

# On the Potential of Education with the Internet in the Future :

Focusing on Intercultural Communication

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## 1 . Introduction

The Internet was developed in the 1970s as an experimental military network called ARPAnet (Advance Projects Research Agency Network). Since then, it has consistently expanded so as to allow researchers and educators to share ideas and information. To our surprise, the rapid advance of modern technology has made it possible to open the door of the Internet to the public. Those who are interested can now easily access it. We are sure wide-spreading use of the Internet can bring more and more profound change into our society in the future, especially in promoting fluent communication. This also can be really desirable for an international understanding between races. The writer, however, has observed that among the people of Japan the Internet has not been used for these. So far it seems the Internet in Japanese education is mainly used for attracting students, and even some experts regard this tool just as something to provide them with entertainment.. In other words, students are led to believe it is for fun rather than practical use. This is probably also due to the strategic commercialization brought by computer hardware or software makers. But we should never forget that the Internet played an active role in the disastrous day, January 17, 1995, when the enormous quake hit Kobe, regarded one of the most sophisticated cities in Japan. The quake caused more than 5,000 fatalities and innumerable casualties. Kobe was thrust into panic, and usual communication channels were shut down. To make matters worse, government

supports were delayed because of this reduced information. It was very pleasant surprise to find the cyberspace was still active and helped people get more precise information ; sometimes the helpful information came in from outside the country as well as from in-country. To our regret, this kind of special information was brought in by a limited number of the users. It goes without saying that the Internet has a lot of potential to facilitate worldwide communication effectively, yet there is not much of a paradigm to use it for intercultural communication. Taking this point into consideration, we would like to propose some guidelines in this paper.

## 2 . Internet : Motivational Tool for International Understanding

When the latest *Course of Study* by the Japanese Ministry of Education for lower and upper secondary schools was executed, the education for international understanding was made a priority. In conformity with this trend, many teachers have tried to develop their teaching materials in order to reach these objectives, using LL (Language Laboratory) and other audio-visual aids, or unique reading materials. Teachers reported that students were very satisfied with their approaches, though as yet there has been little empirical study. What is the cause of this? So far as the writer can observe, there are several major reasons. First of all, an oversize class makes it difficult for teachers to control their students. Secondly, the limited number of educational tools leaves the opportunity for "hands-on" learning in short supply. Thirdly, there might be still too much emphasis on the teacher-centered approach. Although numerous techniques, with which media such as radio, TV, video, newspapers and so forth are utilized, have been developed for the purpose of enhancing international understanding, they were only effective in language teaching or learning. This is perhaps because they failed to provide students with sufficient interaction. It is natural that computers should have taken the place of these techniques as is represented by CAI (Computer Assisted Instruction). It can be thought that computers, to large extent, have succeeded in motivating students and helped them learn various

subjects. However, they did not meet all of the students' full needs.

According to Brown (1981), motivation is commonly represented by psychologists as being built upon six needs as in the following:

- (1) the need for exploration, for seeing 'the other side of the mountain', for probing the unknown;
- (2) the need for manipulation, for operating--to use Skinner's term--on the environment and causing change;
- (3) the need for activity, for movement, exercise, both physical and mental;
- (4) the need for stimulation, the need to be stimulated by the environment, by other people, or by ideas, thoughts, and feelings;
- (5) the need for knowledge, the need to process and internalize the results of exploration, manipulation, activity, and stimulation, to resolve contradictions, to quest for solutions to problems and for self-consistent systems of knowledge;
- (6) finally the need for ego-enhancement, for the self to be known and to be accepted and approved of by others.

Herzberg (1968) also portrayed these motivating factors graphically.

