

タイトル	Monitoring Student Responses to a Blended Language Learning Project-Based Curriculum Initiative
著者	KAY, William
引用	北海学園大学学園論集, 141: 123-170
発行日	2009-09-25

Monitoring Student Responses to a Blended Language Learning Project-Based Curriculum Initiative

William KAY

ABSTRACT

本論文ではブレンディッド・ラーニングの英語カリキュラムに対する学生の反応を検証した研究結果について報告する。2006 から 2007 学年度にかけて行われた先行研究(Kay, Gemmel, Johnson, Hinkelman) で得られた知見により, インターネットベースでのアクティビティーが英語を専攻としない学生の英語に対する学習意欲を促す重要な役割を担うことができると考えられた。この結果を受け, 教師による研究グループを結成しブレンディッド・ラーニングによるカリキュラムを試験的に試みる共同研究を学部内で行った。新たに採り入れられたカリキュラムに対する学生の反応を考察するため, Burns (1999) のアクション・リサーチモデルを基に作られた研究方法を用いた。試験的に用いられた教授法および教材に対する学生の反応は概ね前向きなものであったが, 新たに採り入れられたカリキュラムが英語学習に対する学生の興味や参加意欲に与える影響は大変少ないことが明らかになった。本研究を通じ, 学生の英語学習に対する姿勢や取り組みに対して教師がいかに積極的に影響を与えようと努めるかにこの試みが委ねられているという結論に達した。本結果は, ブレンディッド・ラーニング (BLL) のクラスにおいてプロジェクト・ベースド・ラーニング (PBL) のアプローチを実践した際に得られた知見をまとめたものである。

This paper presents the results from a limited qualitative study on monitoring student responses towards a blended language learning curriculum initiative. From observations made throughout a preliminary study (Kay, Gemmel, Johnson and Hinkelman, 2007) it was felt that Internet-based activities could play a vital role in stimulating interest amongst non-English major students towards new ways of approaching English language learning. These results led a small group of teachers to collaborate on piloting a blended language learning project-based curriculum within a shared department. A research design based on Burns' (1999) model of action research was chosen to gain insight into student responses towards this curriculum innovation. Although student responses were largely positive

towards the teaching methods and materials piloted, results revealed that the curriculum innovation itself held little influence over the level of student interest and involvement in English language learning within this situated context. This study concludes that challenges remained for the teachers involved in this situated context hoping to influence their students' attitudes and approaches towards meaningful English language learning. Results are summarized with advantages and challenges that were encountered through the implementation of a project-based learning (PBL) approach in a blended language learning (BLL) classroom environment.

Keywords: EFL, blended language learning, CALL, e-learning, wireless LAN, collaborative action research, project-based learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that English tends to be a compulsory subject for most university students throughout Japan, lack of active student interest and involvement serve as unique challenges for many English language teachers. Several studies (Berwick and Ross, 1989; Widdows and Voller, 1991; Long, 1997) have suggested that there are specific reasons why many Japanese freshmen, in particular, lack the necessary motivation to pursue English language learning in an effective capacity. These reasons have ranged from student dissatisfaction of teaching methods and materials to a more general feeling of post-university entrance exam exhaustion. Three years ago, a group of native English university-level instructors teaching in Hokkaido identified these particular teaching challenges within their shared department and made a decision to embark on an experiment using shared materials and technology. This experiment involved reaching beyond publisher-designed textbooks and their general-purpose teaching approaches in the hope of inspiring students through the use of more teacher-created learning resources. These resources were specifically tailored with communicative tasks and organized in project-based learning (PBL) units that were intended to focus on meaningful language learning objectives.

The teachers involved in this collaborative initiative had already attempted to merge online resources with offline communication projects into their own English language lesson units. The history of their institution included over five years of experimentation with EFL speech-making projects using presentation software such as PowerPoint (Bossaer & Hinkelman, 2001; Bossaer, Hinkelman, & Miyamachi, 2002). In addition, several other teachers expanded upon the basic use of PowerPoint and reported classroom successes in oral inter-

views, quizzes, and audio-recordings using the same software package. At the same time, a web-based learning-management system called “moodle” (<http://moodle.org>) had recently been introduced to the school’s oral communication classes. Learning-management systems (LMS) are popularly known as “e-learning” systems. A recent trend in EFL teaching has encouraged the utilization of electronic online activities to assist teachers in achieving their language teaching/learning classroom objectives. This hybrid form of education is often referred to as “blended learning” (BL) (Driscoll, 2002; Harvey, 2004; Neumeier, 2005). The advent and development of these BL strategies in EFL classrooms in Japan have provided teachers with a greater variety and range of English language teaching/learning materials and methods. Although more educational institutions in Japan are investing heavily in developing their computer-assisted language learning (CALL) facilities, few of these institutions have the capability of simultaneously providing all of their teachers and students with online resources in their own classrooms. An advantage the teachers had in developing and piloting this curriculum was that all of the students in their shared department were required to own wireless notebook computers as a condition of enrolment. If online technology proved to be workable within a conventional classroom space, the teachers felt that it might be possible to generate further student interest in English language learning within their shared department.

This paper’s main objective is to report on Japanese first-year student responses to a collaborative blended language learning project-based (BLL-PB) curriculum innovation, which was piloted throughout the spring academic term of 2007. In order to provide a context for these responses, however, it is necessary to describe the procedural development of the curriculum innovation itself. Following a review of literature on BLL and PBL approaches, this paper will provide a model for the combination of these approaches within an applicable curriculum innovation framework. A background into the initial limitations that were identified following a conventional textbook-based approach will then describe this limited research context. Although the teachers involved in this initiative were used to sharing ideas freely within their own teaching environment, this trial curriculum marked the first time that they had closely worked together to design a shared online curriculum. In this attempt, the teachers felt it necessary to adopt a research strategy that would support what was essentially a teacher-team initiative. For these purposes, a brief background into their research strategy and subsequent curriculum development approach will be provided. It is also the intention of this paper to provide a description of both the rewards and challenges that these teachers experienced throughout this process. Student responses and teacher

reflections will highlight some of these valuable insights. Finally, implications and further research possibilities will be discussed within the context of the emerging force that BLL is becoming in the recent Japanese EFL teaching/learning context. The next two sections provide a review of literature on the two principled approaches taken in this study: blended language learning (BLL) and project-based learning (PBL).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE¹

2.1 The Blended Language Learning (BLL) Environment

BLL, in a recent EFL context, refers to a language learning environment which combines both face to face (f2f) and online components in facilitating the English language teaching/learning process (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). In a discussion paper from Australia, Eklund, Kay and Lynch (2003) attempt to provide a needed backdrop on the scope of electronic-based learning (e-learning) initiatives in both a national and international setting. Embedded within an expansive discussion, Eklund et al. (2003) describe the recent trends of e-learning's influence on teaching and learning. Of particular interest for the EFL teacher working within a Japanese university is the notion of blended learning as "incorporating the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) into the instructional process to augment rather than replace face to face delivery" (p. 21). As the sizes of freshmen classes in Japanese universities tend to be quite large (anywhere from 35-100 students), the potential for using technology to reach out to more students simultaneously has obviously become a very appealing concept.

Although Eklund et al. (2003) mention that the present aim of education is to view the potential of blended learning in it's "social context", they do not directly address the communicative potential of blended learning strategies in an educational context (p. 21). The reluctance attributed to the many teachers who are hesitant to adopt technology as a teaching apparatus (Eklund et al., 2003: 23) may be due to the fact that they cannot visualize the communicative benefits of such an endeavour. Rather than stressing the aspect of teachers "learning the strategic use of learning delivery channels" (such as the physical classroom, the virtual classroom, print etc.), the Eklund et al. (2003) discussion paper may have also considered ways teachers can learn to use these delivery channels in order to better facilitate communicative objectives in the social context of their teaching/learning environ-

¹ A similar literature review can be found in Kay, Gemmel, Johnson and Hinkelman (2007). This present review includes additional sources relevant to the context of this study.

ments.

In terms of practical communicative relevance for the EFL teacher, Warschauer and Kern (2000) observe the “sociocognitive approaches to CALL” which “shift the dynamic from learners’ interaction *with* computers to interaction with other humans *via* the computer” (p. 11). This third wave role of CALL, following the *structural* and *cognitive* waves, places an emphasis on the potential of computers to open communicative channels to students within a classroom setting and beyond. In their socio-collaborative language learning study in Bulgaria, Meskill and Ranglova (2000) illustrate just how computers could facilitate English language learning in their own teaching/learning context. Although the students exhibited no signs of “enthusiasm” at the beginning of the revised course curriculum, over the course of the study “radical changes in participants’ views of language learning and teaching” were observed (pp. 34–35). These views were considered to be positive in terms of promoting the increased confidence of individual students, peer-work activities and overall teacher-student relationships. This led both Meskill and Ranglova to conclude that their revised blended learning curriculum approach enhanced student English language uptake and proficiency.

While an important feature of Meskill and Ranglova’s (2003) study was to “overcome” constraints by encouraging “learner motivation through involvement and empowerment” (p. 33), their study may have been propelled by the fact that they appeared to be already working with a relatively motivated and high-level group of English language learners. This is evident in the fact that the participants in the study were actually English majors who met “8 hours per week over the academic year,” and would be subject to a “rigorous and comprehensive final exam” (p. 28). There was clearly enough external incentive to maintain a satisfactory level of involvement amongst these students even if they were found to prefer the revised blended learning curriculum. Perhaps a more radical study may have involved a group of lower-level participants who were not English majors and met less frequently.

Stracke’s (2007) recent study on blended language learning (BLL) was constructive in revealing student views towards this new learning environment in a language-learning context. Pursuing a “phenomenological approach,” Stracke aims her study at describing “participants’ experiences from their point of view” (p. 60). Stracke focuses her study on French and Spanish classes for beginners at the Language Centre (LC) at the University of Munster, Germany. A unique feature of Stracke’s study was her decision to concentrate on “three case studies of students who dropped a BLL class after a few weeks and the various reasons for their decision” (p. 76). Pursuing these differing views raises issues on the lack of support and “complementarity” (sic) between classroom and computer sessions, the lack

of print materials, and the overall dislike of the computer medium (p. 71). Although Stracke's (2007) results were not intended for "broad generalizations," the issues raised were thought to be important to consider when planning and implementing future BLL classes in other academic settings (p. 76). Stracke calls for further investigation in different contexts from her specific study in areas of: a) psychological and cognitive disposition; b) cultural, social and educational background of students and technology usage in society and educational contexts (2007: 76).

2.2 The Project-Based Learning (PBL) Approach

This section reviews the pedagogical construct that influenced the design of this study's curriculum. A concern raised by many native EFL university teachers in Japan is the amount of general apathy exhibited by Japanese students in relation to English language learning. Many teachers are quick to attribute this seemingly resistant attitude to their students' general lack of interest towards English language learning or even English culture in general. There are, however, many reasons beneath and beyond these perceived attitudes. The Berwick and Ross (1989) study of Japanese college freshmen's attitudes toward English language learning attributed this apathetic approach to post college entrance exam ennui rather than to an actual conscious dislike of English in general. This study implied that the rigorous college entrance testing system in Japan motivates students to approach English language study in a more instrumental capacity (the Carrot and Stick Hypothesis [Skehan, 1989]) than encouraging a more integrative orientation. If this is the case, many Japanese college freshmen may simply feel that there is no tangible purpose in actively participating or excelling in the subject after they have been accepted into their respective universities.

