

Meeting the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* through an Internet-Based Newspaper Project: Case Studies of Advanced-Level Japanese Learners

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Abstract

Published in 1996, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (Standards), define knowledge and abilities that foreign language learners should acquire in the U.S. The Internet is believed to facilitate standards-based instruction because of its capabilities as a communication medium, information provider, and publication tool.

This paper presents one part of a study that investigated this claim through examining an Internet-based newspaper project in an advanced-level college Japanese course in light of the Japanese Standards. Six students were selected to serve as case studies, with their experiences in relation to this project analyzed in depth. The results show that the students found using the Internet to read authentic materials with the help of an online dictionary to be a positive experience. This then resulted in their actively using Japanese for personal enjoyment outside the classroom. These results suggest that the project was particularly successful in two goal areas: Communication and Communities.

Introduction

In 1996, foreign language (FL) education in the U.S. took an important step forward by setting national goals which were published under the title *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (Standards). Since then, standards-based instruction has become crucial for the success of FL education in the U.S. (Leloup & Ponterio, 1998). Educators have proposed a variety of activities and documented how they served to accomplish the Stan-

dards' goals in the classroom (e.g., Phillips [ed.], 1997). One way of meeting these new standards has been to take advantage of computer technology such as the Internet (Gonglewski, 1999; Torii-Williams, 2004; Walz, 1998). In fact, the Standards themselves recognize the power of technology and declare that technology should be a part of the curriculum, thus enriching students' learning experiences.

This paper discusses one part of a study that explored the possibility of using the Internet as a tool to address the Standards in the Japanese language classroom. Using the *Standards for Japanese Language Learning*, the original study examined an Internet-based newspaper project in an advanced-level college Japanese course. This article will present the findings of a close examination of six students' experiences in the project. Cross-case analysis of the six students was conducted to answer the research question, "In terms of the Japanese Standards, what are the experiences of advanced-level learners of Japanese participating in the Internet-based newspaper project?" In what follows, I briefly review related literature and provide a description of the study and the implemented project. Then, I present findings from the cross-case analysis and discuss them in light of the Japanese Standards.

Literature Review

The Standards originated from the educational reform movement of the late 1980's and the early 1990's, an effort to make U.S. students more competitive academically in the world by setting national goals within disciplines (Phillips & Draper, 1994). Published in 1996, the Standards were expected to guide FL educators in the U.S. in providing their students with better learning experiences. Consequently, the Standards became the model for many state-level standards and a catalyst for curriculum reform (Phillips, 1999; Solomon, 1997). Furthermore, the Standards led to nine language-specific standards, among them Japanese.

The Standards describe "the knowledge and abilities that all students should acquire" in any FL classroom in the U.S. (Standards, 1996, p. 23), using five goal areas known as "the five Cs": Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

These five goal areas reflect a broader, socio-culturally functional definition of FL learning that includes the acquisition of not only grammar and vocabulary but also skills and knowledge that are thought to enrich students' lives.

"Communication" focuses on the mastery of communication skills in the target language in three communication modes: interpersonal, interpretive and presentational. "Interpersonal" refers to spoken or written communication among two or more parties, while "interpretive" is one-way communication in which one receives information orally or in writing. "Presentational" is also one-way, but one gives information to others, as in the case of a speech or report. "Cultures" encourages proficiency in the knowledge of the target culture. Defining "culture" in terms of "products," "practices," and "perspectives," the Standards advocate an understanding of relationships among the three through learning the target language. Aiming at interdisciplinary learning through FL learning, "Connections" promotes the idea that FL learning serves as a learning activity that can contribute to and benefit from knowledge necessary in other disciplines.

Knowledge of FL's allows students to make comparisons, evaluate alternative viewpoints, and re-evaluate their own language and culture from other perspectives. "Comparisons" stresses acquiring these powerful skills through learning FL. Lastly, "Communities" puts FL learning in a broader context, pinpointing the importance of prolonged engagement in FL learning and the benefits of possessing FL skills in today's global society. Thus, this goal area recognizes that it is essential that U.S. students continue FL study in order to increase their opportunities for participating in multilingual communities.

With the Standards establishing the direction of future FL education in the U.S., in the 1990's, many FL educators striving to integrate the Standards into classroom instruction turned their attention to rapidly developing Internet technology (Gongl weski, 1999; Walz, 1998). Chun and Plass (2000) attribute the high expectations of networked computers to "the universal availability of authentic materials" and "communication capabilities through networking" (p. 161).

Research has shown how computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as e-mail enables the learners to communicate with others in the target language beyond temporal and physical constraints, corresponding to Communication Standard 1.1—interpersonal communication. Van Handle and Crol (1998) assert that CMC expands the horizon of traditional instruction by offering learners more opportunities to practice their communication skills in the target language. Aisiselmi (1999) argues that the authenticity of communication in CMC is a motivating factor for learners, facilitating more active participation in interpersonal communication.

The Internet's multimedia capabilities also allow the delivery of authentic reading and listening materials in different genres and styles, enabling learners to practice interpretive communication (Communication Standard 1.2) (Gonglewski, 1999). Brandl (2002) acknowledges this advantage and proposes three types of reading-focused activities on the Web. Moreover, the Web “provides an environment in which learners can publish their own information aimed at a real audience consisting of other users of the [Web]” (Harrison, 1998, p. 441). In other words, as a place of publication, the Web can help address Communication Standard 1.3, i.e., presentational communication, by letting learners' present information in the target language to people around the world (Ishida & Omoto, 2002).