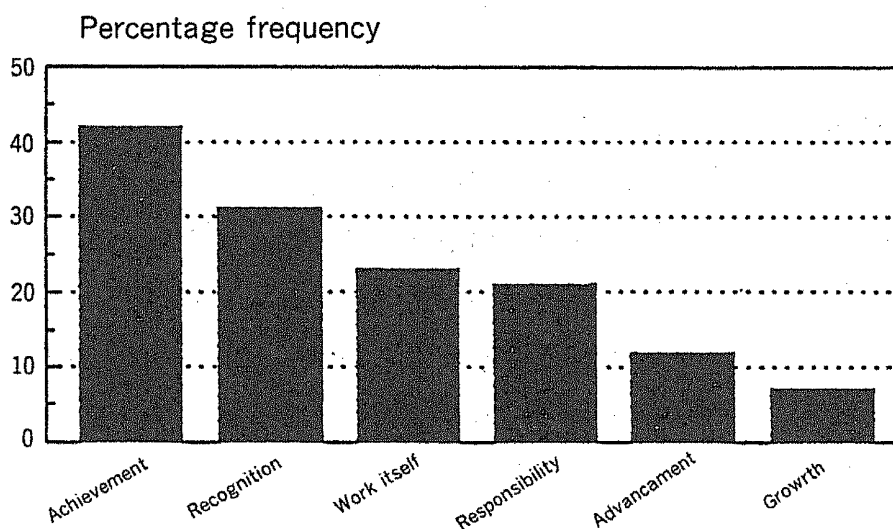


Figure 1. Motivating factors

Even though computers fulfilled the various motivating functions mentioned above, by themselves it is still whether they are able to offer

insights into the different cultures. This is because they are regarded as rather self-oriented tools which impede sympathetic approach to other cultures. In addition, as Malone (1981) reports, there were variations between boys and girls and between older and younger children in the desire to use computers. This might be applied to teachers as well, like variations between male and female teachers, and between older and younger teachers. Then, what can become the most appropriate educational tool, especially in the field of international understanding? It has been recognized that the Internet will take primary position over other tools. As Hoffman (1995) says, "The Internet is a network of thousands and thousands of computers connected around the world. The Internet links not only computers, but the *networks* of computers—it's a network of net works, making it possible for people at schools, private companies and other organizations, as well as in their homes, to communicate with each other."

While the Internet will have really beneficial effect on education, there are couple reasons teachers may feel uncomfortable with this new technology. First reason why they might feel like that lies in the misconception that they equate the Internet and computers. It is true that some of the basics of computer operation are required to access the Internet, but these skills can be taught in a very brief period of time. And as Alspach (1995) argues, computers have very little impact on the Internet, in that the Internet is really made up of *people* from around the world. This point is of at most important, there is no reason why we should do not utilize the Internet for attaining global communication and global understanding. Some educators may not enjoy the way this approach changes their teaching style.

### 3 . The Prominent Features of the Internet for Communication

The most outstanding feature of the Internet is it makes it possible for sharing informational resources all over the world, thus we can experience a much smaller world. While it may still appear to be imper-

sonal for some, the Internet will probably become the worldwide communicational tool in the future. In this chapter, we will take a brief look at some prominent features of the Internet based on its communication ability.

The Internet serves two major functions ; one is the ability to retrieve specific information, and the other is to communicate. As regards the former, telnet <sup>1)</sup> -which allows us to use the computer at our desks to directly connect with some remote data base-can be cited as one of those representative tools. However, the writer does not want to focus on this function. The main objective in this paper is to explore the way intercultural communication is enhanced via the Internet.

There are three distinctive communication features of the Internet : (1) electronic mail (referred to hereafter as "e-mail" ); (2) World Wide Web (referred to hereafter as "WWW") <sup>2)</sup> ; and (3) newsgroup. Though there are many other functions, these three are becoming the most popular ones.

(1) E-mail :

Rather than sending letters and memos in the conventional way, e-mail messages are created and sent electronically. And we will run into two types of e-mail during the course of our Internet travels: Intrasystem e-mail and Internet e-mail. Intrasystem e-mail is e-mail that stays within a particular system, like people who subscribe to commercial online services send to each other. Internet e-mail is instead e-mail that can travel to anyone on any system, as long as that system is connected to the Internet, (Alspach 1995 :5) Between these two types, needless to say, the latter will be more important for education in intercultural communication. With this we are in direct, immediate, and instantaneous contact with people all over the world. Even if students had the problem of no friend with whom to communicate, they can find a special-interest group through the 'list' <sup>3)</sup> that brings together many people who are communicating about a subject in which they are interested. As the result, students who have participated in such a group consisting of people from various

countries not only learn more about their particular topic but also gain intercultural understanding.

