

Experimenting with Computer Mediated Communications Technologies: Connecting Japanese & Korean EFL Students Via the Internet

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Introduction

For teachers and students of ESL/EFL living in the 21st century the Internet makes a whole new frontier available for intercultural communication and second language learning (Belz, 2003; Chase & Alexander, 2006; Moss, 2005; Nishihori, 2006; O'Dowd, 2001; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). The focus of this paper will be on telecollaboration and CMC (computer mediated communication), using the Internet and other high technology resources to connect language learners internationally. First, some of the key terms and issues related to telecollaboration will be introduced, in order to familiarize readers not acquainted with this area of research and teaching. Next, an attempt will be made to provide an overview of some of the new communications technologies currently being used for CMC by language teachers and learners around the world.

After introducing the essential elements of telecollaboration a first person account will be given of my own experiences with an ongoing Internet project that is connecting English language learners at Seinan Gakuin University, in Japan, with their peers at Myongji University, in Korea. This pilot program, The Japan-Korea Culture Exchange (Alexander 2005; Chase & Alexander, 2006), is an ongoing action research project that is utilizing both videoconferencing and text-based electronic messaging

systems in order to facilitate cross-cultural communication.

Following my first person description of the JKCE project, a summary of what has been learned from the program will be provided. While only two years old, this telecollaborative project may offer some useful ideas to EFL teachers who are interested in offering their students authentic opportunities to communicate with fellow English language learners here in Eastern Asia, and around the world. Some of the Japanese and Korean participants' written feedback will also be shared throughout this paper (with minor edits) so as to give a sense of their experiences with the project and to add the students' point of view.

We could understand other student's interesting things, and it is very useful as we can read and write whenever we connect the internet. I've never had these chance to chat with camera, so I enjoyed this project. In the videoconferencing, of course, we have to use English. Therefore, its very helpful to improve my English Skill. Also through this project, I'm interested in Korea better than ever. The message board is very useful to share our information. If this project was only videoconferencing, we could less understand each of us. I feel Korea is more close to Japanese culture. I was interested in Korea, but I'm more interested in than before.
(Japanese female student, Autumn 2004)

Key Issues and Terminology

There are a number of specific terms, acronyms and issues related to CMC and second language learning that will be explored in this paper. Some of the more important ideas are introduced in the first two sections, to assist readers unfamiliar with these terms.

The Internet

Most people living in technologically advanced nations are familiar with the *Internet*, a global communications network which can be accessed via computers and other high technologies, such as cell phones. For second language teachers and learners the Internet allows for quick access to media and resources, as well as inexpensive communication with people in far away lands (O'Dowd, 2001, Takahashi, 2001; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). As recently as 20 years ago most people were using letters and telephones as their primary means of international communication. Now we have e-mail, discussion forums, web cameras and instant messaging software available, which all utilize the Internet in order to transmit information instantly, and globally.

World Wide Web

While some people use the terms *Internet* and *World Wide Web* interchangeably, they each refer to something different. The World Wide Web is the data and information that the Internet provides access to and links together- the colorful websites, homepages and documents which are stored in various locations all over the world. For second language learners the World Wide Web provides a wonderful resource of multimedia materials and cultural information (Takahashi, 2001; Warschauer & Healey, 1998), all available from one's computer. Also, unlike television, which is a passive medium, the Web is interactive. That means that students can create their own web pages, add information to websites, manipulate and alter the media available to them. For EFL/ESL teachers this new creative medium provides both a challenge and opportunity (Nishinaga et al., 2005; Warschauer & Healey, 1998), as our students will have to develop the ability to deal with large amounts of information in the future. They may also need to collaborate and communicate electronically with people from other

cultures.