The Internet can also address the Cultures standards by linking learners with native speakers and authentic materials, thereby helping learners to better understand the relationship among products, practices and perspectives of the target culture, as encouraged by the Standards. Speedier than letters and less expensive than the telephone, CMC makes intercultural interactions and access to first-hand information possible, allowing cross-cultural learning beyond what traditional materials can offer (Kern, 1998). The Web is also believed to function in the same way as CMC, since “quick access to cultural artifacts and authentic multimedia documents [on the Web] in the target language ... enables cross-cultural learning in revolutionary ways” (Van Handle, Ayres, Cimino, Dunn, Foell, and McCarthy, 2001, p. 10). Examining Web-based cultural activities in college-level Spanish classes, Osuna and Meskill (1998) found that students believed their knowledge of the culture increased through

the activities, and that the Internet positively impacted their cultural learning. Hertel (2003) also found increased cultural awareness among 13 first-year college Spanish students in the U.S. after e-mail exchanges with Mexican college students. The comparison between the pre- and post-surveys indicates that the students became more open to the Mexican culture and more critical about their own as a result of exposure to Mexican culture through the e-mail exchanges. The Internet easily allows learners to collect information that can be used to make connections with other subject areas and to compare the target language and culture to their own (Ady, 1999). Gnglewski (1999) argues that the richness of information available on the Internet affords learners at all levels access to resources in the target language for interdisciplinary learning. For example, Walz (1998) describes possible Web-based activities in which eighth-grade students conduct science experiments introduced in a French Web site and present them in their science classes.

Authentic use of language and materials through the Internet also seems to promote the Comparisons goal area by inspiring learners to notice various perspectives through comparisons between the target language/culture and their own. Torii-Williams (2004) conducted an e-mail exchange project between her third-year Japanese students in the U.S. and native speakers of Japanese. She found that her students became more aware of linguistic differences between English and Japanese through trying to appropriately convey their thoughts in Japanese. Finger (2001) reports how a virtual job search achieved Comparisons in a first-year German course at an American university. Students utilized German Web sites to obtain information about applying for jobs in Germany, such as how to make a résumé in German style. As they collected the information, they compared their understanding of job searches in Germany to their experiences in their own culture.

As a medium of communication as well as a tool for information gathering and sharing, the Internet can facilitate learners' participation in a multilingual community, which suggests the Internet's promising role in addressing the "Communities" goal area. LeLoup and Ponterio (1996) claim that the Web's ability to offer current ma-

terials in the target languages allows FL learners to continue learning even after they stop taking classes. When used outside of the classroom, Leh (1997) maintains that the use of CMC can motivate learners to use the target language not only for intellectual training but also for personal enjoyment and enrichment through contact with speakers of the target language.

In sum, the Standards articulate the direction of foreign language education in the U.S. The existing research argues in favor of the Internet as a tool to facilitate standards-oriented foreign language teaching and learning (Phillips, 1998). The Internet, in the form of CMC and the Web, provides learners with: (1) an increased opportunity to interact with others in the target language in the cross-cultural context as well as beyond the school setting, (2) a place to present their products to the world, and (3) easy and inexpensive access to authentic materials in a variety of topics. These features of the Internet are believed to assist standards-based foreign language education. Issue (1) possibly embraces Communication, Cultures, and Communities. Issue (2) implies that the Internet may contribute to addressing presentational communication under Communication. Issue (3) suggests that the Web may lend itself to attaining standards under Cultures, Connections, and Comparisons because the Web allows teachers and learners to obtain culturally rich materials and information on issues in other disciplines in the target language. These materials possibly make it easy to integrate cultural and linguistic comparisons into classroom activities.

In spite of the many claims regarding the possible role of the Internet in achieving the goals set by the Standards, empirical research in this venue has just begun. Walz (1998) states: “[Foreign language teachers] are now more likely to be held accountable and recognized for what we teach and what our students learn” (p. 103). As the Standards become pivotal for the future growth of foreign language learning in the U.S., and as researchers investigate how technology can assist meeting the Standards, the result will inform FL educators of ways to enhance their teaching practice and enrich their students’ learning experiences. This study reported here aims to address this issue by examining how the Internet can contribute to foreign language learning using the Standards as a conceptual framework.

The Study

This article reports one part of a larger study that examined Japanese learners who participated in an Internet-based newspaper project. The original study qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed their production and experiences in relation to the Japanese Standards. The study discussed here focuses on exploring selected students' experiences in the project using a case study approach with cross-case analysis in an effort to illuminate how the Internet impacted students' learning experiences and how they can be related to the Japanese Standards.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in a fourth-year Japanese course at a large state university in the Midwestern U.S. between January and May 2003. The class met for 50 minutes three times a week. On Mondays and Wednesdays, students alternately read two books: *Let's Learn about Japan* (Miura & Watt, 2001), which features Japanese historical figures in the early twentieth century, and a novel, *Kitchen* (Yoshimoto, 1998). On Fridays, the students participated in an Internet-based newspaper project (project) implemented for this study.¹

For the case studies, six students were selected from the ten enrolled in the course based on two criteria: proficiency in Japanese (high, middle, and low) and attitudes toward the project and computer use for learning Japanese (positive and negative). To determine the students' proficiency levels, my research assistant and I evaluated their performance in class and their e-mail messages and ranked them, using scales developed for the study.² These scales are five-point scales with 1 being the lowest level (novice) and 5 being the highest (advanced).