(2) World Wide Web :

As a convenient means of accessing the Internet, WWW became popular quickly because of the greater variety of media in the presentation of information. Its HTML <sup>4)</sup> format has significant advantages over other forms of access; a greater variety of information, products, and services are available on the Web. These are not only presented in text but also by audio visual means including sound, still or motion pictures. In order to access the Web, a Web browser <sup>5)</sup> is required. And the Web browser can be categorized as follows :

- (1) graphical interfaces
- (2) character-based interfaces

These two primary interfaces are easily linked and so users can conveniently move between documents to view text, graphics, movies, and other media. As far as the intercultural communication process between users via the Internet is concerned, such features will provide them with additional cultural information about particular subject.

(3) Newsgroup :

Newsgroups are organized by specific topics like lists. According to the definition by Clark (1995), "Both newsgroups and lists are sometimes moderated. But as a general rule, newsgroups tend to be less formal and less given to rigorous academic debate, more oriented toward the leisure time and the technical. But in their own way, newsgroups also can be places for precision, insight, humor, information—and flaming." As these newsgroup discussions tend to be rather personal, it might be effective to let students view these more authentic ways ; of thinking in different cultures. However, there is a problem that newsgroups are also becoming the main place where hostile communication is done. So teachers have to pay a great deal of attention to what groups students access.

These three major communication functions have a lot of potential for intercultural education, and are very effective when they are used appropriately.

#### 4 . From the Intercultural Perspective

In the previous chapter, some prominent features were described, though they are just part of the Internet. The reason why the writer specifically selected them was not simply because of their popularity among people, but because they are expected to be ideal communication vehicles for intercultural communication. As such, they will be cited in this chapter in more detail.

##### 4 . 1. Present Situations in Japan

There is no doubt that Japan is now promoting internationalization, and is going to take an active role in the global community. Our group-oriented thinking and behaviors have occasionally caused an undesirable international relationship with other countries. The phrase, 'Japan Bashing', which became so popular in Japan exemplifies how much difficulty this country has making itself understood by other countries. It is certain that these different ways of thinking and/or behaving brought about critical communication gap. As Gannon (1994) points out, it is very important to understand Japanese history, which can be viewed as a continual search for WA, harmonious relations among elements so as to create a feeling of effective interaction between human beings and nature. This has resulted in the Japanese are remarkably homogeneous people who have lived in relative isolation for centuries. Recently people in this country have been encouraged to recognize their cultural differences from others', and have been trained to adjust themselves to other, especially western cultures. In line with this perception, educational policy has put special emphasis on how to become more aware of different cultures.

For example, teaching the English language, which will become the main arena for intercultural education. And now various countries and cultures have been added to make this more colorful and balanced view of the world. This can be assessed positively, but there is still a large point missing. The writer believes that Japanese students need to also learn and appreciate more the beauty of their own culture, and further learn to communicate that understanding to people of other cultures. Unless this is placed in the school curriculum, many opportunities for transmitting these fine aspects of our values will be lost.

#### 4. 2. Language

For promoting intercultural communication, to learn English is absolutely indispensable. Recently English education in Japan has strongly stressed on the need for oral communication. "In the last few years public and most private schools offer a conversation class once or twice a week. Sometimes it is with a native speaker of English. However, these conversation classes often contain as many as 40 or 50 students and a common class method will have only 2 students roleplaying a dialog at any given time. So even though conversation classes exist, sufficient time spent in authentic English conversation is rare." (Asama et al 1995: 108) The Internet will resolve all these problems; the language transmitted through it is an everyday experience for students in foreign language settings, and become a means of enriching the language learning experience and of infusing a communicative language orientation in classroom settings. There are innumerable WWW sites for this goal available.

##### <Vocabulary Building>

Some web pages are useful to build vocabulary.

\* *A. Word. A. Day*

<http://www.wordsmith.org/words/today.html>

\* *Cool Word of the Day*

<http://www.dsu.edu/projects/wordofday/word.html>



Both are the web pages for the mailing list, which mails out English vocabulary words and its definition. Although the words here seemed to be relatively difficult, we can actually hear their true pronunciation and learn their etymological background. Once we have registered our e-mail address on here, a word can be sent to us every day.