In terms of teaching methods and content, Long's (1997) study showed that Japanese college freshmen wanted a more dynamic approach to English language learning. Some of the more negative student thoughts were aimed at the conventional aspects of textbook-based English teaching/learning that were considered to be "not effective" (p. 6). Activities such as "fill-in-the-blanks" exercises and seemingly mundane grammar drills, unrelated to real-life experiences, were thought to be boring and pointless. This seemed to concur with an earlier study by Widdows and Voller (1991) that indicated a strong degree of student dissatisfaction with traditional teaching methods. Students in Long's (1997) study suggested implementing more authentic teaching materials and equipment, such as video aids with "interesting content" and movie clips "as a means of learning more colloquial expressions" (Long, 1997: 6). Although Long's subjects recognized the importance of oral conversation

practice, they seemed to be craving for a more multi-media approach to introducing language target structures and facilitating learning tasks. After several years of junior high school and high school English grammar testing and abstract conversational activities, Long's subjects also wanted English conversational activities that contained elements of authenticity and real purpose.

One similar thread identified throughout the studies conducted above is that the majority of Japanese freshmen expressed elements of interest toward English language learning. Rather than remaining silent or expressing negative views towards English as a subject, students appeared eager to voice opinions on how to make English teaching programs more relevant to practical real-life experiences. Taking this into consideration, it would seem useful for teachers to provide lessons where the pedagogical approach would allow students the opportunity to *transfer* the English they learned to other situations. These opportunities would hopefully allow students to think about what type of language is appropriate for various situations and gain experience in applying their communicative skills to unknown situations through the implementation of a student-centred, task-based approach.

Although “task” has been a somewhat ubiquitous term in education during the past thirty years, an agreed definition of its meaning has yet to be settled upon. On one extreme, task can be considered as an open question given to learners along with the necessary resources to respond (Vella, 2000). This simple definition first suggests that a question is posed, perhaps by a teacher, and that either the question has been designed to fit the learners background, or that resources have been provided to support learners as they approach the question. At another extreme, some educationalists consider that tasks centre on learners even more, implying that a task is an open question *created by* learners. In Ellis' (2003) review of the literature on the scope, perspective, authenticity, language skill, cognitive processes and outcomes in a task definition, task is taken to be a work plan that has a primary focus on meaning, involves real-world processes of language use, may require any or all of the four language skills, engages cognitive processes (strategies), and has a clearly defined communicative outcome (pp. 9-10). Throughout the various definitions of task, the primary constant is a focus on meaning. According to Skehan (1998), task has the following main points:

- Meaning is primary
- Learners are not given other people's meaning to regurgitate
- There is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities
- The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome

- Task completion has some priority

Skehan's (1998) concept of task seems to imply that success is defined by outcome. In the context of language learning, the focus on outcome is considered to be more on meaning than on grammatical form (Nunan, 2004; Willis and Willis, 2001). This is a criterion that is often used, consciously or unconsciously, to measure linguistic success in authentic "real-life" situations. Task-based methodologies have been characterized as "giving learners tasks to transact, rather than items to learn" and in this respect offer "an environment which best promotes the natural language learning process" (Foster, 1999). This notion of "task" parallels "real-life" situations more closely than activities that focus purely on form.

Implementing this type of task-based approach into a thematic project-based form can provide students with a sense of coherence and purpose. As a general concept, project-based learning (PBL) approaches are known to focus on a problem to be solved or a task to be accomplished in an environment that allows participants to exercise and demonstrate their "knowledge in action" (Barnes, 1988; Moursund, 2003). One potential benefit of adopting a PBL learning approach in an EFL context is that students are given the opportunity to solve language tasks communicatively. This educational philosophy can be seen to have Vygotskian roots when applied to language teaching following the notion that meaningful learning occurs through social discourse and interaction (Driscoll, 1994). Organizing a class into social units (pairs or groups) to solve project-based tasks can foster students to approach educational challenges that may be above their current level of ability (Wertsch, 1985). In terms of English language learning, students could be presented with a series of tasks embedded in theme-based projects. Students could then be expected to draw upon their past knowledge (six previous years of textbook grammar-based study) to complete these projects. The next section will provide an overview of a BLL-PB curriculum innovation that was designed for this study. This review is presented within the established literature on curriculum innovations.

3. CURRICULUM INNOVATION: DESIGN AND AIMS

Markee (2001) has defined innovation as the "proposals for qualitative change in pedagogical materials, approaches, and values that are perceived as new by individuals who comprise a formal (language) education system" (p. 120). The concept of this curriculum's BLL-PB approach was implementing wireless technology to provide students with access to utilize online resource material in accomplishing communicative task-based projects.

Having pooled various ideas together, this research team had been able to develop numerous language-based learning activities that were felt to have a communicative focus. None of these ideas were revolutionary in terms of overall learning objectives, but they represented new approaches towards reaching certain teaching objectives. If it was possible to alter students' attitudes towards learning English in a more positive manner, the application of a BLL-PB approach in this study's own context would be subjectively "innovative" (Krashen and Terrell, 1983; Markee, 2001; Nicholls, 1983). Reviewing various curriculum design frameworks, Graves' (1996) framework of course development processes was considered as "an organized way of conceiving a complex process" in a situated context (p. 178). The following section will attempt to relate this study's BLL-PBL curriculum within the guidelines of Graves' (1996) curriculum framework proposal.

3.1 Applying Graves (1996) Framework to an Innovation Proposal

Although Graves' (1996) framework is "not a framework of equal parts" and that an "individual's context determines which processes need the most time and attention" (p. 178), it does provide a useful outline for the developmental process of implementing an innovative curriculum. For organizational purposes, Graves' (1996) framework component questions will be considered in relation to the process of implementing a BLL-PBL approach for the student-participants who were involved in this study. Liberty has been taken in slightly reorganizing the framework components in the manner in which this study's group of teachers considered their initiative.

3.2 Needs Assessment

The overall aim of General English "B" classes at the university where this study was conducted was to encourage students to communicate in English. The particular focus here was on oral communication. In terms of "objective" needs (Brindley, 1989; Richterich, 1980), the students being introduced to this curriculum resembled a culturally homogenous group of 19 to 20 year old entry-level Japanese university students. Although they had been exposed to roughly six years of English language study throughout their junior high school and high school years, they were mostly limited in their practical use and application of the language. Since English was not the chosen major of this student group and the majority of these students were likely to remain in Japan for the course of their professional lives, their actual need for English language in real-life communication situations was presumably limited. The content objectives for the course required that teachers take these objective needs into

consideration to make the material as relevant to students as possible. The benefits of incorporating a BLL-PBL approach with an emphasis on authentic resource material was that students were actively working with the English language as opposed to studying it as an isolated concept (Hall: 2001).

The more relevant “subjective needs” of students were factors such as “personality, confidence, attitudes, learners’ wants and expectations with regard to the learning of English and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies” (Brindley, 1989: 70). From experience, non-English major students at this institution generally had exhibited ambivalent to negative attitudes towards learning English. This may have been a result of the manner in which they had been previously exposed to English language teaching and learning. It was hoped that by abandoning a traditional textbook-based language learning approach for a more flexible communicative student-centered learning approach, students’ attitudes in approaching English would be configured more positively within this specific context.

Beyond the scope of English language learning itself, these students were also involved in studying computer science as a requirement of their department. It was therefore assumed that most of these students would likely be on the paths of pursuing professional careers that in some way required the use of computers and computer software. In this respect, incorporating aspects of computer-based learning into English language learning lessons seemed like a relevant course for teachers to pursue. One factor that was identified in the context of this study was the need to encourage students to approach English language resources on the Internet and negotiate their meaning in a communicative capacity. These online resources were then meant to serve as an authentic venue necessary to complete assigned project tasks in social groupings.

3.3 Considerations of Resources and Constraints

Resources were an essential consideration since rooms with wireless Internet access were required in order to successfully proceed with this initiative in the first place. An innovative aspect of this curricular innovation was the use of BLL strategies with wireless laptop computers in an otherwise fairly standard Japanese university classroom environment. Each classroom contained roughly forty student desks that were fairly light and easy to move and thus conducive to the pair-work activities planned for these students. There was a raised lectern platform with a standard chalk-based blackboard at the front of each classroom. Each classroom was also equipped with a modern and full-range audio-visual component system with a built-in projector. This component system would enable teachers to

project their own laptop computer screens onto a classroom projector screen for students to view.

In the context of this study, the students' department decided specifications for notebook computers each year and required students in this department to purchase one matching said specifications. In 2005, this department recommended the Toshiba Dynabook SS1610 (no CD) with Windows XP Professional to students. In 2006, the Panasonic CF-W4 (DVD/CD-R/RW) with Windows XP Professional was recommended. Both the 2005 and 2006 model computers were capable of wireless World Wide Web (WWW) access. Additionally, students were required to have Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint and Excel) on their computers. On the third floor of building "A" at this university, a series of three Altitude 300-2 antennas were installed, each transmitting a unique wireless signal into the classrooms surrounding them. Three classes of students were taught at the same time near these antennas, thus allowing students wireless access to the Internet. Since this university had the required infrastructure needed to provide students with wireless access, it was an ideal environment for initiating this pilot syllabus project.

Any potential constraints were considered mainly in terms of time and student ability. Time would be limited to 14 ninety-minute classes per term that would meet on a weekly basis. It was assumed through experience that the majority of student English abilities would be low. As experience had also revealed that students' general lack of motivation and ability would at times become a classroom management issue, ways to guide and monitor classroom activities effectively would have to be considered. This would put linguistic constraints on the choices of overall classroom objectives and activities.

3.4 Determining Goals and Objectives

Shaping "realizable" goals and objectives was highly contingent on the time constraints of the classroom environment. It was a goal to make these classes fun and enjoyable without losing academic purpose. In accordance to Saphier and Gower's (1987) five objectives, the teachers in this study had to consider what their target learners realistically "would do" and "would master." As each unit would take about three weeks to finish, it was felt necessary to divide the syllabus into three project units per semester. The planned activities (see *Table 1*) within these units focused on students communicatively completing tasks that contained meaningful and practical purposes:

Table 1: *Project Unit Themes for the Pilot Study*

<i>PBL Units</i>	<i>Task Objectives</i>
I. Self-introductions	Becoming more familiar with present tense usage. Students will be expected to complete a PowerPoint slideshow with audio recording. The PowerPoint presentations were done in groups of two or three. Students were expected to introduce each other and ask a few questions. PowerPoint audio slide-shows contained still pictures of students.
II. Hobbies and Interests	Practicing present and present progressive tenses and having students express points of interest about themselves. Students were again expected to complete a PowerPoint slideshow. Students presented these slideshows orally to the class.
III. Hokkaido Guidebook	Students were given the task of making a guidebook of Hokkaido. Each student pair focused on one aspect (food, sports, festivals, etc.) about their local environment and posted a “Wiki” within the moodle LMS. Students reinforced their present tense usage, while building descriptive vocabulary about their city and culture.