The students' attitudes were measured by a questionnaire administered at the beginning of the project.³ The questionnaire contained 29 items about specific areas of Japanese language learning that the project addressed as well as attitudes towards using the Internet and computers to learn Japanese. To determine attitudes, I

calculated each candidate's mean score on the questionnaire. The mean scores of the candidates were relatively high, ranging from 3.54 to 4.82. I ranked the scores and divided them higher scores, labeled "Positive" and lower scores, labeled "Negative." Thus, the distinctions between "Positive" and "Negative" were determined relatively, i.e., how high or low each student score was in the entire group.

Finally, I combined the attitude results with the evaluation of the proficiency level to choose six students who exhibited different patterns in two domains, such as high proficiency and positive attitudes and low proficiency and positive attitudes. This selection method ensured a wide range of variation within the phenomenon of interest (Bradley & Lomicka, 2000). The six students were four female students (Mi-Ae, Amy, Kate, and Julie) and two male students (Luke and Mark) whose ages ranged from 20 to 22 years old. Amy, Kate, Julie, and Mark were seniors, Mi-Ae was a junior, and Luke was a sophomore. Mi-Ae is Korean, and the rest are American. Table 1 presents the six selected students' profiles. Information about computing skills in Japanese and experience in Japan came from students' self-evaluations on the questionnaire.

Table 1
Profiles of Six Students

	Profi- ciency	Attitude	Computing Skills in Japanese				Experience in Japan
			Email	Web	Chat	Word Proc- essing	
Mi- Ae	High	Positive	○	○	○	○	2 few- month stays
Luke	High	Negative	☆	☆	No	◎	2 few-week stays
Amy	Mid	Positive	△	○	No	○	1 year
Kate	Mid	Negative	No	No	No	No	6 months
Julie	Low	Positive	◎	◎	◎	◎	1 year
Mark	Low	Negative	No	No	No	△	No at first, but later one-week stay

Note. ☆: Excellent, ◎: Very Good, ○: Good, △: Fair, No: No experience with a tool.

Procedures of the Internet-Based Newspaper Project

Before students began the project activities, they participated in a researcher-led workshop and learned necessary computer skills such as how to use the Web and e-mail in Japanese. An online dictionary called Reading Tutor (Kawamura, Kitamura, & Hobara, 1997–2004) was also introduced to facilitate the students' reading. When Japanese text is input into Reading Tutor, the program generates a vocabulary list with a hyperlink between each word in the text and its meaning in the list. Thus, learners can check words by simply clicking hyperlinked words in the text. Figures 1 and 2 show the input screen and the output screen of Reading Tutor, respectively.

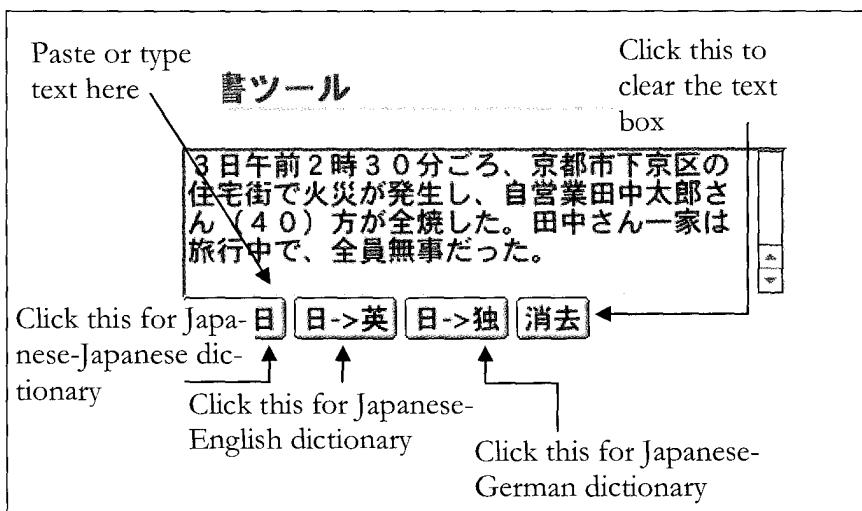


Figure 1. *Input screen of Reading Tutor.*

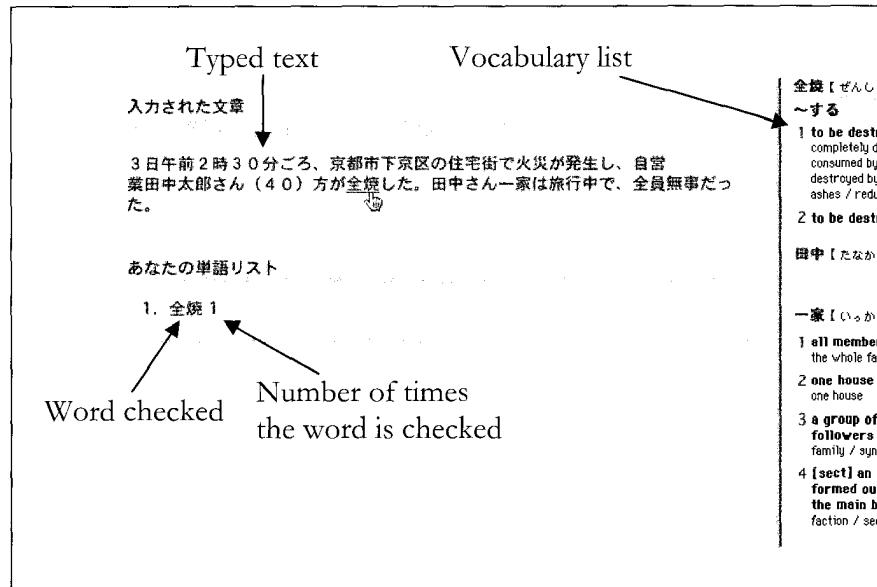


Figure 2. Output screen of Reading Tutor.