Telecollaboration

The term *telecollaboration* refers to the collaborative activities of individuals using high speed global communications networks and technologies to connect with each other from a distance. A formal definition provided by Belz (2003) is that "telecollaboration involves the use of Internet communication tools by internationally dispersed students of language in institutionalized settings in order to promote the development of (a) foreign language (FL) linguistic competence and (b) intercultural competence" (p. 68). Usually the word refers to communication involving computers and the Internet, but videophones and telephones can also be considered channels for telecollaboration. In broadest terms, telecollaboration can occur outside an institutional or educational setting, if people are using high speed communication tools to work together on a common project.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

As already mentioned, the acronym CMC stands for *computer mediated communication*. Telecollaboration involving computers and the Internet is a form of CMC. At the present time a wide range of computer mediated communication tools and technologies are available for people to use (Moss, 2005; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). E-mail was one of the first electronic tools used for Internet communication. Nowadays, video-conferencing is emerging as a powerful CMC technology (Chase & Alexander, 2006; Nishihori, 2006; Nishinaga et al., 2005; O'Dowd, 2001), with web cameras providing for the rapid transfer of sounds and images via the Internet. There are also CMC environments such as chat rooms, message boards and social networks. These computer generated electronic contexts

provide virtual "locations" where people can meet together online (see Cashmore, 2006; Irvine, 2007; Marriot, 1998). Several such CMC technologies provided the means by which the JKCE project was able to bring Seinan and Myongji University students together, to communicate with each other.

Synchronous & Asynchronous Communications

CMC technologies facilitate two different modes of communication. *Synchronous communication* involves exchanges that happen in real time (e.g., video conferencing, chat rooms and instant messaging). *Asynchronous communication* is slower, and can take place over longer periods of time (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Asynchronous technologies allow people to plan and compose their ideas before sending them (e.g., e-mail and message boards). While these CMC technologies are new, humans have long used both synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication. Letters and books transmit information into the future, with a time delay. Face-to-face conversations and high-speed telephones allow for communication in a synchronous fashion. One of the things we discovered with our project (Alexander & Chase, 2006) is that there are benefits and limitations with all forms of human communication.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

The acronym CALL stands for *Computer Assisted Language Learning*. Any language teacher who makes use of computers in order to help his or her students learn a language is utilizing CALL technologies. Warschauer & Healey (1998) have described how the use of CALL technologies has shifted over the last few decades. Initially computers were used as stand alone assistants to language learners, where interesting games and software could be used in order to improve language skills. With the rise of

the Internet, the focus is now shifting to the possibilities made available by the World Wide Web, and emerging CMC technologies (Nishihori, 2006; O'Dowd, 2001; Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

Cross-cultural contact

The phrase *cross-cultural contact* refers to the meetings and attempts at communication by individuals from different cultures. Cross-cultural contact can happen whenever individuals from different cultures meet face-to-face or attempt to communicate with one another (Nishihori, 2006). However, to say that contact has happened does not mean that communications were successful (Thorne, 2003; Ware, 2005) or that telecollaboration had occurred (O'Dowd, 2001). An awareness of the potential for unsatisfactory exchanges, cross-cultural misunderstandings or miscommunication in international contact situations is an important dynamic for teachers to keep in mind. In our project we discovered that making contact was only a first step. Our greatest challenge was to help students in two countries communicate successfully over the course of a semester, in ways that were meaningful and enjoyable for them.

Cross-cultural and Intercultural Communication

In the field of language learning, these terms can be used to refer to successful communications and an exchange of information between individuals of different cultures that deepens the knowledge each participant has of the other, and of their culture (O'Dowd, 2001). In other words, with successful *intercultural communication* each person comes to a fuller and more accurate understanding of the other person's viewpoint and cultural differences. It is also possible to examine intercultural interactions in terms of situated communication episodes (Cupach & Imahori, 1993), which can simultaneously involve both intercultural and interpersonal

aspects. As Imahori (2001) has noted, intercultural communication is an extremely complex process, involving numerous factors such as communicative competence and identity management, while also being dependent on the nature of specific communication contexts and goals.

A promising characteristic of Internet-based communications is that they provide a "new frontier" for *cross-cultural communication* that teachers can utilize and researchers can study (Nishihori, 2006). Almost any area of SLA and intercultural communications research and theory can be applied to the study of Internet-based conversations and virtual settings. Computer assisted communications provide a unique opportunity for researchers, as the very methods of electronic communications can also be used to record data for future study. Text is typed, video communications can be recorded. The "transcripts" of text interactions are actually created by participants. The communication episode that the researcher is studying is exactly what the participants experienced, and time can be saved in terms of the very tedious job of data collection, allowing researchers to move quickly to the more interesting work of data analysis.