Students were expected to complete topic activities in a communicative manner that relied heavily on pair-work. The students’ mastering objectives were focused on developing their confidence in approaching English language learning. Any ambitions in mastering fluency were thought to be unrealistic in consideration of proficiency levels and time constraints. Thus, the goal was simply to encourage students to become more actively involved in learning English as a language by making it seem both interesting and useful.

3.5 Conceptualizing Content

Considering that the target learners in these classes had already been exposed to six years of grammar and translation-based English language learning, the teachers were interested in what their students could actually do with the aspects of the English language that they had been taught. A task-based approach to English language learning was thought to be useful in testing their ability to draw upon their previously learned language knowledge in order to achieve simulated real-life language goals. Although elements of grammar would emerge throughout the various activities, the focus of the material was ideally more on thematic content than on grammatical principles. This approach was felt to be reflective of the interpretation of task and PBL (refer to section 2.2) adopted for this study where the focus was on meaning rather than grammar. Content would then be approached in more of a “natural” language learning environment where students could take more responsibility over their own learning objectives in a relatively “stress-free environment” (Feez, 2001: 210).

3.6 The Presentation and Organization of Content and Activities

A “fixed sequence” (Graves, 1996: 189) of content and activities served to organize this

BLL-PB pilot syllabus where the overall content was divided into broad themes for these student groups. Teachers decided that first-year students would work on activities that focused on expressing themselves and their environment. This was felt to be conducive to the basic language structures entry-level university students were expected to be able to manage in this situated context. It also left the option of pursuing more worldly or global issues with these students the following year as a way to easily distinguish and build upon teaching content and target structures. The course curriculum was organized and housed online in a moodle 1.7 LMS. This was a password secure site that was accessible only to students and teachers within the course. This moodle 1.7 LMS contained assignment repository features that allowed students to submit their projects electronically to a built-in database where teachers were able to access and assess the projects.

Most of the teachers involved in implementing this curriculum had experience utilizing PowerPoint theme-based projects as a venue for task-based assignments where students were able to sound record their work or present their projects orally to the class. These projects had been approached as purely experimental activities that were not necessarily well organized in the years previous to this study. A salient finding from the Stracke (2007) study was that “print materials” should also be available to serve as a companion to online resources (pp. 71-73). Following this finding, it was decided that the projects for these classes would also be organized and published within print-based “booklets” that offered clear instructions and lesson objectives for students. These booklets were thought to be useful as a quick and efficient companion reference for online activities.

The project booklets ranged from eight to ten stapled pages and had activities sequenced in a logical order. The initial activities in the booklets served as a warm-up to engage students in thinking about a topic or theme. Such activities included listing and ranking activities. This followed with more interactive activities such as interviews and discussions, inevitably introducing the main project assignment for the unit.

The two main project venues chosen for this curriculum during the first semester were PowerPoint slideshows with embedded sound recording and student-composed “Wiki” Web pages. The concept behind the PowerPoint slideshows was to have students work together in pairs and create dialogues based on the theme of the project unit. For the first unit, “Self-Introductions,” students were asked to create a dialogue introducing each other at a party. This exercise was intended to provide students with the opportunity to practice basic self-introductions and ask simple questions in English. The students were encouraged to take action pictures of themselves with their cell phones and upload their pictures to their

PowerPoint slides. Once their dialogues were constructed and their pictures were properly formatted, students recorded their dialogues into sound recording files featured within the PowerPoint software package.

Upon completion, students were able to share their PowerPoint projects with other groups and engage in peer-evaluation activities. These peer-evaluations involved activities focused more on listening comprehension. The Wiki Web page project was meant to foster communicatively researched composition. A Wiki (created by Ward Cunningham, 1995) is a type of server software that allows a user to compose and edit a web page. Wikis would be used during the “Hokkaido Guidebook” project where students chose or were given a topic to research about their prefecture in Japan. Topics (sightseeing, food, entertainment etc.) would focus on points that were unique to students’ own unique environments within Japan. Students were able to add their own text as well as video and picture links to their Wiki Web pages. Upon completion, students were expected to swap projects with other groups for peer-editing activities. Students were free to make or recommend changes to the other pair groups. The moodle 1.7 LMS that was used in these classes had a Wiki module that was built into its system and was user-friendly.

3.7 Evaluation

Student participation and successful completion of assigned tasks and projects were chosen as principal assessment methods in gauging student classroom progress in terms of involvement. Attendance and active participation within and amongst groups were important in determining how well students responded to certain tasks and project themes. In the case of PowerPoint projects, grades were awarded based on the successful completion of the criteria components. Project assessments were largely subjective based on the criteria set by each individual teacher. Each student received a “score sheet” on the last page of each booklet, which basically listed the sequence of activities and acted as a checklist for both teachers and students. Project booklets were collected at the end of each activity and the teacher checked to see whether the day’s task had been completed or at least attempted. Teachers were later responsible for determining how successful their students were in completing these tasks. The final evaluation for each PB unit was in the assessment of the overall project task in the form of a PowerPoint presentation or a Wiki page. The next section presents the research background and conditions of this situated study.

4. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In this section, an institutional background history will first be provided to describe the environment of this study. Both student-participants and teacher-participants will then be described in an attempt to better relate the situated context of this study. Throughout these descriptions, salient information from the institution's research background will help to explain how this research began to be articulated.

4.1 Institutional Profile

Courses in English communication were a requirement for first- and second-year students at this university, which seems to follow a common practice throughout Japan. As a policy of instructor independence at this institution, teachers were allowed to choose teaching material to design their own curriculum. No uniform assessment system or reports had previously been used to judge the effectiveness of this system. Each student was expected to take two classes of English (English "A" from a Japanese teacher, and English "B" from a native English teacher) for two years in the general education program. For over 30 years, the entering student body of about 1000 had been put into this system. Classes of approximately 25-40 students were created using a random assignment system, based on alphabetical order. This led to the practice of teachers waiting until they had met the students for 1-2 classes to determine what kind of syllabus or lessons plans were prudent to pursue. It also meant that teachers had dramatically different levels of students in the same class, often resulting in some bored high-achievers and frustrated under-achievers who appeared confused and lost. In order to provide teachers with a better idea of student levels and motivation, from April 2004 the university instituted a placement test as a streaming process to separate the students into 3-6 levels. The design of this test was a 50 question multiple-choice listening and reading exam that was administered online to save marking time and facilitate statistical analysis. The General English placement test results for the Social Information Department from 2004-2006 were the lowest of all departments in the school. A significant number of students, approximately 30%, did not appear to have attempted to answer the questions, but perhaps had clicked answers randomly in an attempt to quickly finish the test. This was not considered a serious problem as those students had similar scores and were grouped together in lower classes of similar low-motivation, low-ability students. After streaming was introduced, teachers immediately noticed a greater uniformity in terms of class atmosphere and expressed that this enhanced their ability to choose teaching materials

to fit their particular levels.

4.2 Student-Participants' Profile

The English learners involved in this study were from the Social Information Department, which is a technical major including studies in computer science. This department was chosen for two reasons: 1) the students all owned wireless-internet-enabled notebook computers, and 2) this department ranked last in level of entering English ability and motivation at this institution. According to teacher impressions, a general resistance towards English language learning had characterized this department's student body for many years. Although this is understandable as English was not their chosen major, the teachers involved in this study had individually found these students more difficult to teach as they were becoming more actively resistant to classroom learning. Modes of this so-called resistance to learning ranged from actively and very openly engaging in disruptive activities that were not relevant to the classroom lesson (chatting in Japanese, text messaging friends on mobile telephones) to the more passive forms such as sleeping or a general refusal to participate in classroom activities. Furthermore, this department faced a rapidly declining enrollment rate and as a result was beginning to feel forced to accept more students with lower high school academic grade point averages than they had previously. This meant that the overall academic standards of the department were dramatically decreasing year by year. This is a trend that many feel is occurring in Japanese universities nationwide.

4.3 Teacher Participation

Collaboration within the SI department had already been occurring informally for lesson planning as most teachers had already abandoned publisher textbooks in oral English and had moved into project-based PowerPoint presentations as a format for teaching oral communication. However, congestion and difficulty in scheduling computer rooms led one teacher in this department to test notebook computers in a common desk/chair style classroom environment. When wireless access points were installed on campus, it became possible to use wireless notebooks in more traditional classrooms. During a brief test during the late fall in 2005, this teacher asked all of his students to bring their notebook computers to class and had them do an Internet search activity. Of the approximately 15 students, all were able to access the Internet without much trouble or technical assistance. From this experience and discussions with the computer centre staff about load capacity, it seemed possible to continue with a full-scale Internet and computer-based curriculum for three classrooms starting in

April 2006. Although this teacher's experience had largely been positive, there were concerns whether or not this type of approach would work amongst four teachers attempting to have their whole classes simultaneously accessing the school's wireless Internet line.

In April 2006, this classroom-based study began with the teacher-participants being assigned to all the Social Information Department classes. The main purpose of the 2006 study (Kay et al.,) was to establish simply whether wireless notebooks and Internet-based activities could be incorporated into classic desk-and-chair classrooms. Thus, the research question at that time was primarily one of technical feasibility. Throughout a year of closely working with the school's computer department, it was established that wireless notebooks could in fact be incorporated successfully into these more traditional-based classrooms and that several of these Internet-based activities seemed to be successful amongst the groups of language learners. There was, however, no clear research sample data on whether the students themselves actually considered BLL approaches to be enjoyable and/or useful to their own pedagogical needs. Since this type of information was considered to be vital in understanding student attitudes and responses to this new mode of language learning, interest amongst some of the teacher-participants was generated to focus more clearly on the student perspectives toward BLL.

For the present study, a focus on newly enrolled first-year students was chosen following previously published research that had identified drops in the levels of active involvement in classroom activities and overall attitudes towards English language learning occurring amongst these type of learner groups as they entered post-secondary educational institutions in Japan (Berwick and Ross, 1989; Long, 1997; Widdows and Voller, 1991). It was also felt that by using smaller and more focused data sample from a uniform group of language learners, problems could more easily be identified, isolated and approached. For this reason, the teacher-participants involved in this study dropped from four members to three. This was due to the fact that one of the teachers involved in the initial 2006 study was not assigned to instruct first-year learners in 2007. **Table 2** shows a summary chart of the course baseline information for the first-year classes of the first term of the 2007 academic year. "Teacher" was not actually involved in the BLL-PBL curriculum. The inclusion of the "teacher" column in this table is to merely provide an accurate scope and range of levels for the first-year students observed throughout this study. "Repeater students" were excluded from **Table 2**, as they did not meet the requirements (newly enrolled first-year students) of this study:

Table 2: *General English Course Baseline Information*
Social Information Department, Spring Semester (2007)

	Class Section	Teacher	Year	Level	Class Hours	Enrolled Students	Attending Students**	Male/Female
1.	English IB (32)	Teacher*	1	High, 1 of 4	/	/	/	/
2.	English IB (33)	Teacher1	1	Middle, 2 of 4	21	27	25	22/3
3.	English IB (34)	Teacher2	1	Mid-low, 3 of 4	21	28	27	25/2
4.	English IB (35)	Teacher3	1	Low, 4 of 4	21	20	16	15/1

* Did not participate in the study

** “Attending students” refers to students who did not drop out of the course and thus were eligible for a final grade. This does not assume that all attending students were awarded a final credit for the course.

