructors where sharing and the practical exchange of ideas on certain applications can take place. The presenters created the group in June 2012, and the group is steadily increasing its membership among Japanese language instructors in Japan and the United States. Attendees at the conference were also encouraged to join at, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/benkyokai/>.

## Reference:

Tohsaku, YasuHiko (2013). *Nippon 3.0 の処方箋.*

*Tokyo, Japan:* KK. Kokuhosha (ISBN-10: 4062184613)

## Links that may be of interest to readers:

Puppet pals https://itunes.apple.com/app/puppet-pals-hd/id342076546

COETAIL Website http://www.coetail.com

bContext application: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/interactive-whiteboard-smartboard/id515971580?mt=8

Skitch: http://evernote.com/skitch

Screencast-O-Matic: http://www.screencast-o-matic.com

**Bio:**

**Machiko Romaine** is a long-time Japanese Language and Culture instructor for K-12 foreign language and heritage learners, currently living in Tokyo and regularly subbing at international schools. She also gives workshops on second language acquisition to parents of bilingual and bicultural children. As a result of participating in Coetail 2011-12, she is connected to a new world of educators.  She manages an open group on FB for language instructors: "勉強会 -- teaching subjects/JP lang. with IT'.   She wishes to share what she received and more at Coetail. She herself is not a tech specialist but is surrounded by many and willing to share her findings. Her bio can be found at LinkedIn. <http://www.linkedin.com/in/machikoromaine> <machiko@gmail.com>

**Reiko Aya** has been teaching different grade and language levels for over ten years. She was a classroom teacher at a Japanese immersion school in Oregon, taught live-online classes at Seton Hill University in Pennsylvania and recently teaches Japanese as a foreign language through near native levels at the American School in Japan. She received her Master of Education and teaching Japanese as a foreign language certificate from Portland State University. <raya@asij.ac.jp>