After the computer laboratory session, the full-scale project began. The project consisted of two major components. In one component, students read and discussed authentic Japanese newspaper articles taken from the Web (see Table 2 for the list of articles). They read different articles approximately every two to three weeks and wrote short summaries of them in Japanese. They also read the assigned article together in class to check reading comprehension.

Table 2
Assigned Newspaper Articles in the Project

Week	Title
2, 3	Cloned human being: Name is “Eve”: Newly-risen religious group officially announced the birth (December 28, 2002, Mainichi, Society)
5, 6	Service dogs: “Disabled Assistant Dogs Bill” started being discussed: Welfare Labor Committee (April 5, 2002, Mainichi, Politics)
7	Life-long learning, women are targets (December 20, 2002, Sankei, Financial)
11, 12	Looks like JR West set up women-only train cars following Keio Train, but isn’t it male discrimination? (March 20, 2002, asahi.com discussion board “Let me say a word” Society/Politics/Financial) Women-only cars on the Midōsuji Line (November 11, 2002, Sankei, Society)
12	“Spirited Away” entered the Academy Award Featured Animation (December 12, 2002, Sankei, Culture and Entertainment) Crown to “Spirited Away” The Academy Award (March 24, 2003, Sankei, Culture and Entertainment) “Spirited Away” box-office profits increased by expanded release (March 30, 2003, Sankei, Culture and Entertainment)

The assigned articles were selected prior to the course so that students knew in advance what to expect in the project. The newspapers were selected from two major Japanese newspapers Web sites, Mainichi Interactive and Sankei Web.⁴ Sankei gave permission to post copies of their articles on the project Web site, and at that time Mainichi Interactive archived their articles for up to two years. A posting from a discussion board at another major newspaper Web site, Asahi.com, was also selected as an opinion article.⁵

After reading the articles in class, the students completed two assignments. One was to choose articles that interested them from online Japanese newspapers, read them, summarize them, and write reactions. Each student read two self-selected articles during the project. The second assignment was to exchange opinions about the as-

signed articles by e-mail with native speakers of Japanese (e-mail partners) who also read the articles. The e-mail partners were five female undergraduate students and two female graduate students studying Japanese pedagogy in Japan. They were recruited through their professors.

Another component of the project was online newspaper publication. Using a process writing approach (Barnett, 1989), the students wrote articles individually. In the seventh week, they chose topics corresponding to newspaper sections (e.g., international, sports) and wrote article outlines. Then, the students produced drafts of their articles and sent them to their e-mail partners and received feedback on the content. They revised the articles and submitted the final drafts in the thirteenth week of the semester.

Finally, in the fourteenth week, the articles were published on the Web in a class newspaper. They shared the online class newspaper with their peers as well as their e-mail partners. Then, the project was completed by students' five-minute oral presentations of their articles on the last two days of the semester. Table 3 presents the schedule of the project during the 15-week semester.

Table 3
Schedule of the Internet-Based Newspaper Project

Week	Reading & Discussion of Authentic Newspapers	Publication of Online Class Newspaper
1	Lab session: Japanese computing Self-introduction to e-mail partners	
2	Read “human cloning” in class Discuss “human cloning” with e-mail partners	
3	Discuss “human cloning” in small-group and whole class	
5	Read “service dogs bill” in class Discuss “service dogs bill” with e-mail partners	
6	Discuss “service dog bill” in small group and whole class	
7	Reading and discuss “life-long learning” in class	
9		Decide topic of article Write article outline Write 1st draft of article
11	Read and discuss “women-only train cars” in whole class Discuss “women-only train cars” with e-mail partners	Receive feedback on 1 st draft of article from e-mail partners
12	Read “Spirited Away” articles Discuss “women-only train cars” in small group and whole class	Write final draft of article
13		Share class newspaper with e-mail partners
14		Read class newspaper
15		Present article in class

Data Collection

The study primarily drew upon the data collected from 24 semi-structured interviews (four interviews per student). The interviews took place approximately once a month and asked about students' prior experience with the Internet in Japanese, the project's influence on their learning, and reflection on their experiences (see Appendix for interview questions).

Additional data were collected from taped observations of in-class discussions, 83 e-mail messages exchanged between the students and their e-mail partners, and writing assignments. E-mail messages were collected by having them carbon copied to me. Sixteen whole-class discussions and nine small-group discussions were tape- and video-recorded and supplemented by notes I took during the observations. The writing assignments included 17 summaries of assigned articles, eight summaries and opinions of articles of the students' choice, 15 early drafts and six final drafts of the online newspaper articles.

Data Analysis

I analyzed each of the six students by closely reviewing data from him or her and constructed a rich description of his or her experience in the project. It served as within-case analysis (Creswell, 1998). Once I analyzed and described the six cases, I conducted a cross-case analysis to find patterns, if any, across them. I employed the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to identify the impact of the project in general and that of each activity on the six students' experiences. Finally, I examined findings in terms of the Japanese Standards by looking for students' experiences that were relevant to the five goal areas (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) and 11 content standards of the Japanese Standards. For instance, when students mentioned the project's influence on the development of their reading ability, I

linked their remarks in the interviews with Communication Standard 1.2 (interpretive communication).