Communicative Competence

In simplest terms, *communicative competence* refers to a person's ability to use a language effectively in order to communicate with others. While descriptions of communicative competence may vary, one of the most accepted definitions is that initially provided in 1980, by Canal & Swain (see Brown, 2000; Ellis, 1985), who described the construct in terms of four interrelated aspects: *grammatical*, *discourse*, *sociolinguistic* and *strategic* capabilities. These can be summarized (Brown, 2000) as the ability to use correct grammar structures and linguistic patterns in sentence construction (i.e., grammatical competence), the ability to connect many sentences together coherently in order to create meaningful and comprehensible

language output (i.e., discourse competence), understanding how language is used in specific sociocultural contexts (i.e., sociolinguistic competence) and finally, the ability to adjust and respond to communication difficulties, lack of knowledge, ambiguity and misunderstandings (i.e., strategic competence).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Consistent with research into the nature of human language mastery, cognitive development and second language acquisition (see for example Brown, 2000; Chase, 2000; Ellis, 2005; Flavell, 1985; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Gardner, 1991; Rogoff, 1990) CLT takes a learner-centered approach, attempting to integrate modern research and theories with the teaching of second languages. *Communicative language teaching* is not a specific method (Brown, 2000). Rather, teachers who wish to employ communicative strategies are challenged to create authentic opportunities for their students to actually practice the target language in meaningful social situations, in order to communicate (Chase, 2000; Brown, 2000; Ellis, 2005; Moss, 2005; Nunan, 2005). CLT is probably one of the most widely accepted paradigms for second language education in the world today (see Brown, 2000; Moss, 2005). In contrast to its primary rival, the Grammar Translation Method, CLT is not centered upon the teaching of grammar rules, isolated vocabulary and the translation of difficult texts (Brown, 2000). Unfortunately, while the ideals of CLT have been embraced by many educators here in Japan, the reality is that the communicative approach has not yet been implemented widely (see Taguchi, 2002), especially at the secondary school level. A fundamental goal of our project was to explore how CMC technologies could be used in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of English in a communicative manner.

What I most enjoyed about this project was to communicate directly with students in Korea by using the computer and the camera and to share both Korean culture and Japanese culture with them. One of good points of the video-conferencing is to enjoy games together... I found that we had much more common features than I had expected. They are very friendly and kind. (Japanese female student, Autumn 2005)

CMC Tools & Technologies

This next section will provide brief descriptions of some of the most inexpensive and potentially useful CMC tools presently available. There are a variety of technologies which can support *asynchronous communications*, where there is usually a delay in time between when messages are sent and when they are received. These electronic contexts and tools (e.g., e-mail, message boards, blogs and social networks) can be especially useful when people are living in different time zones or find it difficult to communicate in real time. The second set of tools (e.g., chat rooms, IM, videoconferencing) provide for *synchronous communications*. In other words, much like telephones they facilitate "live" interactions across great distances, instantly.

Asynchronous CMC Technologies

E-mail

Electronic mail is probably the most popular means of asynchronous written communication available now, for people in modern technologically advanced nations. E-mail is really just a new method for sending written text, replacing typewriters, pens and paper. Just as the telephone was a leap from the telegram, and the printing press revolutionized book publishing, e-mail is transforming the way humans send letters. Messages

that used to take a week to travel around the world now take less than a few seconds. This offers many new opportunities for second language educators. A very popular website called *E-Pals* (epals.com) allows second language teachers and learners to come together to find electronic pen pals in other countries. In our project the students did not use e-mail in order to communicate, as it is difficult to keep track of all students' messages and we wanted to make use of more sophisticated CMC technologies which could provide interactive environments for cross-cultural group discussions.

Online Discussion Forums

Electronic message boards, sometimes called *discussion forums* or *bulletin boards*, provide an ideal setting for asynchronous group communication (Alexander, 2005; Gang et al., 2006). These boards allow individuals to create topic-related *discussion threads*, where people can come together from different parts of the world in order to discuss issues that interest them. One of the most popular forums for English second language learners on the World Wide Web is *Dave's ESL Café* (www.eslcafe.com/forums/student/), where English teachers and students from all over the world can join together to talk about various topics. Dave's board is "open" which means he allows anyone to read messages and join conversations. For our project we created a private discussion board using a learner management system called *Moodle* (moodle.com). This allowed us to provide a safe and "closed" space where only our students could read and write messages, post links to music videos and share photos with each other.