The principal teacher/researcher (teacher 1) of this action research study decided to enlist the help of an additional “participant-observer” in an attempt to complete a triangle of views from both the teachers and the students. This is felt to be useful in such research studies as the participant-observer is often “in the best position to collect data about the observable features of the interaction between teachers and students” (Burns, R., 2000: 457). As the teachers involved in implementing this curriculum innovation were all native English speakers from native English-speaking countries (The United States and Canada), it was desirable to have a native Japanese-speaker who was also fluent in English to negotiate the teachers’ access to student accounts that would be obtained through surveys and focus-group interviews. The teacher-participants also thought that including Japanese teachers in this research would help build better relations and understanding between both English and Japanese faculty members. Thus, the enlistment of a Japanese professor from the English Department where this study was conducted was a very welcome addition. The next section will provide a background into the action research methodology that was pursued for this study.

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

In the spring of 2007, the principal teacher/researcher of this study decided to focus on student perspectives relating to a BBL-PB approach in an EFL context. Of particular interest was determining how students would respond to a blended learning project-based approach using wireless laptop computers in a classic “desk-and chair” environment. The general research question that was formulated would then relate specifically to the particular context of this study:

How does a group of first-year Japanese English language learners in an EFL context respond to a blended language learning project-based curriculum innovation over the

course of one academic semester?

It was the intention of this study to organize these responses as they were related to student experiences within this curriculum process. Following Stracke's (2007: 76) recommendation for further research into views of students concerning BLL, it was decided that the results of this study would be examined under the following three categories:

- a) Student responses towards the pedagogical aspects of the curriculum innovation.**
- b) Student responses on the interactive social culture of the classroom.**
- c) Student responses towards technology usage within the context of this curriculum innovation.**

The principal teacher/researcher of this study took the liberty to restructure Stracke's (2007) recommended research focus as the three articulated categories above were considered more suitable for investigation under the context of this particular situated study. The next section outlines the research methods chosen for this study.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY²

CALL researchers such as Warschauer & Kern (2000) recommend classroom-based research focusing on contextual studies and descriptive ethnographies of practice, rather than experimental hypothesis testing or analysis of tools. This kind of research requires more qualitative methods than quantitative methods, though both methodologies may be usefully applied in investigating a problem. In this study, the teacher-participants decided to use an action research methodology because of its adaptability to fit a broad case study using collaborative teams of teachers (Burns, 1999). Action research is one research method that has helped many EFL teachers to re-evaluate their role in language learning classrooms in the hope of improving the quality of their teaching and helping their students better achieve target objectives. While action research is often criticized for its inherent challenges to meet "the minimum criteria for acceptable QI [qualitative inquiry]" (Richards, 2003: 26), it has proven to be most useful in detecting and addressing specific problems in the EFL teaching/learning environment.

Observing a gap in the "knowledge base for teaching," Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1990: 2) have commented that a missing key ingredient has been from the active input from teachers

² A similar research method and rationale was adopted for Kay, Gemmel, Johnson & Hinkelman, 2007.

themselves. As a method of research applied in an educational setting, action research sets out to bridge such a gap by allowing teachers' concerns to be both heard and acted upon in an effort to make genuine improvements. The qualitative aspects of action research allow it to focus "on a specific problem in a defined context, and not on obtaining scientific knowledge that can be generalized" (Burns, 2000: 444). In an EFL teaching/learning context, this focus can take on a unique dimension, as educational environments tend to differ from one culture to the next. This makes it problematic to assume that quantitative generalizations can be achieved and successfully applied to similar problems detected throughout various cultural settings. Bailey and Nunan (1996) highlight the fact that "Given the particularities of individual cultural contexts, any pedagogical proposal, of whatever complexion, needs to be contested against the local reality" (p. 120). As "local realities" differ from culture to culture and from classroom to classroom, EFL practitioners will have to consider their own teaching/learning environments as being culturally unique before attempting to address any problems emerging within these environments.

Having accepted the cultural uniqueness of a teaching/learning context, a practitioner can begin to address observations that have been identified within this setting. An action research study by an EFL researcher in Hong Kong serves as a good example where an "acute" hurdle for EFL teachers in Asia was identified in "getting students to respond" voluntarily in the classroom (Tsui, 1996: 145-147). This study made a clear distinction between the "reserved and reticent" Asian students and their generally more vocal "Western counterparts" (p. 145). This study's teacher-participants were then able to collaborate and collect their data on a specific issue that concerned them in their own professional context. Having collected this data, the study was able to outline some of the "successful and unsuccessful strategies" that the participants used in an attempt to improve their understanding of this situation for the benefit of both their students and themselves (pp. 160-164). This type of "problem identification, therapeutic action and evaluation" (Burns, 2000: 445) conducted by Tsui and her colleagues demonstrate the applicability of Lewin's (1952) model of action-research in an EFL setting. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) further developed this cyclic model to incorporate what they considered to be four "moments" of action research: planning, action, observation and reflection. The cyclical manner of such an approach reflects the naturalistic philosophy of how identified issues have a tendency to expose other issues of concern that require further research and consideration.

In the context of this study, an action research approach that was slightly more flexible than the Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) model and adaptable to a collaborative framework

was highly desired. Burns (1999) had outlined such an approach through her involvement in various national Australian studies such as The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) (1996). While the Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) model had been criticized for being too rigid for educational design (McNiff, 1988), Burns' (1999) adapted framework was seen to allow for more flexibility in a collaborative research environment. This framework envisions an eleven phase experiential sequence where research experiences are "interrelated" (p. 35) and more fluid than within a systemic cyclical process:

1. exploring (*agree on an issue of interest to the group based on collective experience*)
2. identifying (*clarify the nature of the issue through observations to suggest further action*)
3. planning (*trial a particular course of action and collecting data on the outcome*)
4. collecting data (*procedures selected for collecting data are developed and tried*)
5. analyzing/reflecting (*analysis and interpretation of data*)
6. hypothesizing/speculating (*predictions on what is likely to occur/form basis for further action*)
7. intervening (*change classroom approaches in response to hypothesis*)
8. observing (*observe outcomes of intervention*)
9. reporting (*articulate activities, data collection and results*)
10. writing (*summative phase/write an account for a report or article*)
11. presenting (*present results to a wider audience*)

(Burns, 1999, pp. 35-44)

The action research process steps in this study would focus primarily on steps 1 to 6 and attempt to recommend further courses of intervention to "change classroom approaches" in order to further improve on the problems explored and identified within this situated context. Burns' interpretation of action research was particularly appealing to this situated study due to the emphasis on approaching a research initiative collaboratively and not being restricted to following a model through "prescriptive steps which must be carried out in a fixed sequence, but rather as suggestive of various points in the research process" (Burns, 1999: 43). In essence, the approach adapted for this study mirrored the complex and often "messy" context EFL teachers are confronted with throughout their daily teaching/learning environments. The following section will outline this study's procedure for data collecting (Burns, 1999: 43).

7. ACTION RESEARCH DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

The next sections will detail the procedures of the principal teacher/researcher of this action research study in a situated context. Data samples were collected from all three teachers involved in this study throughout the spring academic term of 2007. The findings of the principal teacher/researcher (teacher 1) will be the primary focus, since they were found to be largely consistent with the findings of the teacher-participants. The views and insights from the other two teacher-participants (teacher 2 and teacher 3) and the participant-observer have been included where relevant to draw comparisons or to confirm salient findings. All participants have been identified by their role in the research. The database for this situated research consisted of an initial survey, two end of project feedback ranking surveys, one focus group discussion, daily classroom observations and logged reflections from weekly teacher-participant meetings.

7.1. Selection of Student-Participants

The student-participants involved in these findings were Social Information (SI) majors from a private university in Hokkaido, Japan. They were all full-time first-year students whose ages ranged from 18 to 19 years old. As the principal teacher/researcher for this study, my class sample was that of a middle-streamed class with a gender distribution of 24 males to 3 females. All students were asked whether they wished to participate voluntarily in this study at the beginning of the first term. Students who agreed to participate signed consent forms and were informed that their responses would be kept confidential. Students were given the option to answer as many survey questions as they wished. As the semester progressed, sample numbers tended to decrease due to the rate of absences and student withdrawals. This was felt to be a natural course of events and was not felt to take away from the integrity of the study as a whole.

7.2. Descriptions of Survey and Observation Techniques

This section will highlight the salient features of the survey and observation techniques used in this study.

7.2.A. Beginning of Term Survey (BTS)

An initial survey was administered to the student-participants towards the beginning of

the semester to determine the role of computers and technology in their lives and to also determine their general attitudes towards English language learning. The twenty-item survey (see Appendix A) was a mixture of checklist choice, closed items and scale items in order to make the survey easy to complete for this group of learners. There were two open-ended questions included in the middle of the survey in order to break up the monotony of the multiple-choice format and also to offer students the opportunity to express themselves and be more reflective about their answers. The survey included items that were technology specific and English language learning specific. The survey also offered items that merged technology with English language learning. This survey was administered through a feedback feature on the LMS “moodle 1.7” program. This program has a built in analysis processor that enables survey results to be quickly compiled and computed into percentages.

7.2.B End of Project Surveys (EPS)

The “end of project” surveys (EPS) were conducted solely in my class in order to provide the students with a quick, anonymous and non-verbal way of expressing their feelings about certain projects within the curriculum. The survey format was found in a “small-scale” study conducted by Peacock (1998). In Peacock’s study, the results of his surveys were quantitatively checked via Pearson r for three-way correlations between on-task behavior and learner self-report of the factors “usefulness” and “enjoyableness.” For my more qualitative research needs in this situated study, the student responses from these paper-based surveys were merely entered numerically into a chart. The results were used only as an indicator of student attitude trends towards the projects. The items were ranked on a seven-point scale. The student-participants simply placed an “x” on the scale that best described their opinion of the projects (see Appendix B). There were only two “end of project” surveys administered during the first semester. The first survey was administered at the end of the first project while the second survey was administered at the end of the last project.

7.2.C. Focus Group Discussion Survey (FDS)

Students involved in the focus group discussion were selected from all three (teacher 1, 2 and 3) classes. Two of the most reliable and top academic performers from each of these classes were approached and asked to volunteer their time over a lunch period to answer feedback questions relating to their past and present English language learning experiences and their reflections on the new curriculum. The focus group discussion was guided by a list

of questions over a lunch period towards the end of the first semester. The questions were discussed in Japanese and administered by an observer-participant. The purpose of this focus group was to bring representatives from each of the three classes together to discuss various aspects of the blended learning project-based curriculum. The intention was to give students as much freedom to express their feelings as possible. The lists of questions (see Appendix C in English form) were given to the students ten minutes before the discussion in order for them to understand the nature of the questions that were going to be asked and to also have them prepare some answers for the time limited session. This strategy was felt to be efficient as students were able to prepare and produce some thoughtful comments on a number of the discussion items. Due to the time and financial limitations on the amount of translation possible, only comments felt to be particularly relevant to the results of this research have been included and translated into this paper. Student comments were translated by the observer-participant and were detailed to the principal teacher/researcher of this study in a meeting following the focus group discussion. This was felt to better ensure ethical issues surrounding student confidentiality.