To ensure reliability of the study, data sources were triangulated (Merriam, 1998). To enhance internal validity, I conducted peer review with my research assistant as well as member checks in which the six students were asked to comment on the analysis. The research assistant reviewed my analysis and provided me with feedback on possible misinterpretation of data or insufficient accounts of it. We discussed discrepancies between my interpretation and his so that our final opinions were in accord. Similarly, I asked each of the six students to read the comments on the write-up of his or her case and cross-case analysis. All of them provided me with feedback including their agreement with my interpretations and more explanations of their remarks in the interviews. I carefully examined their comments and incorporated them into the final write-up.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the six students' experiences suggests that the project was effective in addressing three content standards in particular: Communication Standard 1.2 and Communities Standards 5.1 and 5.2.

The interviews with the six students revealed that reading Japanese newspapers had the most salient influence on their experiences in the project, suggesting that the project helped to advance the students' skills at interpretive communication, i.e., Communication Standard 1.2. Because Japanese newspapers and other authentic texts have a large amount of unknown vocabulary and Chinese characters (*kanji*), the six students uniformly considered reading Japanese newspapers to be one of the most intimidating and difficult tasks for foreign learners of Japanese. Julie had had first-hand experience: "When I was in Japan, I thought I would try to [read the newspaper] every day. Every day, there were many things I didn't understand ... so ... I quickly got tired of it" (#1, 2/5/03, translated from Japanese).⁶ Kate was worried about the project mainly because she knew too few *kanji* to read authentic texts: "I was intimidated to start looking at those [newspaper] Web sites.... I swear, I look at that screen and it's all

kanji and I just want to crawl under the table” (#1, 2/11/03). Even Luke, a highly-proficient learner said he “was really … apprehensive about reading newspapers. [It] seems like [it’s] really impossible” (#1, 2/8/03).

Nevertheless, the six students acknowledged that reading authentic articles was their most positive experience during the project. This result sharply contrasts with Kubota’s (1999) finding that unfamiliar *kanji* and vocabulary in Japanese web pages discouraged her students from participating in technology-enhanced projects. The difference in results is probably due to Reading Tutor: except for Mi-Ae, who used an online Japanese-Korean dictionary, all attributed their positive experience to Reading Tutor. Looking up every word and *kanji* in paper dictionaries takes time, in turn, discouraging Japanese learners from reading authentic texts. Reading Tutor considerably reduces the amount of work by automatically checking words in a given text and creating a vocabulary list for the user. As a result, “it made [reading newspaper articles] a lot faster because I don’t have to look up every single character that I don’t know, and then look up the compound” (Julie, #1, 2/5/03). Kate, who initially felt intimidated by the project, expressed similar feelings: “It makes my life a lot more bearable. It takes me hours to look everything up in an article. But using Tutor really speeds that up … I can find out the words I don’t know a lot more quickly. I don’t have to spend five minutes trying to find right characters, and that’s helped a lot” (#1, 2/11/03).

As described above, the students’ experiences showed that the project was successful in helping them develop interpretive communication skills, as addressed in Communication Standard 1.2, and the Internet played an essential role in addressing this content standard. By introducing them to Reading Tutor and Japanese newspapers on the Web, the project lowered the barrier of unknown vocabulary and *kanji*, making it easier for them to read authentic newspapers. Harrison (1998) points out that “it is necessary to help [learners] bridge the gap between their existing level of language and the authentic language they will encounter” (p. 450) on the Internet. Reading Tutor served as this “bridge” and assisted the students in their endeavor to read authentic newspaper articles.

Some of the students' experiences also correspond to the Communities goal area. As discussed above, the students indicated that they felt more comfortable reading Japanese newspaper articles due to the project. This experience motivated some students to read other printed and electronic materials on their own, which accords with Communities Standard 5.1 (use of Japanese within and outside the classroom). For instance, when Mark went to Japan in March, he tried reading the newspaper in Japanese at the hotel: "I go down [to] the hotel [lobby] every day and I'd say 'The Japanese-language Yomi-uri Shinbun, please' ... I maybe read the headline and like 'OK, I kinda get that.' And then maybe trying to read an article or two ... I think it was easier than I thought that would be. Maybe I understood, maybe 30% or maybe 35%" (#3, 3/31/03). Similarly, Amy started reading Web sites of her favorite Japanese bands and books she had purchased in Japan. She proudly stated, "I tried reading [the books]. And I think I understand maybe 70 or 80%" (#2, 2/26/03).

Because she felt more comfortable reading authentic texts, Kate ended up reading an extra, unassigned article while completing a homework assignment. She had chosen Japan's policy on Iraq as a topic and read an article reporting that Japan's prime minister wanted to support both the U.S. and other countries although they had conflicting policies. Wondering how it would be possible, she "wanted to know more about how they're justifying that" (#2, 2/27/03) and read another article on her own. In the assignment, she articulated her opinions about the prime minister's position:

In Japan, there seems to be a complex relationship between the previous Japan-American war and the current Japan-American alliance. After that war, even if Japan wants peace and doesn't have military forces, the U.S. always needs to involve Japan. For example, [regarding] the current attack against Iraq, the Japan[ese] prime minister said, "We make efforts to balance between the importance of the Japan-American alliance and international cooperation." In another Japanese article, the prime minister [said] "International cooperation is important [when it comes to] Iraq." But I wonder how this can be done. The world seems to gradually have two [different] opinions, so even if

Japan wants to agree with France's opinions, I think [Japan] probably [ends up] supporting the U.S. If [Japan] doesn't do so, [I think] that Japan-U.S. alliance becomes nothing.