Blogs

The word *blog* is a new term which refers to a message board that is hosted or managed by an individual. A blog is a bit like an open diary or

journal, where the person who creates it can share their essays, photos, video clips, audio files and personal information. Blogs also allow for comments from readers, so in that sense they are a unique kind of message board. A benefit of blogs for language learners is that they can provide a place to host journal writing or short essays, allowing other students to post comments. A disadvantage of blogs is that some will tend to be more interesting or popular than others, which could become a problem in a classroom with many students.

Social Networks

A *social network* is a unique kind of electronic forum, in that it's a vast interconnected virtual community, where one can communicate with old friends and meet new people (Cashmore, 2006; Irvine, 2007). The size of a social network can range from a few dozen members to several million, and can serve as a provider for a wide variety of CMC technologies. Right now online social networks are used by most young people living in the United States, Korea and Japan (Cashmore, 2006; Irvine, 2007). Japan's *Mixi* (mixi.jp), Korea's *Cyworld* (cyworld.nate.com) and the American-based network *MySpace* (www.myspace.com) are host to large numbers of young people in those nations, and elsewhere. These three social networks each have several million members in their home countries, providing individuals with free homepages, blogs, discussion forums and personal messaging services. *MySpace* is presently the largest social network in the world, hosting sites where people are communicating in many different languages- including Japanese, English, German, Italian, Spanish and French. Social networks are the new virtual meeting space for young people (Cashmore, 2006; Irvine, 2007). Recently, we found that most of the students in our project belonged to either Japan's *Mixi* or South Korea's *Cyworld*. This proved to be advantageous for us (Chase & Alexander, 2006), as it

meant that most of our participants were already familiar with essential CMC tools and technologies.

Synchronous CMC Technologies

Instant Messaging

Instant messenger (IM) communications software has become increasingly popular in the last decade. The leading systems of AOL, MSN and Yahoo Messenger are used by millions of people worldwide. IM technologies allow people to open up a direct channel with a designated friend or "buddy" as they are called (Marriott, 1998), thereby bypassing computer security systems and allowing for synchronous text, audio and visual communication. This creates a "live" effect similar to telephone communications, making instant messaging highly enjoyable for users. In our project we found MSN instant messenger's text capabilities to be quite useful for telecollaboration, when audio communication failed or became impossible. In a study by Thorne (2003) an example was given of a pair of second language learners in Germany & the USA who were able to develop a friendship quickly by communicating with IM technology. If there are problems with instant messaging software, it's that the audio and visual functions don't always work. Another problem is that users can become so immersed in text communications that they are distracted from other things which they need to do. In the case described by Thorne (2003) the German and American student initially spent over 5 hours "talking" to one another online, in the course of a single day. IM has some definite possibilities for facilitating intercultural communication and language competence, but must be used carefully and thoughtfully.

Chat Rooms

Electronic *chat rooms* provide a setting for synchronous text

communication, where small groups of people can interact and post messages simultaneously (Marriott, 1998). These virtual meeting rooms are similar to IM, in that people must be online at the same time. Unlike a discussion board where a record is maintained of messages posted over the course of weeks and months, in chat rooms people join live conversation episodes midstream. Conversations are usually informal, move quickly and really do feel "live." Due to the rapid time demands, chat rooms do not usually allow for the depth of discussion that message boards provide. Also, if too many people join a "chat" simultaneously the communications can become extremely chaotic. On the other hand, many young people enjoy the quick pace and live feeling. When "chatting" with friendly people it feels quite intimate, almost like your minds are bouncing around together in a little room somewhere in cyber space. In our study (Chase & Alexander, 2006) the chat room created an informal context for small groups to come together. Most of the students who were able to join these discussions found them quite interesting, and actually seemed to enjoy the challenge of communicating their thoughts quickly, by typing text messages in English.

Videoconferencing

The term *videoconferencing* originated with the earliest forms of synchronous visual telecommunications, where video cameras were used to allow people in different locations to communicate with each other simultaneously. The video camera is not actually creating video when used this way, but is used for the synchronous transmission of audio and visual images (see for example Nishihori, 2006; Nishinaga et al., 2005). These days the term videoconferencing is still used, although webcams (aka, webcams) are becoming more popular than video cameras, as they are inexpensive and can plug directly into computers. The advantage of

videoconferencing over other forms of communication is that people can see and hear one another, allowing facial expressions, voice tone and non-verbal signals to be used as vehicles of communication (Nishihori, 2006; Nishinaga et al., 2005; O'Dowd, 2005). One of the things we discovered in our study was that this visual medium is extremely powerful, so that even when students in different countries had trouble understanding each other's English, they still felt that the video interface was interesting, exciting and worthwhile. With live visual contact one gets the feeling that you have actually "met" someone, even if they are hundreds or thousands of miles away.