7.2.D. Teacher-Participant Meetings

Weekly meetings were held between all the teacher-participants of this study. The purpose of these meetings was to share lesson plans and teaching strategies for the blended learning classes. These meetings also provided teacher-participants with an opportunity to share and reflect on their classroom successes and challenges. Each teacher-participant took turns chairing and logging the weekly meeting agendas. The weekly meeting minutes were logged and electronically stored in an online forum module within the moodle 1.7 LMS program. This was an interactive forum that allowed teachers to add and respond to comments freely. This was a password secure site that could only be accessed by the teacher-participants in this study.

7.2.E. Classroom Observations

All of the teacher-participants closely observed the level of their students' classroom involvement and communicative interaction each week. Salient observations were documented and discussed in the weekly meetings and log forums. In addition, our observer-participant was asked to observe classroom sessions periodically in order to get a better understanding of a blended learning environment and also to provide teacher-participants with an outsider's perspective on the conduct and reception of their curriculum innovation.

7.3 Data Collection Timeline

Throughout the process of analyzing the results, it was felt that the surveys did not generate as much interesting data as the classroom observations and the focus group discussions. While the beginning of term survey was helpful in supporting or disputing some of our team's initial assumptions, the end of project surveys did little more than merely gauge that there was generally a positive trend of student attitudes towards the projects and content we had chosen. Rather than placing too much emphasis on the surveys themselves, I have chosen to focus on data from our logged observations and focus discussion data and draw on the survey data where relevant. The table below (*Table 3*) outlines my own curriculum timeline within the context of our team's schedule of observations and weekly meetings:

Table 3: Timeline of curriculum and data collection

Week of term	Classroom activities/Unit content	Data collection/ Observations	Teacher meetings/log postings
1	General course information, warm-up exercises to establish level, class rules.	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	First official meeting/log posting April 17 th
2	Project 1 booklets distributed/Warm-up activities: Self-introductions.	Beginning of term survey (students complete online moodle 1.7).	Teacher meeting 2/log posting April 24 th
3	Project 1: introductions/PowerPoint workshop	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 3/log posting May 2 nd .
4	Project 1: constructing dialogues/picture taking/formatting	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 4/log posting May 9 th .
5	Project 1: PowerPoint sound recording and formatting.	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 5/log posting May 15 th .
6	Project 1: peer-evaluations and final project submissions.	End of project survey 1. Project assessments.	Teacher meeting 6/log posting May 22 nd .
7	Project 2: Hobbies/Interests (mini-project): Brainstorming ideas/initial formatting: PowerPoint.	Observer-participant observation in class/Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 7/log posting May 30 th .
8	Project 2: Peer-editing/practice for oral presentations.	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 8/log posting June 5 ^h .
9	Project 2: Oral presentations	Project assessments/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 9/log posting June 13 th .
10	Project 3: Hokkaido guidebook/booklets distributed/warm-up activities.	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 10/log posting June 19 th .
11	Project 3: Hokkaido guidebook/students chose themes/research topics for Wiki.	Observer-participant observation in class/focus group discussion.	Teacher meeting 11/log posting June 26 th .
12	Project 3: Hokkaido guidebook/Wiki compositions/peer-editing.	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 12/log posting July 3 rd .
13	Project 3: Students make short video on campus/Upload into moodle.	Teacher observations in class/Note taking.	Teacher meeting 13 (last meeting)/log posting July 10 th .
14	Last class: Final Wiki peer-editing.	End of project survey 2/Project assessments/Note taking.	Final log posting July 17 th .

The survey item results will be presented and referred to under the following abbreviated forms:

Beginning of Term Survey=**BTS**

End Of Project Survey=**EPS**

Focus Group Discussion Survey=**FDS**

Teacher forum entries=**TFE**

8. FINDINGS

Analysis of all the survey data according to our research inquiry outline (refer above to section 5) pointed to generally positive responses from students towards the BLL-PB curriculum innovation that was introduced in this study. There were, however, important insights achieved throughout this process. It is important to note that due to the small number of student-participant responses and the ongoing nature of this action research initiative, these findings can only be regarded as tentative and relevant to this study's situated context. Findings will be presented through the voice of the principal teacher/researcher of this study.

8.1. Student responses towards the pedagogical aspects of the curriculum innovation

The impression amongst the teacher-participants prior to conducting this study was that first-year students from our SI department held generally negative attitudes towards learning English in an academic setting. In an action research context, this was an issue that was explored for years where teachers had collectively experienced and voiced concern over their students' resistance to learning English. Preliminary data results, however, indicated that this was not necessarily the case. In response to item 18 (**BTS**) "*Learning English is useful for my future,*" 45.8% of students in my class "strongly agree [d]" while 37.5% chose to "agree." This seemed to indicate that the majority of students who were surveyed at least considered English to be both an important subject and skill to acquire. In terms of responding to item 19 (**BTS**) "*Learning English is fun and interesting,*" students seemed more uncertain. 16.67% of students surveyed in my class "strongly agree [d]" with item 19 while 37.50% chose to "agree" and 33.3% were "undecided or not sure." I considered from these initial findings that students were predisposed from experience to respond more negatively to English teaching methods and materials than to the subject as a whole.

Data that was later attained was able to reveal some additional insights into the backgrounds of students' English language educational experience. Item 1 (**FDS**) "*Tell us about your experience learning English in high school*" prompted students to reflect

on their experience learning English in high school. The students' responses portrayed a teacher-centered environment where the students were expected to "copy what the teacher wrote on the board" and "memorize lots of vocabulary." The focus on most of the classroom work was on "translation" using a lot of "print exercises." These findings revealed that the Japanese practice of *yakudoku* in pursuing English language studies continued to be a prevalent pedagogical methodology within many Japanese high schools. As *yakudoku* tends to emphasize reading and writing skills over oral conversation skills (Bamford, 1993; Gorsuch, 1998; Hino, 1988; Law, 1995), students in these environments are often denied opportunities to practice speaking. Indeed, none of the focus group participants appeared to have had much experience in the way of oral conversation practice and only one student participant mentioned that an ALT (a native assistant language teacher) had visited their school "two or three" times during the entire course of their high school years. It was surmised from the overall tone of the student responses that their English language learning experience during high school had been mostly "boring" (observer-participant's comment). I felt that their English language learning experience in high school bore some influence on student attitudes towards item 19 (BTS). I also felt that their collective experience might create obstacles in their reception to our new materials and methods of teaching.

In terms of implementing our curriculum, student reactions observed by teachers in their own classes appeared to be mixed. Even though careful thought and planning went into decisions relating to the appropriateness and order sequencing of tasks within our project units, students seemed to be hesitant to trust their own instincts with tasks that we felt were well within their ability and comprehension. Voluntary participation and initiative were at times lacking which continued to create great obstacles for the teacher. The teacher's comment below described a typically challenging classroom situation:

The first warm-up question was incomprehensible to them so I made an attempt to simplify the question. Then I continued with task A and task B. The brainstorm was hard, they would not discuss with partners, they just worked individually. In task C, half of the students tried to ask each other the questions and half ignored their partner--retreating to their cell phones until I asked them to stop. I finished the class with each student finally choosing a focus for their project. All in all, a pretty poor lesson, but much to do with my getting used to new materials I have not taught before. (TFE: May 3rd).

This comment seems to illustrate the difficulty teachers periodically experienced in actually presenting the lesson activities and content to the students. Individual members in our

teacher team often had to be creative and flexible in presenting tasks to the students in order to merely get their attention. Sometimes this led to spending more time on an activity than was expected or desired. The next comment, which I logged a week after the previous comment, observes students responding more favorably to a task:

We managed to finish off our introductory “party” theme PowerPoint projects. We spent a little more time than I had hoped, but the students seemed to enjoy it reasonably well and needed to practice basic question forms. I spiced things up a little last class by taking the students outside to take their pictures for their PowerPoint slideshows. (It was a nice day and having the students all out on the A wing lawn made the pictures look like they were taken at a cherry blossom party). We were only outside for about 10 minutes and the students worked well getting their material together. (TFE: May 15th).

Both of the above comments illustrate the extent to which classes varied in terms of their involvement and interest level. They also illustrate how the teaching situation was not predictable, but rather complex.

The complexity of the classroom environment was mirrored in the somewhat ambivalent, and at times constructive student comments from the focus group discussion. Considering the previous methods of English language learning that our SI students had experienced throughout their secondary education, it is not surprising that students felt our curriculum and teaching approach to be quite different and somewhat challenging. Student responses to Item 11 (FDS) “*What did you find difficult?*” criticized teachers for not using more Japanese in class. One student remarked that this was the first time he had ever been in a class where “everything was taught in English” and encouraged teachers to use more Japanese in the classroom. This sentiment was unanimously voiced within the group and seemed to be a particular concern for students when important instructions relating to classroom activities and homework were given. This appeared to be a curious criticism as all of the teacher-participants had admitted to often resorting to using Japanese when giving instructions. One teacher, in particular, had logged a comment (TFE: May 9th) that he had had to use more Japanese than usual due to the unexpected difficulty of the unit content.

Challenging content became more of an issue as students continued to elaborate on item 11 “*What did you think was difficult [about the course]?*” (FDS). In terms of classroom activities relating to specific English skills, students thought that they struggled with “English composition” the most. They mentioned that they found the Wiki composition pages to be difficult mainly because they did not fully understand what the teachers’

expectations were for these exercises. I felt this was valid criticism and quite perceptive in regard to my own classroom context. I was initially very enthusiastic about the potential possibilities of this Wiki project. As I was counseling and observing students during week 12, I noticed that they had written only two or three short sentences for their Wiki pages. Since I had given them an example of a Wiki I made, I had expected them to take more of an initiative in writing their content. During my counseling sessions, I began to see how confused they were in terms of content structuring and detail. In retrospect, I feel that my enthusiasm perhaps exceeded the realities of my classroom situation and thus clouded my judgment as to the amount of autonomy my students were able to handle in a second (L2) language.

Judging by the rating results on the **EPS** charts, students were seen to respond favorably to the projects that were surveyed. Despite the fact that they were translated into Japanese, I felt that perhaps students had just quickly checked the ranking intervals on the EPS charts without carefully considering the pedagogical intentions of the projects. Some of the focus group student-participants did appear, however, to be conscious of the content material and intended objectives of the projects. Items 3 and 5 (**FDS**) were designed more specifically to gauge the levels of student recollections in relation to recent classroom activities and content. Item 3, “*What was the theme of the unit you have just completed?*” elicited two student responses. The first student was able to explain that her class had just finished working on a “guidebook” and that her topic was on “sightseeing.” Our participant-observer found this response to be significant because the student had code-switched into English during her explanation. It was felt that a student at this level would not normally use or understand vocabulary such as “sightseeing” or “guidebook.” This pointed to the fact that some level of uptake was occurring and that perhaps students were becoming slightly more involved in their language learning process. Item 5, “*Were you able to learn anything new in English during this course?*” elicited fairly positive responses. The students felt that they had learned some “new vocabulary” and that their “grammar” had improved. The students also mentioned that they felt their listening and pronunciation had improved. Two students remarked that the PowerPoint sound recording activities were a good opportunity to practice English pronunciation. They also felt that the peer evaluation classes (where students would look and listen to other student projects) were “fun,” “interesting” and provided a good opportunity to practice listening skills. I considered these comments to be conducive to the **EPS** student rating results.