\* *Word Puzzles*

<http://syndicate.com>

This web page is also useful to learn new words. The desirable feature of this page is its quiz-based and task-oriented format, which naturally motivates students to learn words in a game-like fashion.

〈Reading〉

The Internet is text-based and is always full of vividly worded information. If the teachers will classify useful resources and present them to the students properly, it will help them explore wide variety of written material and improve their reading comprehension.

\* *Gutenberg Project*

<http://med-amsa.bu.edu/Gutenberg/Welcome.html>

This site has hundreds—thousands—of electronic texts online, and more being added every month. Here we can read Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Grimm's Fairy Tales, Aesop's Fables, Edgar Allan Poe, and the list goes on.

\* *Impact Online*

<http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/impact/>

This web site is full of world news both current and archive. The site is run by the University of Illinois College of Education, and designed for intermediate and advanced ESL/EFL (English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language) learners.

〈Listening and Speaking〉

Some web sites on the Internet are very helpful for listening and speaking.

\* *Listening and Speaking*

<http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/edpsy-387/rongchang-li/esl/lisandsp.html>

The site is divided into seven sections, and 'Listening training on the Web' and 'Speaking English' are two of the best. Both of them deserve attention by learners wishing to improve their communicative competencies.

#### <Writing>

These web sites are helpful to develop writing skills.

##### \* *An Elementary Grammar*

<http://www.hiway.co.uk/~ei/intro.html>

In this site, students get acquainted with basic grammar for writing. Once they have learned how to write, they will feel more interested in applying in using this skill. In this case, the following site helps them significantly.

##### \* *Written Discussion Exercises*

<http://comenius.port.net/fable/discussion.html>

Here the students can cultivate their writing skills, because they can subscribe their writing assignment to the web host for evaluation.

There are number of sites for learning English besides those shown above. If we use search engines <sup>6)</sup>, we will be able to find more appropriate sites for ESL/EFL learners. In addition, they will really help students become aware of English speaking cultures. But there is more. Why should English be the only focus, even in the class where intercultural understanding is taught? This implies that the education for international understanding in Japan should only be directed toward English speaking countries only. As the result of this phenomenon, Japanese people are not becoming familiar with the peoples of Africa, the Middle-East, South America, and the rest of Asia etc.. These people have a very different type of communication style and life style from the Americans or English. It is obvious that Japan is also going to advance the cultural mosaic previously experience in other countries. Therefore giving students a balanced view becomes a critical issue for the future. In this

sense, as languages often reflect the culture underlying, some web sites are very useful in learning important aspect of different languages from around the world. Some of them are shown below.

\* *Country Specific Pages*

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/AfricanStudies/HomePage/Country.html>

This web-page describes the details of most of African countries including language, and on the same site we can find a wonderful page on which we can experience the languages of Africa. The URL address is shown below.

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/AfricanStudies/HomePage/AFRGIDE.html>

This is the web-page named 'K-12 Electronic Guide for African Resources on the Internet', and various types of information are found there. In its site called 'Languages of Africa', where we can learn Arabic and Swahili by the hyper text version, and in addition, we are able to participate in the audio lessons.

\* *The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at UNC*

<http://www.acs.appstate.edu:80/~griffinw/>

This is the home page with links to other home pages about Spanish, German, Chinese, Russian, French, and Latin and full of information about the specific language and culture.

#### 4. 3. How to Actualize Online Interactive Classroom

The web pages are almost limitless, and this occasionally some students feel overwhelmed when finding the site which meets their needs. But once students have been shown how to limit their selections, it is possible to create a classroom full of enthusiastic explores. Here are some examples.

<Via WWW>

Goal:

To let students learn about the culture of a particular society

by studying its language and customs.

Objectives :

Use various Internet search engines to locate information related to language, culture, societies, and other countries. Select a language and a country where it is spoken, and study various aspects of the language and the society.

Procedures :

(1) Let students identify a couple search engines and write their addresses on a word processing program so they can access them at a later date.

(2) Let them use the browser like Netscape and select a topic in that country that they think is important, then see in what ways the target culture is similar to, and different from Japanese culture.

(3) Let them write the URL address being studied for sharing the information among classes later.