(Kate's summary and opinion, 2/21/03,
translated from Japanese)

In addition, reading real newspaper articles gave Luke topics to discuss with Japanese people outside the classroom. He said, "Unless we were doing the newspaper projects ... that issue [we read in the newspaper] wouldn't have been brought up in class" (#4, 5/2/03). He added, "being able to read these articles gave [the students in class] something to talk about with other Japanese people" (#4, 5/2/03). That is, the topics were more relevant in that they could be brought up in ordinary conversations. Indeed, Luke had a chance to be engaged in "ordinary conversations" at his workplace where he had daily contact with native speakers of Japanese with whom he "talk[ed] about something [we had brought up] in class all the time" (#4, 5/2/03).

Furthermore, the publication of the class newspaper on the Web seems to address the Communities Standard 5.1 by providing the students with the opportunity to present information pertinent to themselves (i.e., their school and the local town) in Japanese not only to their teacher and classmates but also to the world. The students wrote individual articles either about their school or about the surrounding town. While some students thought writing about their school and the local town would not be much of learning experience, others considered it as a chance to learn "something VITAL and that's the ability to communicate more about who we are and where we've come from in Japanese" (Kate, #2, 2/27/03).

For instance, Julie, who was volunteering to teach English to two Korean children at a local school, chose to write about English-as-a-Second-Language programs in the local community. She stated, "It's important to be able to explain these things" because "when [she] was [in Japan], [she] was always explaining something about where [she] was from" (#3, 4/2/03). Through the process of writing

an article in Japanese, the project enhanced skills that she considered to be essential: the ability to discuss things relevant to her in Japanese. Other students also presented their interests through online publication of articles: Kate, a member of a sorority, wrote about sororities and fraternities on campus, while Amy, a musician, discussed the local music scene, and Luke talked about basketball, his and local people's favorite sport. Through web publishing as part of this project, these articles became available to anyone with Internet access. Thus, they communicated with audiences outside the classroom, and this allowed them to achieve Communities Standard 5.1, a result in line with the research of Ishida and Omoto (2002).

The Communities goal area encourages learners to go beyond the school setting as users of the language they learn. The second standard under this goal area advocates that the students use the target language for personal enjoyment and enrichment. Amy's case shows how the project's e-mail exchange addressed this standard by enabling her to build a personal relationship with a native speaker of Japanese living in Japan. The exchanges below exemplify this. In a prior exchange, Amy wrote that she played an instrument at a coffee shop, and Mika asked which instrument it was. In a reply on February 3, Amy wrote:

I usually played guitar, but I'm playing an instrument called a whistle these days. A whistle may not be a very famous instrument, but it is fun. On my home page, my whistle music can be recorded: [URL]. Please listen to it if you'd like! (The file is in the middle of the page). (translated from Japanese)

Mika wrote back to Amy, telling her: "I listened to the sound of a whistle on your home page! It's a very mysterious sound. I like this sound" (2/5/03, translated from Japanese). This set of e-mail messages illustrates the personal interaction that took place between them through sharing music.

The personal exchange continued to develop. On February 3, Amy asked if Mika had read *Kitchen*. In her reply on February 5, Mika

wrote that she had never read it, but she would. Then, on February 22, Mika wrote to Amy:

By the way, through your influence, I read Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen* the other day. It was really interesting. I thought it was a deep novel. It seems to have become one of the most important books in my life. Thank you very much for introducing a good book to me! (translated from Japanese)

Amy replied: "I'm happy because you read *Kitchen*! Thank you very much!.... When I read that you had become fond of this book, I was really glad" (2/27/03, translated from Japanese). About this episode, Amy said: "I thought it was really cool.... That's something that I do with my friends all the time, like, 'I read this book and it's really great' or 'I heard this new CD. You should go and check it out'" (#3, 4/2/03).

Amy and Mika became even closer as the influence became two-way. In a message on February 27, Amy asked Mika what kind of music she liked. Mika named a Japanese band in her reply. Although Amy had never heard of the band before, she "went and got some MP3s of the band she mentioned. They're a lot of fun" (#3, 4/2/03). This time, Mika influenced Amy by introducing a new band. Amy valued this experience and stated, "That's like something I would've never known about if I hadn't been e-mailing her" (#3, 4/2/03).

Cheaper than telephone calls and faster than letters, e-mail makes communication with native speakers more accessible (Kern, 1998). Amy's experience demonstrates that e-mail exchanges gave her a valuable opportunity for social interaction with a native speaker who was otherwise unavailable. Amy built a friendly relationship with Mika through sharing what they liked. This finding exemplifies the social presence in e-mail (Leh, 1997) that "contributes to an important part of [learners'] language learning experience in a real-world setting instead of in a traditional classroom environment" (Lee, 2004, p. 96). In other words, Amy's case suggests the project's possibility of

addressing Communities Standard 5.2, “Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using Japanese for personal enjoyment and enrichment,” in that she had a friendly relationship with her e-mail partner through personal exchanges about novels and music.

Moreover, Luke, Kate, and Mark also valued their experiences with the Internet during the project because they learned about tools and resources they could use for personal enrichment and future Japanese language learning. Through exposure to the Internet in Japanese, Mark realized its value as a source of authentic Japanese. In particular, he started to see the Web as a tool for independent learning: “If you have a Web site with new articles or new news that you can access really fairly easily . . . then you don’t need to be taught if you want to” (#2, 2/28/03). It seems that he began doing his own independent learning: “I listened to news on the Web site, which is really cool . . . I wanna try it everyday. For at least . . . ten minutes” (#3, 3/31/03). Furthermore, he transferred computing skills and resources that he learned in the project to another course: “Right now, I’m doing a report from another class [which took him to Japan in March] and I’m using Google search engine and Lycos dictionary [in Japanese]” (#4, 4/29/03).