Voice and Video Mail

Recently a *voice mail* option was added to many IM software programs, allowing users to send voice mail to friends. As webcams become more popular it is possible that a *video messaging* option will be added as well. This will allow people to send audio and visual communications via the Internet in an asynchronous manner, as an alternative to e-mail. Actually, this is already possible, using a variety of methods. One way is to create a short video message with a digital camera or one's cell phone, and send that by e-mail. Another option is to use the hellodeo application (hellodeo.com) which provides a free service for making video messages with webcams. While we have not yet experimented with this technology it has potential for our project. At some of the online social network sites such as *MySpace.com* members are already creating short video introductions, seasonal greetings and messages that they post on their blogs and share with each other. Teachers who have access to computer rooms where PCs are equipped with webcams can give second language learners the opportunity to practice using asynchronous voice and video technologies on their own. The goal of course would be to use whatever tools are most effective

in facilitating authentic and meaningful student-to-student communications.

I enjoyed communicating with foreign students because I had never talked to foreign students on campus. I could know about information of Korea in detail, for example famous places, fashion and foods. They illustrated tourist attractions with some photos. [With video] we can see each other's faces, so it seemed that we were in same place... After this project, I found they like movie, music and travel like I do. And I think Korean and Japanese are like each other. Web camera and microphone, I think it is easy to talk in pairs, it should take at least one hour. (Japanese female student, Autumn 2004)

Description of CMC Project Connecting Korean & Japanese Students

In this next section I will provide a first person account of my own experiences with the Japan-Korea Culture Exchange (Alexander 2005; Chase & Alexander, 2006). The JKCE project has been conducted as action research (Dick, 2002), where the collaborative design and implementation of the program is continuously being informed by feedback from student participants and critical reflection on the part of the teachers involved. Our purpose initially was not to test specific research hypotheses (Chase & Alexander, 2006), but rather to create an intercultural CMC project that was inexpensive, worked smoothly, functioned effectively, and would be easy for teachers like ourselves to implement. In order to do that we needed to think of ourselves as teacher/researchers, continuously reflecting upon our experiences so that problems we encountered were solved, and the "design" of our project improved over time. This "research & development" methodology is reflective of action research (O'Brien, 2001), which Dick

(2002) describes as "a flexible spiral process which allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time" (p.2).

The JKCE project was started in the winter of 2004, after I contacted members of South Korea's CALL SIG (Special Interest Group) online, seeking a partner for telecollaboration. Paul Alexander, an instructor at Myongji University, agreed to work with me. We held similar views about language teaching and learning, both of us hoping to provide authentic opportunities for our students to communicate with each other, via the Internet. Together, we decided that we would try a "dual mode" approach (Alexander, 2005), providing both oral and text based communication experiences for students. Our intention was to provide them with chances to use all 4 language skills- *reading, writing, speaking* and *listening*- so that the project would give them the opportunity to improve their communication capabilities. We also wanted to use the simplest and most user-friendly technologies possible, so that as teachers we could set things up without technical assistance, and students could join the project both at school and from their homes.

When we began the project in the Autumn of 2004, we initially equipped our Windows based laptops with inexpensive Logitech webcams. We then installed MSN Messenger, an instant messaging program that transmits text messages and allowed us to do videoconferencing for free. We started with a small group of volunteers, four from each side. My students were mostly English language majors, while the Korean students represented many different majors, including business, international studies and law. Videoconferences were carried out in multimedia classrooms at our schools, during lunch hours. Prof. Alexander also set up an online discussion forum, using Moodle's course management system. The Moodle forum is password protected, creating a safe location where the

Japanese and Korean students were able to communicate by writing to one another after school. With these two technologies we were able to offer our students both live (synchronous) videoconferencing and delayed-in-time (asynchronous) text-based communication opportunities.