(4) Let them access and share some of the sites students found and then lead them into a discussion.

<Via Mailing List>

Goal :

Students get accustomed to civilized discourse with other members of the human community.

Objectives :

Students write and respond once a week to a member of the list they chose in other countries. The purpose of the e-mail correspondence is to discuss, compare, contrast, and analyze topics in class.

Procedures :

(1) Let students learn how to subscribe to a list,(Make sure that everyone finds an e-pal, and that everyone gets a communication line

started.)

(2) Let them correspond with a list on which teachers have arranged for students.

(3) When they get used to doing this, help students engage their e-pals in discussion of various aspects of the topics and subjects being studied in the class.

#### <Via HTML>

##### Goal:

To design an unique home page with the students of intercultural class.

##### Objective:

Develop home page message that is created in intercultural class. They will be open to the people in all over the world on the Internet, and make it possible for sharing the personal information together.

##### Procedures:

(1) Let students get acquainted with the basics of HTML document.

(2) Then, show a range of information links from simple to complex, and that have a clear and appealing purpose and message.

(3) Next, divide students into some groups and let them work in groups. Assign different parts of the project to different groups of students according to their interests.

(4) Then let the students design and create the home page in English.

(5) Tell the groups to put an e-mail address which belongs to any member of the group so that he/she can bring visitors' comments to the class for discussion, when the home page is posted on a server in a network.

## 5 . An Implication for the Future

So far the writer has briefly introduced the potential of the Internet applied to the field of intercultural communication. However these descriptions only begin to identify myriad possibilities. The more teachers will create their own unique ways to educate students utilizing the Internet, the more the class becomes interactive or educational. For example, some teachers may use IRC (Internet Relay Chat) <sup>7)</sup> in the class and lead students into the realm of simultaneous written communication through English. This could not have been imagined in the old days. In addition, there is not only the advantage of simultaneous information-sharing, but the opportunity to make new friends from all over the world so that students get acquainted with other ways of thinking.

Now that the Internet is no longer a tool just for professionals, it is natural that more and more convenient communication tools or software will be developed. And real-time visual and verbal communication through the Internet is no mere dream. For example, the combination of the QuickCam which was produced by Connectix Corporation and CU-SeeMe software which was developed at Cornell University has already led us into exciting new forms of communication. Moreover, the Internet telephone, the Internet radio, the Internet video and so forth will soon be developed. It is anticipated that many more net tools are going to be invented in the near future. However, we are sure the proliferation of such tools will be confusing us every now and then. So teachers themselves must be assisted with how to present such tools to an entire class, and how to introduce activities with them that will engage learners in active participation.

## 6 . Conclusion

The above article suggests that the advent of the Internet system creates many exciting possibilities for Japanese students to gain and share cultural information with others from around the world. On the contrary, the article recognizes that there are many obstacles to overcome, especially in the way to tie the Internet to language and culture teaching. It is because the Internet is so new that many teachers will feel uneasy to change traditional teaching methods. In spite of this, the writer strongly insists on adopting it into the classroom. Because it can show us that human communication is conveyed not only verbally, but also through literal and visual messages. The Internet actualizes these interfaces without regard to distance and finance. The writer convinced that teachers and students are not yet familiar enough with this innovative tool, but in the future they may come to rely upon the Internet when humanistic approaches are presented. The writer hopes that some of the preliminary techniques and procedures outlined in this paper will implement and promote these profound educational possibilities.

The writer gives his sincere appreciation to the Japanese Ministry of Education which provided me an opportunity to research this topic at California State University, Chico, and also wishes to express his special thanks to Jeffrey Bisaga (Ph.D.) for his assistance with preparation of this article.

## NOTES

- 1) A method for connecting your computer to another computer on the Internet.
- 2) A hyper textual area of the Net for browsing and gathering information.
- 3) A way for people with similar interests to communicate each

other.

- 4) Hypertext Markup Language. The coding scheme used to format text for use on the World Wide Web.
- 5) A program used to view HTML documents and navigate the World Wide Web.
- 6) Ways to search through the World Wide Web to find what you want.
- 7) A way for people to talk to each other over their computers in "real time" on the Internet.

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