Based on weekly classroom observations, there was a consensus amongst all of the

teacher-participants that the general mood and atmosphere in the classes was positive. While there were still periodic behavioral problems identified within classes, we all agreed that these instances were significantly lower than previous years. Again, we felt that it was important to consider student attitudes towards their learning experience within our situated context to help us get a more complete view of how our teaching methods and materials were being received. Item 2, (FDS) “***Tell us about your experience learning English at [this university] so far: What were the topics/How was it taught?***” attempted to elicit some responses on teaching methods and content. The students referred to the unit contents in Japanese katakana as being “projecto.” One student responded that he was “having fun” and that he enjoyed the various “projecto games” (activities) that teachers were using in class. A second student agreed and added positively that the students “always have something to do.” The first student commented that he liked the fact that the classes were more “active” than the ones he had experienced in high school and that he was very “surprised” that teachers encouraged students to get up and move around freely. He felt that this made the class time go by “quickly.” These types of responses were again conducive to the EPS chart results where mostly favorable ratings were recorded for “interest,” “enjoyment” and “absorbing” categories.

The role of teacher personality had a surprising impact on the manner of student responses. Item 4, (FDS) “***Did you enjoy this course? If yes, please explain why. If no, please explain why not***” was intended to elicit more comments on the course itself and perhaps English language learning in general. Instead, students took the opportunity to briefly compare the difference between Japanese and English instructors. Revealing little about our Japanese counterparts, students seemed surprised that native English teachers were so “friendly” and “smiley.” They complimented teachers on the fact that they were able to “remember student names” and took time to “talk with them” in class. They appeared particularly attentive to native English teacher interactions between classes with one student confessing that many of his classmates “enjoyed watching and mimicking” teacher-talk. Asked to provide an example, the student responded with “Ok, Ok” and “Good, good...no problem.” Although I had realized that the issue of personality would probably be raised, I was unaware of the extent and importance students seemed to place on personality differences between Japanese and native English teachers. Our teacher-team concluded that attitudes towards personality perhaps obscured student perceptions toward our curriculum innovation and English language learning in general.

Overall, teachers felt that most of the student-participants were more concerned about

the fun and enjoyment factor of the course than any tangible English language proficiency development. There was never any serious discussion generated on the purpose or target objectives within the project units and students seemed reluctant to bother inquiring about mistakes or making any corrections when mistakes were brought to their attention during class exercises. The results in this context seemed to imply that the students were not approaching the subject of English communication in a completely academic capacity. The impression of all the teacher-participants was that the students were very happy that efforts were made to make the class more enjoyable, but ultimately the students were more concerned about merely getting through the course than excelling in English as a linguistic skill.

8.2. Student responses on the interactive social culture of the classroom

Since our BLL-PB curriculum approach involved a high degree of pair and group work, the social relations between students in the classroom were an important factor in the overall levels of participation in the course. In this respect, elicited data from the students and classroom observations by teachers were used to examine the students “relationship with the social context [in the classroom], and the structuring of the learning opportunities which it makes available” (Mitchell & Myles, 2001: 25). In communication classes, students were expected to work with their partners in an attempt to help and support each other in negotiating meaning to complete language tasks. Student resistance towards this process had earlier been explored and identified as an acute obstacle for teachers in terms of classroom management and achieving language learning objectives. One of the key purposes behind our BLL-PB curriculum initiative was to raise the level of student involvement in communicative classroom activities. While the teacher-participants generally felt that their students were showing signs of increased interest and involvement with their computer projects, there were still instances of resistance detected throughout the curriculum process. Teacher 3 logged the following:

I began my class focusing on class discipline and taking attendance. Normally, I take attendance well into the class while students are in the middle of some individual task--in order not to lose time on calling names. However, this class needs lots of care in regards to discipline, so I had them answer my roll call with sentences that repeat their name (with English intonation) and state what they brought with them. For example...

Teacher: Mr. Terashima? [with the syllable “shi” stressed, and rising intonation at the end]

Student: Here! I am Akio. [with first syllable stressed]. I have my computer. I have my book. And I have my headphones. [or I forgot my...]

This does three things. First it practices stress and intonation, which I emphasized in the first two classes. Second, it gives them some basic grammar in making sentences. And third, it reminds them of their responsibilities in coming to class. I would say it worked OK, as students were attentive and in cases of forgetting, seemed apologetic for failing to remember all three items. (TFE: May12th)

The teacher-participant's above observation seemed to indicate that discipline was still a noticeable problem in this classroom context and that there was an attempt being made to intervene with some carefully thought out classroom management strategies. These types of strategies were often aimed at keeping the students focused on their tasks and social responsibilities in the class.

The problem of meaningful linguistic interaction and participation in class, as perceived by the teacher-participants, was periodically an issue. Students still seemed hesitant or resistant towards engaging in communicative classroom activities, which negatively influenced the flow of lessons. Teacher 2's comment below is an example of such a situation:

This is the only class that does no homework when given. They do their projects in class so it is virtually a self-study course, with some brief interaction with me. In these interactive moment (s), the students often speak Japanese to me, but I make them repeat it in English, which they can barely manage to do. (TFE: July 13th).

Focusing on the "brief interaction" that was occurring in the classroom above, it is interesting to observe what Breen (1985) considered to be a "paradox" where "the established interaction which is evolved and maintained by the culture of the classroom group often conflicts with efforts towards communication through the new language" (pg. 129). Teacher-participants all agreed that they struggled through this paradox at various stages of the curriculum process.

Through various struggles, teacher frustration was often unintentionally communicated to the students and may have led to one of the more socially complex findings of this study. In attempting to elicit some student assessments about the course during the focus group discussion, responses to item 11, (FDS) "*What did you find difficult?*" predictably centered on language. Again, students voiced a strong desire for more Japanese to be used

by teachers during class. As easy as this criticism may have been in the past for many native English teachers to ignore, more research is shedding valuable light on the effectiveness of utilizing a student's first language (L1) in an instructional foreign English language teaching setting (Burden, 2000; Cole, 1998; McDowell, 2009; Weschler, 1997). These were felt to be important responses and feedback worthy of future and further consideration.

One less predictable response that may be closely interrelated with linguistic considerations, however, focused on cross-cultural perceptions and understanding. Speaking on behalf of the class in general, one student was uncomfortable about the fact that "they [the students] can't tell how the teachers are feeling." Asked to clarify this response, the student felt that the class was uncomfortable at times because they were unable to detect whether teachers were "angry or happy." This student seemed to sense that teachers were perhaps frustrated at times when students did not respond quickly or appropriately enough to classroom instructions. This seems to bear evidence that a type of collective socio-cultural phenomena was occurring within each of the teacher-participant's classroom contexts. This socio-cultural phenomenon manifested itself in a type of "us and them" context not only between students and teachers, but between English and Japanese culture as well. The observer-participant who chaired the focus discussion thought that this was a significant finding since it seemed to raise the issue of "cultural barriers" in the English language classroom. During her feedback session with me, the observer-participant explained that she was "surprised" to sense that these student-participants continue to place "a type of wall" between themselves and native English teachers in the classroom. Her surprise seemed to stem from the fact that "western culture is everywhere in Japan" today. She elaborated that while "most young Japanese people are very used to western culture as portrayed in the media, they still have "many communicative problems" in approaching "western people" in a real-life context.

The results from the focus group discussion also pointed to more complex issues relating to the dynamic between individual learners and the collective classroom group. Item 15, (FDS) "*What would you suggest to improve or change the course?*" elicited two responses directed at improving the overall classroom atmosphere. Asked to elaborate on this response, one student voiced a desire for other students in class to become more "active" and "friendly" during classroom activities. This comment revealed certain tensions occurring between some individuals in the class who wanted to participate and those students who were more apt to avoid active participation. Breen (1985) has identified this tension at a point where "individual psychological change will continually relate to group psychological

forces” (130). This becomes extremely relevant as Japanese culture traditionally encourages the individual to conform and submit to the group. This situation pointed to a further complexity where teacher initiatives are often left vulnerable to the unique social cultures within their own classroom contexts.

8.3 Student responses towards technology usage within the context of the curriculum innovation.

The computer specific items on the **BTS** were designed to establish students’ familiarity with computers and their computer habits in terms of usage prior to the course. As Japan is a technologically advanced society, the teachers involved in this study predicted that most of the students would be fairly familiar and confident in terms of using computers. This did not seem to be the case as 45.83% of the students surveyed in my class felt to be “only a little comfortable using computers” while 25.00% of the students considered themselves “not comfortable using computers” (**BTS**: item 2). Although 50% of the students surveyed in my class had been introduced to computers in elementary school and 37.50% had been introduced to computers in junior high school, 87.50% of the students reported that they had “never” used a computer for English language learning (**BTS**: items 1 and 3). In terms of the proposed BLL-PB curriculum, the majority of students were concerned about their general “computer skills” as well as their “English typing abilities” (**BTS**: item 12). Students appeared to feel that they would be left behind as they struggled with their “typing speed” and anticipated that they would be exposed to writing and reading “longer sentences” (**BTS**: item 12). These early results suggested that there was a considerable level of anxiety amongst students in relation to the proposed curriculum innovation.

Curiously, the students surveyed also appeared to be somewhat cautiously optimistic about the idea of blending computer resources with English language learning activities. A positive trend of opinions was reported for item 8, (**BTS**) where 25% of students anticipated that using notebook computers in class would “definitely be enjoyable” while 33.33% were evenly split considering that using computers “will be enjoyable” and “will be a little enjoyable.” Students were seen to be in relative agreement regarding the “beneficial” aspects of blended learning. Most students seemed to agree that their “English skills” would improve in terms of “reading, typing and listening” and that the course would also be beneficial to their overall “computer skills” (item 13: **BTS**). Any additional concerns were focused on the more technological aspects of the curriculum such as internet-access and computer maintenance support.

The issue of technical difficulties was raised during the focus group discussion. In response to item 12, (FDS) “*Do you think computers have helped or hindered your English language learning progress in this course?*” students were quick to point out that they felt their Internet connection was “slow” at times. One student expressed feelings of frustration because some of his work was “lost” when his Internet connection was down. The students did, however, feel that the technical conditions in the classroom improved as the term progressed. The main reason the technical problems improved was due to the help and support from the computer department at the study’s institution. Staff members from the computer department were frequent guests in many of our classes as students experienced various problems with their Internet connections. This support did not go unnoticed by the students. Responses to item 14, (FDS) “*Do you feel that you were provided with adequate technical support during this course?*” were very positive. One student mentioned how he “appreciated and admired” the technical staff and was even impressed that they could communicate with the teachers in English. Another student commented that he felt the students would have been limited without the help and support of the computer department staff. This was a sentiment that all the teacher-participants in this study agreed with and raised the issue of the inherently interrelated nature of our curriculum, since both administrative and technical support were required. This was a problematic finding as it pointed to the difficulty of applying this curriculum outside of our specific context.

