

## Stimulating Creativity in a Japanese School — Using the Internet

By Nicolas Gromik

This article details how using the Internet can stimulate students to learn about English writing skills as well as apply their knowledge gained in the classroom in a creative and meaningful manner.

This review is based on experimental communicative English lessons for Japanese third graders at a senior high school. Two classes of 20 students were the targeted audience. The benefits of utilizing the Internet in the classroom became apparent as the students interacted with computers, the Internet and Microsoft Word.

First I experimented with *dfilm.com* to evaluate the ease of using this website, by looking at the quality of the website. Some of the characters may appear visually challenging and inappropriate for junior high school students. After understanding the system and possibilities with *dfilm.com*, I approached the Japanese English Teacher in charge of the class and demonstrated how the whole website worked. I encouraged the teacher to try and send me a movie. Observations about staff room dynamics reported that this teacher was clarifying with other teacher the appropriateness of this activity. Once she reported that yes it was "ok" to try a lesson, I designed



the lessons and the time line.

### The structure

*dfilm.com* is an interactive user friendly website. The user is given a wide selection of characters, sceneries and music to choose from. The user simply has to click on their preferred choice and the "next" prompt to develop their movie.

The film making system is divided into six sections. First there is the choice of places and background. These range from all kinds of seasons and weather preferences, such as a rainy beach or a snowy park. Second there is the choice of a maximum of two characters. These vary from animation type characters to look alike (George Bush or Musashimaru). Then there is the type of interaction between the characters. The user is given four kinds of encounters from monologue to chasing, meeting and picking up a character. Once the story is set the user begins to write the dialogue (this will be discussed further on). For one scene a dialogue exchange is a three sentences per characters. Each sentence has a maximum of one hundred characters. After completing the dialogue the next step is to choose background music. At this stage the user arrives at a junction.

The user has to decide whether to end the movie or add a new scene. There is a maximum of three scenes per film. The next stage involves creating a trailer for the movie. There are four kinds of trailers to choose from. Here the students type in their name and the movie title. Once the movie is finished it is ready to be either enjoyed or sent to a willing viewer (in this case the teacher who has to assess them).

### The lessons

The lessons were directed by the author, an Assistant English Teacher (ALT), and it was managed fully in English. For this particular experiment the students were first introduced to the idea of making an anime. This

was a teacher-led lesson to familiarize the students with this English program. Each student was allocated a computer in the computer laboratory of the school. The students individually followed the instruction demonstrated by the ALT. During this lesson the objectives of the project were outlined and the deadline was scheduled. The students had full power over the creativity of the movie and dialogue. The students were given four lessons at fifty minutes each to complete a movie of any length.

### The creative lessons

During four lessons the students experimented by themselves with the concept of the movie. At one point, I realized that it would be more effective for the students to first type their dialogues so that their work could be saved and retrieved for the next lesson.

It became apparent, however, that some students had very little experience with using Microsoft Word. A whole lesson was dedicated to explaining the meaning of the error markers that are green (for sentence structure mistakes and red for spelling mistakes). The students were exposed to punctuation and its meaning. It is interesting to note that although Japanese students are exposed to a lot of reading, they appear not to understand the purpose of punctuation. A whole class brief lesson was designed and then students were individually reminded with the ALT pointing out their punctuation errors. The most advanced students learned how to use spell check by themselves.

I assisted students individually with sentence structure and spelling mistakes, and when there were communications problems, I was helped by the Japanese English teacher.

Once their dialogue was typed, the students accessed *dfilm* and one whole lesson was dedicated to designing the movie and cut and paste the dialogue. The students only had one lesson to complete the whole task

from creating to mailing their movie.

Once the ALT received all the films, I reviewed them all and assessed them on the basis of length, meaning, essence, and creativity, English mistakes. After evaluating all their work, one last lesson was scheduled to allow the students to view all the movies and to provide a general feedback on the general similar mistakes. For example, a common mistake was "let's janken!"; an appropriate expression would have been "let's pull straws".

### Recommendations

dfilm.com is a great anime making website. It is very user friendly for any age level. The staff at dfilm is

also available should there be any technical problems. However it is regrettable that the films cannot be saved onto any formats for further viewing. The films can however be stored at an email address for an undetermined period of time.

The benefit is students learn to write purposefully in English and express their opinion in a creative manner. However some students may not want to cooperate and mediocre work is unavoidable.

Scheduling a lesson to view all the films is a little uninteresting for the students because the characters are not voice animated. Consequently viewing 25 films of varying length and

quality maybe tiresome for certain students. However the students benefited from seeing common production errors and, in retrospect, realizing how they might have been avoided.

Conclusively, this was a great experiment and experience. I do recommend that should either Assistant Language Teacher use this website that they contribute further research in order to maximize the understanding and utility of such a website.

*The author wishes to point out that he is receiving no sponsorship of any kind for writing this review of dfilm.com*

## Getting Great Sound from CD players

by William R. Hogue

I teach a listening class from a text that has a classroom CD. CDs have great sound and are much more convenient than a cassette, but there is one problem. The CD players that are available are just not up to the job of getting clear sound out to the 50-plus students in this class. Another problem is that many CD players cannot scan ahead or back in the same track which is essential for effective classroom use.

I found a solution that takes advantage of the big TVs that we have in every room. They have plenty of power to get the sound

out, even to the back of the room. The solution is a portable CD player and a cable that connects the sound output of the CD player to the line inputs of the TV.

I use a Sony RK-G129, but any similar cable will do. The cable is 1.5 meters long and has a stereo miniplug on one end and a pair of RCA plugs on the other. I use a Soundlook SAD-3900 CD-player with a headphone and a "Line Out" jacks. Although inexpensive, it has the scanning features that I needed. It also has a "single track repeat" mode, which is sometimes handy. Many portable CD players have a

"Line Out" jack. If your player doesn't have a "Line Out" jack try the normal headphone jack, starting with a low volume setting.

Plug the miniplug end into the CD-player and match up the RCA plugs to the same colors on the TV input panel, ignoring the yellow "video" jack. Fiddle with the TV and/or VCR input controls until you select the correct setting that plays your sound, usually something like "EXT-1" or "AUX-2".

You can hook up portable cassette tape players, MD players and MP3 players in the same manner.

## Ask the Techie

*This column is for you to ask your own questions about using computers and the Internet with your students. Send your questions to the editor, Tom Robb at tom@robb.net*

### Q: What is Hypercard?

A: Hypercard, which was bundled with early Macs was one of the first "multimedia" authoring programs since it could play sounds on cue and even show video. Based on the metaphor of a deck of study cards, it has been used extensively for educational programming since it could branch to different cards

depending upon what was clicked on, display hints, provide scoring, etc. The current version 2.4.1 is available from Apple for \$99. There is also a PC counterpart called "Toolbook" for which a 30-day trial version is available at <http://www.asymetrix.com/en/toolbook/index.asp>

These days there are other ways to accomplish the same tasks, such

as PowerPoint, Visual Basic, HTML (with javascripting), or activity creation tools such as Hot Potatoes. Still some people still stand by "Hypercard". With the third party "LiveCard" (<http://www.royalsoftware.com/>) you can actually make the "stacks" as Hypercard programs are called, completely accessible on any browser on any platform.