Kate also emphasized that “becoming more comfortable with Japanese on the Internet has been a very valuable resource” (#4, 5/2/03). In her opinion, the project was especially useful in that it helped her become an independent learner:

I feel like using the Internet is a great way to do that . . . just because the online dictionary makes it a much more accessible thing. I don’t automatically look at articles and think that there’s no way I can approach them, I don’t have time to mess with it. . . . I feel like I’ll be willing to devote the time, knowing that it’s manageable. I think that’s particularly due to this project. (#4, 5/2/03)

These findings indicate that the project afforded the students opportunities to become familiar with the Internet “as a valuable learning tool offering updated information in comparison to printed resources” (Osuna & Meskill, 1998, p. 75). It also taught them that

the Internet could support their independent study of Japanese. Such awareness agrees with the Communities goal area, that learners should continue to be engaged in Japanese language learning throughout their lives. Harrison (1998) maintains that the Web allows learners to control their own learning since they can use the Web as a means to find information based on their own interests and goals. The project highlighted this aspect of the Web to the students and successfully addressed the Communities goal area.

Considering the fact that the project was conducted in the last Japanese course that the students could take at their university, the strong presence of the Communities goal area may be significant. Foreign language knowledge enriches one's future professional and personal lives. The Communities goal area promotes prolonged engagement in FL learning. The link between this goal area and the project implies that the project gave the students experiences that might set them out on continued use and study of the Japanese language. Goglewski (1999) points out that “[before] Internet resources made [second language] materials so readily available, students were tempted to drop the notion of using the [second language] once classes were finished” (p. 360). Learning how the Internet could help them study Japanese, the students who participated in this project will not suffer the lack of opportunities to maintain or improve their skills in Japanese, unlike those described by Goglewski.

While the findings suggest the success of the Internet-based newspaper project particularly in addressing Communication Standard 1.2 and Communities Standards 5.1 and 5.2, the cross-case analysis of the six students also highlighted a less positive experience which deserves attention.

It was found that Mi-Ae had a considerably more negative experience in the project than others. She initially expressed excitement about the project, stating: “I think it helps everything [about learning Japanese]” (#1, 2/4/03). She particularly anticipated exposure to “a lot of use of real Japanese” and “example and [let her] imitate them” (#1, 2/4/03) through the project. With high expectations, Mi-Ae tried taking advantage of the project, including e-mail exchanges with a native speaker. She voluntarily e-mailed her e-mail

partner, Keiko, twice in the first few weeks when none of her peers did, showing her enthusiasm for communicating with a native speaker.

As the project proceeded, however, Mi-Ae's excitement gradually diminished. First, she negatively viewed small-group discussions. Even though she participated in group discussions, talking for roughly one third of the total turns in a group (38.6% while discussing human cloning, 21.6% about a possible law relating to service dogs, and 33.2% while discussing women-only train cars), she thought "it doesn't help much [with my speaking] 'cause ... we're same learners right now, so we have the limitation of using vocabs and grammar" (#2, 2/25/03).

E-mail exchanges did not meet Mi-Ae's expectations either. Although she actively e-mailed Keiko at the beginning, she later became less enthusiastic about the activity. For instance, when she received praise on her article draft from Keiko ("I think it's a well-written article! I wouldn't be able to write such high-level sentences in Russian [which she was studying] as well as you did"), Mi-Ae was disappointed: "She told me that 'Why just don't you change to katakana from all English [inaudible].' That's the only comment I got from her, actually. So ... she didn't give me much help" (#4, 4/24/03).

Comparing her case to others indicates that Mi-Ae's dissatisfaction may stem from her prior experience. Unlike the other five students who studied Japanese from classroom instruction most of the time, Mi-Ae started studying Japanese in Japan where she immersed herself in authentic use of the language. This experience led to her strong belief that immersion and direct access to authentic Japanese are keys to successful Japanese language learning. With this background, she seemed to think that the project did not have much to offer her in terms of her language development. Even the e-mail exchange with a native speaker was not enough to meet her high expectations.

Belz (2002) suggests that familiarity with the target language and culture prior to such a project as this may influence what learners expect and how learners perceive the learning outcome. Blyth (1999) reports the effect of students' prior beliefs on the evaluation of technology-enhanced activities. In his study, U.S. college students in

beginning-level French courses tended to view French study solely as grammar and vocabulary acquisition, criticizing the lack of focus on language structure in the activities. Although Mi-Ae's belief is not the same as that of Blyth's students, her case corresponds to Blyth's finding that a mismatch between what students believe and what technology-enhanced activities can offer negatively affect the student's experiences. It indicates the need to communicate reasonable expectations for the project by emphasizing its content, objectives, and contributions to language study more explicitly, as Blyth (1999) suggests.

Conclusions

The six students' experiences examined in this study suggest that the Internet-based newspaper project was particularly strong in helping the students develop reading skills in Japanese and allowing them to use Japanese beyond the classroom. In other words, the project was successful in attaining Communication Standard 1.2 (interpretive communication) and Communities Standards 5.1 (use of Japanese within and outside the classroom) and 5.2 (use of Japanese for personal enjoyment and becoming a life-long learner). That is, by utilizing a dictionary tool and resources available online, the project engaged the students in interpretive communication and helped them to recognize Japanese language learning beyond the classroom. As today's students are more accustomed to the Internet than ever through using it at home and at school, the integration of the Internet into the FL classroom provides students with a familiar, appealing learning tool. In addition, such Internet-based projects can be great opportunities for students to develop the electronic literacy that is necessary to live in today's information society (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000).