The first semester was a success (Alexander, 2005) in that our students were able to use English to communicate and learn about one another, by writing online at the discussion forum. Our efforts were not as successful in terms of live videoconferencing. The MSN messaging program did not always work well, especially for audio. Visual images were transmitted, but they moved very slowly. This meant that while we were able to see each other we could not hear our partners on the other side. Without audio, we had to write text messages back and forth, using the IM software. For our final videoconference together, Christmas gift boxes were exchanged between the two groups, and opened simultaneously. The Japanese and Korean students really enjoyed sharing this experience with each other (Alexander, 2005), finding interesting snacks, canned drinks, photos, and other cultural items sent to them by their closest international neighbors.


While the online message board worked very well from the beginning, we felt that we needed to improve our videoconferencing equipment. In 2005 we switched to Macintosh computers, with iSight cameras and iChat videoconferencing technologies. The difference in terms of quality and reliability was significant. With the Apple computers the video images filled the display screen and moved faster, while the audio was crisp and clear. The experience was very satisfying, both for students and teachers. It really felt like we were "meeting" each other, face-to-face.

We next decided to move the videoconferences into our offices, providing the students with more privacy, while making the synchronous exchanges easier to set up and schedule. Each week we gave students a topic or theme to discuss both during the videoconferences and at the online

forum. These topics included travel experiences, movies, music, cultural information about their cities, and favorite foods. In our assessment both the Spring and Autumn 2005 sessions went very well. With Macintosh's iChat application the students were able to communicate with each other much more easily, although practice was needed, as they were not used to computer mediated videoconferencing. The students also continued to write to one another at the discussion board, and all seemed to enjoy the project.

In the Spring of 2006 we decided to experiment with something new. We moved our videoconferencing back into the large multimedia classrooms, and attempted for the first time to connect two whole classes together (totaling almost 50 students) during class time. The results were mixed. Students on both sides seemed to greatly enjoy connecting "live" with their peers in Japan and Korea, but audio was hard to hear in the large media room, and students felt shy talking in front of such a large group of peers. We did not use the electronic message board that semester, so students really didn't have the chance to communicate deeply, or get to know one another.

Finally, in the Autumn of 2006 we tried to bring everything together, linking two whole classes via both videoconferencing and message board technologies. The online text-based discussion forum was a great success. With such a large number of students we no longer needed to pick a discussion theme for each week. Instead we created 14 topic areas (see box), and allowed students to start their own discussion threads within each area. We borrowed this model from what we saw over at *Dave's ESL Café* and other large scale discussion forums, where conversation threads are organized by specific topics and themes.



Welcome to the **Japan-Korea Culture Exchange!** To check out your classmates' profiles, click on "*Participants*" on the top-left of this page. Or feel free to post a message in one of the discussion forums below. Have fun!

- [Introducing Ourselves!](#)
- [Talking About Movies!](#)
- [The Music We Love!](#)
- [Food, Food, Food...](#)
- [Life in Korea!](#)
- [Life in Japan!](#)
- [Pets & Animals!](#)
- [What Are Your Hobbies?](#)
- [Sports & Physical Activities!](#)
- [Our Travel Experiences!](#)
- [Talking About This Project & the Internet!](#)
- [Our University Life & Future Dreams](#)
- [Ladies Forum: Love, Health & Beauty](#)
- [News, Social Issues & Current Events](#)
- [Live Chat Room!](#)

With almost 50 students we had numerous asynchronous conversations going on throughout the day, all of them in English. Students were talking about life in Korea and Japan, music, sports, movies and other topics that interested them. The level of involvement of individual students varied. Some became very excited by the project and posted all the time. Others were a bit reluctant, and did not participate as much. One interesting

dynamic we noticed was that a few extremely sociable people really helped to keep the discussions moving. Unlike a "live" oral communication situation where a talkative or sociable person may dominate conversations, with the asynchronous message boards everyone had the chance to participate and share their views, while the people who wrote a lot often played an essential role in keeping the conversations interesting and moving.

It was during the Autumn 2006 session that we became aware for the first time that many of our students belonged to the online networks *Mixi* and *Cyworld*. As mentioned earlier, these social networks have become extremely popular with young people in both Korea and Japan (see Cashmore, 2006), thereby allowing them to become quite familiar with CMC tools (e.g., e-mail & IM software) and virtual environments (e.g., chat rooms, blogs & discussion forums). We were also fortunate to have a Chinese exchange student join our project. She was very sociable, and brought another cultural perspective to conversations. Prof. Alexander and I joined many discussions as well, so communications during the last semester had a rather multinational feeling to them.