In terms of the more educational aspects of the BLL approach, students responded favorably to the activities that were implemented into the course units. Students responded to item 8, (FDS) “*Were there any computer activities that you enjoyed during this course?*” by listing English Internet searches, word processing activities and PowerPoint slideshows. One student added that he enjoyed the chat room interview exercises (which were managed on the LMS moodle 1.7 program). This student felt that his English typing speed had improved during these exercises because of the pressure to respond quickly to other students’ questions. Item 7, (FDS) “*How would you describe the atmosphere in your classroom during the course?*” also elicited positive responses where students considered the teaching approaches more “student-centered.” One student responded that he felt most students were comfortable because they could “take their own time” in class to finish their projects at their own speed. When I asked our observer-participant to elaborate on this response, she replied that students “felt more independent” when they were engaged in their classroom activities and that the class was more student-centered” than what they were used to in previous English language learning experiences. This was a significant

finding mainly because it showed that some students were aware of the autonomous features (Nunan, 1997) of the BLL-PB curriculum innovation that were intended to condition students to use language more creatively and independently.

9. IMPLICATIONS

There remains little conclusive evidence to suggest that the BLL-PB curriculum innovation itself directly generated greater student interest and involvement towards English language learning in this situated context. While students generally responded favorably towards classroom activities and project content, other factors in relation to student interest and involvement were found to be equally influential throughout the research findings. The teacher-participants felt that the enjoyment or fun element of the course was important, but were concerned that at times students placed too much emphasis on this element at the expense of meaningful learning objectives. Thus, the teacher team in this study felt to be perceived more at times as actors or performers in this environment than language instructors. This may have had negative implications on students' attitudes towards their own work and study habits. This finding concurred with Shimizu's (1995) study where students were found to regard native English teachers less seriously than their Japanese counterparts leading to a more lax approach in terms of student participation. Exploring the distinction between Japanese university student perceptions of native English teachers and their curriculum content may prove to be worth further investigation.

The process and implementation of the collaborative aspects of the BLL-PB approach also raised many issues for the teacher-participants involved in this study. The issue of flexibility was raised several times as some teachers found that the material collectively agreed upon before the term started was not appropriate for every teaching context. Teacher 3 reported that since his class appeared to be "the lowest level in ability and motivation...many of the materials [he] borrowed did not work with them." Project booklets in the future may have to contain several more activities to choose from in order to adjust the teaching material level when appropriate. Time constraints simply did not allow our team the luxury to incorporate this into our project booklets for this study. This should become less of a problem as we develop a larger shared resource database in our moodle 1.7 LMS program. Another issue revolved around teacher expectations in terms of student assessments. In piloting this curriculum innovation, teachers collectively found that not enough time and consideration was spent on properly refining project specifics. This became a problem as students tended to look for achievable benchmarks and at times seemed

confused with the subjective nature of our evaluations. These issues would be worth investigating in terms of a study on the collaborative decision-making processes of curriculum content and assessment.

Finally, the technology issues for this study raised concerns about whether the approach itself was particularly useful in achieving coherent language learning objectives. The teacher-participants in this study were keen to avoid what was coined “The Wizard of Oz” effect, where computers become a type of gimmick or curtain for teachers to hide behind. Although careful consideration was taken to make activities as communicative and interactive as possible, there were incidents where technology was seen to take over the teaching/learning flow. Teacher 2 reflected, “Like a child with a new toy, I tended to place more emphasis on the computer than I normally would in a language classroom. Looking back now I feel that an excessive amount of time was spent on computers. As a teacher, I would prefer to replace a fair amount of this computer time with communicative activities” (TFE: July 10th). I feel that all the teacher-participants in this study agreed with teacher 2’s comment and found themselves in a similar situation from time to time. A study on the usefulness and appropriateness of computers requires further investigation in this context.

10. CONCLUSION

The intention of this study was to offer a first step towards investigating student responses and attitudes concerning a curriculum innovation in a situated context. This innovation was planned and piloted in a sincere attempt to bring about positive change within a single department in a university where problems had been explored and identified by a group of teachers. Some of the problems addressed in this study have recently spread to become a serious issue for the entire university. As the rate of student failures in English language courses have increased dramatically, the need and value of compulsory English in the institution is being thoroughly questioned. This has already led to the abandonment of English as a compulsory graduation requirement in at least one department for the next academic year. As pressure is being placed on Japanese and native English teachers in finding solutions to inspire and motivate their students, more efforts on bridging the gap between student needs and curriculum approaches and objectives are needed. It is hoped that the information gained from this study will begin the process of helping to understand these challenges in order to plan suitable intervention strategies to make meaningful changes that will benefit both teachers and students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere appreciation and thanks are reserved for my former colleagues Don Hinkelman, Andrew Johnson and Paul Gemmell who all donated their time and cooperation to this study. Special mention must also be reserved for Professor Makiko Nishi whose patience and assistance in translations were vital to the overall research process of this situated study. I would also like to reserve special thanks for Associate Professor Tim Grose for his general help, support and encouragement. Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to Aya Shiratori and Greg Wheeler who graciously assisted me with the final updates, translations and revisions for this paper.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bailey, Kathleen M., and David Nunan (eds.) (1996). *Voices from the language classroom: Qualitative research in second language education*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bamford, J. (1993). Beyond grammar translation. In Wadden, P. (ed.), *A Handbook for Teaching English at Japanese Colleges and Universities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 63-71.
- Barnes, D. (1988). *From Communication To Curriculum*. London: Penguin Group.
- Berwick, R. & Ross, S. (1989). Motivation after matriculation: Are Japanese learners after examination hell? *JALT Journal*, 11, 193-210.
- Bossaer, A. and Hinkelman, D., (2001). Technical Difficulties in the Application of Presentation Software to University EFL Speech-making Classes. *JALT Hokkaido 2001 Proceedings*, 21-28.
- Bossaer, A., Hinkelman, D., and Miyamachi, S. (2002). Feasibility of Students Using Presentation Software in University English Communication Classes. *Journal of the Society of Humanities, Sapporo Gakuin University*. Vol. 71, 95-128.
- Breen, M. P. (1985). The social context of language learning: a neglected situation. In C. Candlin and N. Mercer (eds.) (2001) *English Language Teaching In Its Social Context*. London: Routledge. 122-144.
- Brindley, G. (1989). "The role of needs analysis in adult ESL program design." In R. K. Johnson, ed., *The Second Language Curriculum*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 63-78.
- Burden, P. (2001). When do native English speaking teachers and Japanese college Students disagree about the use of Japanese in the English conversation classroom? *The Language Teacher*, 24 (6), 5-11.
- Burns, A. (1996). Collaborative Research and Curriculum Change in the Australian Adult Migrant English Program. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30 (3), 591-598.
- Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burns, R. B. (2000). *Introduction to Research Methods*. NSW: Pearson Education.
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. L. (1990). Research on teaching and teacher research: The issues that divide. *Educational Researcher*, 19 (2), 2-11.
- Cole, S. (1998). The use of L1 in communicative English classrooms. *The Language Teacher*, 22 (12), 11-13.

- Driscoll, M. (1994). *Psychology of Learning for Instruction*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Driscoll, M. (2002). Blended learning: let's go beyond the hype. *LTI Newslines*. <http://www.Itinewslines.com/Itimagazine/article/articleDetail.jsp?id=11755>
- Eklund, J., Kay, M. and Lynch, H. (2003). E-learning: emerging issues and key trends. Australian National Training Authority. <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Feez, S. (2001). Curriculum Evolution in the Australian Adult Migrant English Program. In Hall, D. & Hewings, A. (eds.) *Innovation in English language teaching: a reader*. London: Routledge. 208-228.
- Foster, P. (1999). Task-based learning and pedagogy. *ELT Journal* 53/1. 69-70.
- Gorsuch, G. (1998). *Yakudoku* EFL instruction in two Japanese high school classrooms: An exploratory study. *JALT Journal*, 20: 6-32.
- Graves, K. (2001). A Framework of Course Development Process. In Hall, D. & Hewings, A. (eds.) *Innovation in English language teaching: a reader*. London: Routledge. 178-196.
- Hall, D. R. (2001). Materials Production: Theory and Practice. In Hall, D. & Hewings, A. (eds.) *Innovation in English language teaching: a reader*. London: Routledge. 229-239.
- Harvey, L. (2004). *Analytic quality glossary*, Quality Research International. <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary>
- Hino, N. (1988) *Yakudoku*: Japan's dominant tradition in foreign language learning. *JALT Journal*, 10: 45-55.
- Kay, W., Gemmel, P., Johnson, A., & Hinkelman, D. Blended language learning: Using Wireless notebooks and a project-based approach. 札幌学院大学人文学会紀要 第82号 別刷 2007年10月
- Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (eds.) (1988). *The Action Research Planner*. 3rd ed. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Krashen, S. and Terrell, T. (1983). *The Natural Approach*. New York: Pergamon.
- Law, G. (1995). Ideologies of English language education in Japan. *JALT Journal*, 17: 213-224.
- Lewin, K. (1952). 'Group decision and social change'. In (eds.) T. Newcomb & F. Hartley, *Readings in Social Psychology*. New York: Holt.
- Long, R. W. (1997). 'Investigating and Responding to Student Attitudes and Suggestions For Course Improvement' *The Language Teacher*, 21 (10). <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/files/97/oct/long.html>
- McDowell, L. (2009). L1 use in instructions for low-level learners. *The Language Teacher* 33 (6), 3-7.
- Markee, N. (2001). The Diffusion of Innovation in Language Teaching. In Hall, D. & Hewings, A. (eds.) *Innovation in English language teaching: a reader*. London: Routledge, 118-126.
- McNiff, J. (1988). *Action Research: Principles and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Meskill, C. & Ranglova, K. (2000). Sociocollaborative language learning in Bulgaria. In M. Warschauer & R. Kern (eds.) *Network-based Language Teaching: Concepts and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapter 2.
- Mitchell, R. & Myles, F. (1999). Second language learning: key concepts and issues. In C. Candlin and N. Mercer (eds.) (2001) *English Language Teaching In Its Social Context*. London: Routledge, 11-27.
- Moursund, D. (2003). *Project-based Learning: using information technology* (second edition). Eugene, Oregon, U.S.A.: ISTE publications.
- Neumier, P. (2005). A closer look at blended learning-parameters for designing a blended learning

- environment for language teaching and learning. *ReCALL*, 17 (2): 163-178.
- Nicholls, A. (1983). *Managing Educational Innovations*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Nunan, D. (1997). Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy. In Benson, P. and Voller, P. (eds.), *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London and New York: Longman, 192-203.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *An introduction to Task Based Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peacock, M. (1998). Usefulness and Enjoyableness of Teaching Materials as Predictors of On-task Behavior. *TESL-EJ*, 3 (2). <http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESEJ/ej10/a3.html>
- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative Inquiry In TESOL*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Richterich, R. (1980). "A model for the definition of language needs of adults". In Trim, Richterich, Van Ek, and Wilkins: 31-62.
- Saphier, J. and R. Gower. (1987). *The Skillful Teacher*. Carlisle, Mass.: Research for Better Teaching.
- Sharma, P. and Barrett, B. (2007). *Blended learning: Using technology in and beyond the language classroom*. Oxford: Macmillan.
- Shimizu, K. (1995). Japanese College Students Attitudes Towards English Teachers: A Survey. *The Language Teacher*. Tokyo: <http://www.jalt-publications.org/tlt/files/95/oct/shimizu.html>
- Skehan, P. (1989) *Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stracke, E. (2007). A road to understanding: A qualitative study into why learners drop out of a blended language learning (BLL) environment. *ReCALL* 19 (1): 57-78.
- Tsui, A. (1996). 'Reticence and anxiety in second language learning'. In K. M. Bailey & D. Nunan (eds) *Voices From the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vella, J. (2000). *Taking Learning to Task: Creative Strategies for Teaching Adults*. California: Jossey-Bass.
- Warschauer, M. & Kern, R. (2000). Introduction: Theory and practice of network-based language teaching. In M. Warschauer & R. Kern (eds.) *Network-based Language Teaching: Concepts and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.
- Wertsch, J. (ed) (1985). *Culture Communication and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weschler, R. (1997). Uses of Japanese (L1) in the English classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3 (11). Retrieved from <iteslj.org/Articles/Weschler-UsingL1.html>
- Widdows, S. & Voller, P. (1991). PANSI: A survey of the ELT needs of Japanese university students. *Cross Currents*, 18 (2), 127-141.
- Willis, D. and J. Willis. (2001). Task-based language learning. In R. Carter and D. Nunan (eds.) *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Beginning of Term Survey Questions and Results:

1). When did you first use computers in school?

