

# Using the Internet with your students:

*An interview with Christina Gitsaki and Richard Taylor*

**E**TJ organized 1-day courses over the Spring and Summer this year, at 5 locations around Japan, leading to a Certificate in Teaching Japanese Students. The courses were sponsored by David English House and Oxford University Press. As part of the courses, Christina Gitsaki (Nagoya University of Commerce) and Richard Taylor (Nagoya City University), co-authors of the www-based communication textbook *Internet English* (OUP), gave presentations entitled "Web-Assisted Language Learning". John Dutton asked them about their views on using the Internet with Japanese students of English.

• *Do you think that there is any particular age group that can benefit more than others by using the Internet?*

The Internet contains a variety of information to appeal to any age group. The main concern is the students' level of English. The lower the level the more guidance from the teachers is needed. The higher the level of English proficiency (intermediate and above) the easier it is for students to surf the web on their own.

In many schools there still isn't a sufficient number of computers to permit all of the students to use them on a regular basis. Is there still some way that the teacher can use the Internet with his/her students?

EFL classes that use the Internet do not need to be taught in a computer lab where each student has access to a computer. Classes can be taught in a traditional classroom but teachers need to ensure that their students will be able to access the Internet for an hour or so before their next class. So even a small number of computers is sufficient.

• *To what extent do you feel that Internet use should take place in-class/school and out-of-class/school, bearing in mind that some students may not have Internet access at home?*

Both of these approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. When students are able to use the Internet in class, teachers can offer guidance and help to them and keep them on track. However, this may mean extra classroom time for both teachers and students. Use of the Internet out of class gives students the freedom to choose when they want to do their web surfing and also ensures that students will be spending an extra hour or so of their time exposing themselves to English (which should make most teachers happy!). However, when students use the Internet at home, they have to rely on themselves in

case they have any difficulties with the software or hardware.

With computer novices we'd recommend some teacher guidance on the use of the Internet at least at the beginning. Once students are familiar with the web-browsing software and how to locate specific information they are fine on their own.

• *What kind of Internet activities to you feel are the most successful? Could you outline the aims/purposes of these activities? What kind of activities do students seem to like the most?*

Certainly activities that students can relate to. For example, with first year university students we have found that topics such as finding information about their favorite famous person, planning their holiday on the web or looking up information about their favorite movie are very motivating and successful. Such activities enable students to find information about things that they are interested in and then share this information with their classmates. Japanese students love to access sites that have current and most recent information, and sites that are interactive. For example, students get a thrill when they can listen to a track of their favorite CD or watch a video clip of their favorite movie. Girls love it when they browse through on-line shopping malls!! The important thing here is to have a pedagogical purpose behind each activity. Otherwise students just go web surfing.

• *Are there any special considerations for large classes, very small classes (including 1-on-1), group work, individual work?*

If teachers are teaching their Internet related course in a computer lab then we would recommend a maximum of 30 students since the teacher will probably spend time helping students with their computers. If the lesson is taking place in a traditional classroom then, any number of



Surfing the Internet provides students with an opportunity to be exposed to more English and allows them a perceptual change pertaining to the world around them.

students is fine. About 1-on-1, we haven't tried it, but in our opinion, it is best if students can share the information they find with other students from their age group. It is much more exciting and motivating.

• *How many hours per week would you envisage for Internet-related study?*

Hmmm, at least 2 hours a week. Students would need about 2 hours in order to do a web search and put together a basic one-page report. Obviously the more time students spend surfing English websites the better. When students attend an English lesson they are exposed to English for about 45mins or 90mins a week. When they use the Internet they are exposed to English a lot more! And getting students to spend more time practicing English is every English teacher's dream!

• *What advice do you have for teachers who want to start making (more) use of the Internet? Have you encountered any difficulties, or pitfalls, using the Internet with students?*

First of all teachers should familiarize themselves with the Internet. They should spend a lot of time surfing and putting together a database of websites that would be interesting for their students. Then depending on the students' level of English and computer proficiency, teachers should design activities giving adequate guidance and help to students. Again, teachers should make sure there is a language component in each activity, i.e. that students will be given opportunities to practice one or more language skills during the course of the activity. After all, we are language teachers and

language teaching should remain our goal.

When teachers design their own materials they need to try them themselves in order to find out what kind of websites students will be visiting and any difficulties that may arise. Then they will need to revise the materials before using them again. There are always things that will need to be clarified or expanded. Most of the difficulties we have encountered are related to the use of computers. When teaching in a computer lab, teachers have to be familiar with the software and hardware that their students will be using. In many cases, the teacher is also the computer technician, but with the current efficiency of the hardware and software, problems should be minimal if any.

• *Looking to the next couple of years, what do you see emerging as the main benefits of Internet use for Japanese students of English?*

Students who spend time using the Internet in English will be able to navigate through English web-sites and will not avoid them like many students today. Also the accessibility of the Internet will encourage students to spend more time surfing the web. If we can teach them how to surf English websites then they will expose themselves to English a lot more. Also, their perception of the world and their knowledge of International matters, different customs and people from different nationalities will increase, making Japanese students more...cosmopolitan.

Thank you, Christina & Richard! ETJ