Unfortunately, with such a large number of students it became difficult for us to support small-group or person-to-person videoconferencing. Instead of trying to schedule dozens of student-to-student conversations in our offices we held two large scale videoconferences in the classrooms. The first session gave students the chance to introduce themselves, while for the second videoconference we orchestrated a true-false game, dividing each class into blue and red teams. That way each team had half their members in the other country. Most students reported that these synchronous video experiences were rather enjoyable, although some complained that they could not hear people's voices clearly, and that the large group situation did not allow for much authentic student-to-

student communication.

On the other hand, in order to augment the lack of intimacy and communication experienced in these exchanges we each decided to videotape our students in unrehearsed situations outside of the classroom, with digital video cameras. In late October of 2006, I was able to take a group of Japanese students to the nearby Fukuoka museum, and then down to Momochi beach, by bicycle. We videotaped greetings from these locations, so that the Korean students could get a sense of Seinan University's local surroundings. Prof. Alexander did a similar thing in December, videotaping a group of his students as they introduced parts of their campus. These recordings we then sent to each other, through the mail and Internet. Many students reported that these "offline" videos were extremely enjoyable to watch, allowing them to get a feel of what real life was like in each other's country.

Also during this last semester we experimented with our Moodle chat rooms, initiating special chat times during the week. Students who were able to join these live chat sessions told us that they really enjoyed the experience. We hope to make further creative use of this CMC technology in the future. One last thing that seemed to be appreciated by the Seinan University students was that during our final class (the week before Christmas) I brought my Macintosh laptop computer and set it up for students to be able to say goodbye to Prof. Alexander, whose classes in Seoul had already ended. For many of the students this was their first chance to talk freely with someone one-to-one by videoconference. A number of the students reported that they really appreciated this, and wished they had more such opportunities.

I enjoyed writing posts and reading others'. I could see many nice pictures of foods, traditional buildings and movie stars. It is really

fantastic! I also could know various opinions of Korean friends and Japanese friends, also a Chinese friend! Sometimes, I was very surprised and was made happy by their forum posts. It is so fun! Although I cannot speak Korean and Chinese well, I CAN communicate with them in ENGLISH! It is wonderful. I also enjoyed the conversation with Mr. Paul with a web camera in the last class. I could talk with him without tension. I really want to have a chance to talk by the web camera in the future!! (Japanese female student, Autumn 2006)

Summary and Conclusion

To summarize how our project has evolved, we began with the goal of using a "dual mode" CMC approach, relying upon synchronous videoconferencing and asynchronous text-based discussion forums to provide our primary contexts for communication. What happened was that over time we found ourselves experimenting with a variety of formats, using as many different communication methods and technologies as possible. The gift boxes and "offline" video recordings we sent to each other did not require the Internet, but proved to be essential parts of the project's intercultural experience. One thing that has helped make the JKCE project successful, in my opinion, is that we (the teachers involved) encouraged each other to take risks, experiment with creative solutions and propose new ideas without hesitation. Some of these were successful, while others failed, but we learned a lot from the process.

In terms of technology, what we discovered (Alexander & Chase, 2006) is that a "multi-modal" approach to long distance intercultural communication seems to be optimal, allowing for a mix of synchronous and asynchronous interactions, high and low technologies, formal and informal situations, written, visual and oral forms of communication. While

students in our project were often writing to each other online, rather than speaking, the text-based communications technologies have given them an opportunity to practice using the same kinds of conversation strategies, vocabulary and phrases that they would need to use if communicating with each other face-to-face.

As for the videoconferencing, we discovered in 2005 that Apple's iChat system works splendidly, for one-to-one and pair-to-pair communications. Unfortunately, it is much more challenging and difficult to use in whole class situations, such as we attempted in 2006. Unless we are able to get more computers equipped with webcams, it will be difficult to provide large numbers of students with opportunities to communicate face-to-face in a meaningful and unrehearsed fashion. Nevertheless, we found that students really enjoyed seeing the smiling faces of their partners overseas, so that even when videoconferencing "failed" the experiences added something to our classes, putting real faces on names, helping students to feel closer to their international neighbors. Most importantly, we found that the live videoconferences and asynchronous video exchanges helped to motivate our students to try to communicate with their project partners. CMC tools and contexts allow for creativity and autonomy, they put our students in the driver's seat, motivating them to actively practice and use the English capabilities they are trying to master.