- a) elementary school: 12 (50.00%)
- b) junior high school: 9 (37.50%)
- c) high school: 3 (12.50%)
- d) never: 0
- e) I don't know: 0

2). How comfortable are you using computers?

- a) Not comfortable: 6 (25.00%)
- b) Only a little: 11 (45.83%)
- c) Comfortable: 5 (20.83%)
- d) Very comfortable: 1 (4.17%)
- e) I don't know: 1 (4.17%)

3.) Have you ever used a computer for English language learning?

- a) Yes, often: 0
- b) Yes, a little: 2 (8.33%)
- c) No, never: 21 (87.50%)
- d) I don't know/remember: 1 (4.17%)

4.) Where do you mainly have access to computers now?

- a) At home: 14 (58.33%)
- b) At school: 9 (37.50%)
- c) At an internet café: 0
- d) At a friend's house: 0
- e) I don't have access to a computer: 1 (4.17%)

5.) How fast is your internet speed where you mainly have access to a computer?

- a) High speed ADSL, broadband: 14 (58.33%)
- b) Slow speed (modem, dial up): 8 (33.33%)
- c) I don't have access to the internet: 1 (4.17%)
- d) I don't know: 1 (4.17%)

6.) What type of activity do you MOST use your computer for? a) games: 4 (16.67%)

- b) study in Japanese: 4 (16.67%)
- c) study in English: 2 (8.33%)
- d) email: 0
- e) reading the news: 1 (4.17%)
- f) shopping: 4 (16.67%)
- g) chatting in Japanese: 0
- h) chatting in English: 0
- i) surfing in Japanese: 8 (33.33%)
- j) surfing in English: 1 (4.17%)

7.) How many hours a day (on average) do you spend on the internet in your free time?

- a) less than 30 minutes: 5 (20.83%)
- b) 30 to 60 minutes: 11 (45.83%)
- c) 1 to 3 hours: 3 (12.50%)
- d) over 3 hours: 2 (8.33%)
- e) I don't use the internet: 3 (12.50%)

8.) Do you think you will enjoy using your notebook computer in this English class?

- a) No, not at all: 2 (8.33%)
- b) A little: 8 (33.33%)
- c) Yes, I think it will be enjoyable: 8 (33.33%)
- d) Yes, it will definitely be enjoyable: 6 (25.00%)

9.) Which skills do you feel can be improved the MOST with computers in an English?

- a) reading: 11 (45.83%)
- b) writing: 2 (8.33%)
- c) speaking: 2 (8.33%)
- d) listening: 9 (37.50%)

10.) Do you have a mobile phone?

- a) No: 0
- b) Yes, phone only: 0
- c) Yes, phone and email access: 0
- d) Yes, phone, email and internet access: 24 (100.00%)

11.) How much does internet access cost on your mobile phone?

- a) It comes free with my package: 12 (50.00%)
- b) 100-300 yen per month.: 0
- c) 300-500 yen per month: 2 (8.33%)
- d) Over 500 yen per month: 4 (16.67%)
- e) I don't know: 6 (25.00%)

***12.) What do you think will be most difficult about using computers in this English class?**

***13.) What do you think might be most beneficial about using computers in this English class?**

14.) Using a computer can help me improve my English.

- a) strongly agree: 1 (4.17%)
- b) agree: 13 (54.17%)
- c) undecided or are not sure: 4 (16.67%)
- d) disagree: 1 (4.17%)
- e) strongly disagree: 0
- f) I have no opinion: 5 (20.83%)

15.) People waste too much time using computers.

- a) strongly agree: 1 (4.17%)
- b) agree: 8 (33.33%)
- c) undecided or are not sure: 9 (37.50%)
- d) disagree: 3 (12.50%)
- e) strongly disagree: 0
- f) I have no opinion: 3 (12.5)

***Student responses for items 12 and 13 were typed point form in Japanese. These responses have been translated and were summarized in the "FINDINGS" chapter were relevant.**

16.) It is too difficult for me to work with a computer.

- a) strongly agree: 2 (8.33%)
- b) agree: 4 (16.67%)
- c) undecided or are not sure: 12 (50.00%)
- d) disagree: 4 (16.67%)
- e) strongly disagree: 0
- f) I have no opinion: 2 (8.33%)

17.) I really enjoy working with computers.

- a) strongly agree: 6 (25.00%)
- b) agree: 13 (54.17%)
- c) undecided or are not sure: 4 (16.67%)
- d) disagree: 1 (4.17%)
- e) strongly disagree: 0
- f) I have no opinion: 0

18.) Learning English is useful for my future.

- a) strongly agree: 11 (45.83%)
- b) agree: 9 (37.50%)
- c) undecided or are not sure: 3 (12.50%)
- d) disagree: 1 (4.17%)
- e) strongly disagree: 0
- f) I have no opinion: 0

19.) Learning English is fun and interesting.

- a) strongly agree: 4 (16.67%)
- b) agree: 9 (37.50%)
- c) undecided or are not sure: 8 (33.33%)
- d) disagree: 1 (4.17%)
- e) strongly disagree: 1 (4.17%)
- f) I have no opinion: 1 (4.17%)

20.) Learning English is difficult and frustrating.

- a) strongly agree: 3 (12.50%)
- b) agree: 2 (8.33%)
- c) undecided or are not sure: 10 (41.67%)
- d) disagree: 8 (33.33%)
- e) strongly disagree: 0
- f) I have no opinion: 1 (4.17%)

Appendix B: End of Project Surveys

Two end of project surveys were administered to the student participants involved in this study. The student instruction sheets, sample ranking survey the student results are provided below. The instructions and ranking surveys were both translated into Japanese for students. The English versions are included here.

Computer English Activities:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide us with feedback on the value of the project you have just completed. We feel that your input will help us maintain and possibly improve the quality of our teaching methods and material selection. Participation in this questionnaire is voluntary. All responses will be kept confidential. **This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Additional time will be allowed upon request.**

INSTRUCTIONS:

Do not write your name on this sheet - fill it out and hand it to your group leader. (Group leaders: please place the questionnaire forms in the class envelope provided when your group members have all finished. Seal the envelope and hand it to your teacher).

Please mark ONE “X” on each scale to show how you rate the following concepts. Use the scales as follows:

If the word at either end of the scale very strongly describes your ideas and impressions about the project, you would place your “x” mark as shown below:

interesting____;____;____;____;____;__x__ boring

OR

interesting __x____;____;____;____;____; boring

If the word at either end of the scale describes somewhat your ideas and impressions about the project (but not strongly so), you would place your “x” mark as follows:

interesting____;____;____;____;__x____; boring

OR

interesting____;__x____;____;____;____; boring

If the word at the end of the scale only slightly describes your ideas and impressions about the project you would place your “x” mark as follows:

interesting____;____;____;__x____;____; boring

OR

[-11-]

interesting____;____;__x____;____;____; boring

Student Questionnaire Sheet

Please indicate your feelings about the project you have just completed.

interesting : : : : : boring

authentic : : : : : unauthentic

enjoyable : : : : : unenjoyable

meaningful : : : : : meaningless

appropriate : : : : : inappropriate

exciting : : : : : dull

satisfying : : : : : unsatisfying

useful : : : : : useless

appealing : : : : : unappealing

absorbing : : : : : monotonous

Thank you for participating in this voluntary ranking survey.

Results: Project 1 (Self-Introductions) (N=18)

	Positive			Neutral		Negative		
	+++	++	+	+-	-	--	---	
interesting	3	5	5	4	0	0	1	boring
authentic	2	3	7	4	1	0	1	unauthentic
enjoyable	1	10	2	2	2	0	1	not enjoyable
meaningful	1	6	3	4	1	1	2	meaningless
appropriate	1	2	7	6	2	0	1	inappropriate
exciting	2	6	4	3	2	0	1	dull
satisfying	0	2	11	2	0	2	1	unsatisfying
useful	0	4	7	3	1	2	1	useless
appealing	3	3	8	2	0	1	1	unappealing
absorbing	1	1	10	4	0	1	1	monotonous

Results: Project 2 (Hokkaido Guidebook) (N=10)

interesting	3	2	4	1	0	0	0	boring
authentic	4	2	3	1	0	0	0	unauthentic
enjoyable	4	3	3	0	0	0	0	Not enjoyable
meaningful	3	2	4	1	0	0	0	meaningless
appropriate	1	2	3	2	2	0	0	inappropriate
exciting	1	3	5	0	0	0	1	dull
satisfying	3	3	3	0	0	0	1	unsatisfying
useful	3	2	4	0	0	0	1	useless
appealing	2	3	2	3	0	0	0	unappealing
absorbing	0	3	3	4	0	0	0	monotonous

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Items:

1. Tell us about your experience learning English in high school:
(What do you remember?/ How was it taught?)
2. Tell us about your experience learning English at this university so far:
(What were the topics/How was it taught?)
3. What was the theme of the unit you have just completed?
4. Did you enjoy this course? If yes, please explain why. If no, please explain why not.
5. Were you able to learn anything new in English during this course? (For example: new vocabulary or grammar?).
6. Were you given enough opportunity to practice speaking English during this course?
7. How would you describe the atmosphere in your classroom during this course? (For example: positive, negative, enthusiastic, boring?).
8. Were there any computer activities that you enjoyed during this course? (For example: Power-Point, searching for information on the Internet etc.)
9. Were there any computer activities that you disliked during this course?
10. What did you find easy in this course?
11. What did you find difficult?
12. Do you think computers have helped or hindered your English language learning progress in this course? (Please take a few moments to discuss how computers have helped or hindered your progress).
13. Did you experience any technical problems during this course? (If yes, please explain these problems).
14. Do you feel that you were provided with adequate technical support during this course? (For example: If you did experience some technical problems with your computer, were these problems addressed and solved quickly?)
15. What would you suggest to improve or change the course?
16. Are there any other issues or comments that you would like to discuss?