One of the challenges for teachers in Asia is that many students have been conditioned to think of second language learning as something that teachers *give* to them, and they *receive*, in a passive fashion (Ellis, 2005; Farmer, 1994; Nunan, 2005; Taguchi, 2002). Most ESL/EFL students in Korea, China and Japan spend a great deal of time studying English vocabulary and grammar, but have few opportunities to actually use the language to communicate with foreigners (Chase, 2000; Nunan, 2005).

In that respect, authentic cross-cultural CMC experiences can give

deeper meaning to English second language education (Nishihori, 2006), providing a more satisfying "purpose" than studies focused primarily on entrance exams and tests. We live in a global society now. China and Korea are Japan's closest neighbors. Several years ago I visited Singapore and was deeply impressed by how the English language was used there, as a communication tool which allows Chinese, Malaysians, Indonesians and others from Southeast Asia to communicate, work together and live in harmony. A similar dynamic is presently unfolding in Europe, thanks to the emergence of the European Union. In countries like Germany, Finland, India and Singapore it is becoming a very common expectation, for young educated people to grow up bilingual and more internationally minded.

One only needs to look at tragic events in the world today to realize that intercultural communication has a very deep and meaningful purpose (Imahori, 2001). Greater understanding between the citizens of nations can help to build a sense of community in a region, sowing the seeds of economic prosperity, peace and friendship far into the future. The roots of Japanese culture connect this nation historically to China and Korea. As the student's own comments indicate (see below) with English language skills and CMC technologies they now have the opportunity to bridge cross-cultural gaps and build real friendships, by communicating directly with their closest neighbors, as well as the rest of the world.

At first, I was interested in this project very much!! And just as I expected it was soooooo fun!! We, Japanese and Korean students had never met before, but it didn't matter at all. It was nice opportunity for me! So we didn't know each other, but we gradually knew by seeing and enjoying on the Video Conference and it made better our cultural exchange on the Internet!! Now we can share many ideas, food, music, social problem, and even love & health!!

This project helped us to know different custom and culture. What's more, we learned it not by the text but by real Korean people!! In addition, we communicate in English. That is, we learn how to speak English at the same time each other!! (Japanese female student, Autumn 2006)

Thank you very much for giving us this chance to have a good communication with Korean friends. I really enjoy this program and I will enjoy it from now on. According to the first video conference, I feel much closer with the Korean friends. The first video conference was really very interesting although I couldn't hear the introductions from all of them clearly. I am looking forward to seeing them. (Chinese female, Seinan exchange student, Autumn 2006)

I really enjoyed watching video from your school. I'm just getting to know your faces and names. I was very surprised that you ride bicycle in your campus. We could not ride bicycle because our campus is quite small and it's on the mountain. And I saw your campus was sooooo peaceful with lot of trees. The most amazing thing was that you could go to the beach whenever you want. I can not remember when was the time I visited the sea lately. I want to talk about it more. But my older brother keeps making noises saying "Get out of computer!!!" I'm looking forward to meet you in video conference, bye. (Korean female student, Autumn 2006)

Ye~ that's right... If someone ride bicycle in our school, then that someone may be gotten hurt;; that's horrible;; Please don't anybody try riding bicycle in our school;; ha; Just walk and run ^^ As she

above said, the most amazing and jealous thing was you guys can see easily the beautiful sea~ That's really great. In here Seoul, we can see only mountain and urban things. I heard we are going to meet each other in class on online ^^ see ya next time guys~ ^^ (Korean male student, Autumn 2006)

Meeting you guys makes me to have a hope to visit Japan. Your country is island, so it's very easy to find beaches and coasts. But in Korea, when I want to see the beach with sands. I have to take a train or bus and have to go long way. I like visiting other country and I heard Japan is very clean and Japanese people are kind. Country of good manners! My friend is going to Osaka this winter. I envy her.. T_T Keep in touch (Korean female student, Autumn 2006)

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