While this study shed some light on the possible role of the Internet in the application of the Standards to practice, some limitations should be noted. First, the limited context of the study calls for some caution about the generalization of results. It is necessary to replicate similar research in various settings and with learners from

different backgrounds. Such research enables us to better understand how the Internet can support the standards-based classroom.

Second, this study focused on exploring the students' experiences rather than measuring the impact of the project on their proficiency. If research can show that such Internet implementation based on the Standards can help learners improve their proficiency better than other methods, the argument for the integration of the Standards using the Internet will be strengthened. Therefore, future research is needed in order to fully investigate this issue.

Lastly, future research should consider other CMC, since different media may influence interactions among participants. This study intentionally used e-mail because one-on-one, asynchronous interaction in e-mail would be easier for the students to handle than interaction in other CMC forms such as Bulletin Board and Chat Room systems. Although I believe e-mail was the best choice for this study, e-mail may have limited students' interpersonal connections with their e-mail partners. Utilizing other CMC tools could have resulted in different student experiences. Thus, more research is called for to explore how other CMC can facilitate standards-oriented projects and influence students' experiences.

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Appendix

Questions of Semi-Structured Interviews with Six Selected Students

First Interview

1. Have you ever used the Internet to learn Japanese? Why or why not? If “Yes,” how?
2. What have you done so far?
3. In what ways do you think the project might help you become more capable in Japanese? Can you give me an example? (vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, kanji)
4. Has the project influenced vocabulary/comprehension/fluency/kanji/accuracy in any way? Can you give me an example?
5. Someone told you, “I want to take J402. Could you tell me about projects you are doing?” What would you tell that person?
6. What do you think might be positive and negative about the project? Can you give me an example?
7. This project involves e-mail, the Internet, and working in groups to produce your own Internet newspaper. How important to your learning do you think these activities are compared to other ways you learn? Could you explain why and give me an example?

Second Interview

1. Through participating in the online newspaper project, what benefits have you seen?
2. Some of your classmates say that the project:
 - (a) Helps learn kanji because there are fewer steps involved when reading online with Tutor.
 - (b) Lets them read faster, concentrate more on the

- content, and motivates to read more with Tutor.
- (c) Exposes them to good examples, different types of things and vocabulary in the context.
 - (d) Lets them discuss abstract topics using newly learned vocabulary in small group discussions; listening exercise to see if they understand what others say.
 - (e) Provides by email “real” “genuine” communication with a real Japanese; intermediate step between writing and speaking.
 - (f) Lets them be more independent; introduces to ways to learn Japanese after the course ends or in future.
 - (g) Gives different perspectives than those of the U.S. by reading newspaper articles and communicating pen pals.
 - (h) Is the closest thing to going to Japan without actually going there.

What do you think about this comment?

- 3. What concerns do you have regarding the online newspaper project?
- 4. Some of your classmates say that the online newspaper project:
 - (a) May not retain kanji longer than using a dictionary.
 - (b) Needs more discussion because we all read the articles before class.
 - (c) Listening to non-native speakers doesn't help with speaking.
 - (d) E-mail doesn't help speaking because it's writing.
 - (e) Doesn't help learn Japanese culture because we're writing about the local town.

What do you think about this comment?

- 5. Please take a look at this (I'm going to show a list of the National Standards' 5Cs on page What one the list do you think has appeared in each activity of the online newspaper project (email, reading newspaper articles, etc.)? Can you give me an example?

Third Interview

1. What is your topic?
2. How did you come to choose the topic?
3. What else did you consider?
4. How did your pen pal fit into what you choose?
5. How did the Japanese newspaper readings fit into what you chose?
6. Did your project teach you anything new?
7. Did your project extend anything you had already learned?
8. What similarities and differences between Japan or Japanese and the U.S. and English did the project touch upon?

Fourth Interview

1. Could you tell me your overall evaluation of J402 newspaper project? What in the project do you think the most and least beneficial to you? Please give me 1–2 example(s).
2. Some people say that activities with the Internet such as J402 newspaper project help students improve their communication skills and that it ultimately contributes to building a community among students and native speakers of Japanese. Based on your experience, what do you think about this? Please give me 1–2 example(s).
3. Some people say that activities with the Internet such as J402 newspaper project are a good way to learn about Japanese culture and reflect on cultural differences between Japan and the U.S. (or your native country). Based on your experience, what do you think about this? Please give me 1–2 example(s).
4. Some people say that it is important to incorporate other subject matters, such as politics, geography, into Japanese language learning and that this can be achieved by using the Internet such as J402 newspaper project Based on your experience, what do you think about this? Please give me 1–2 example(s).

Endnotes

¹ The design of the project was modeled after activities developed by Ishida and Omoto (2002).

² Refer to Fukai (2004) for more details about the rating scales for students' in-class performance (i.e., speaking) and e-mail messages.

³ More descriptions of the questionnaire are discussed in Fukai (2004).

⁴ The URLs of the newspapers are as follows.

Mainichi Interactive: <http://www.mainichi-msn.com>

Sankei Web: <http://www.sankei.co.jp>

Asahi.com: <http://www.asahi.com>

Yomiuri On-Line: <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp>

⁵ This discussion board has been closed.

⁶ The number after a sharp (#) indicates the interview number of each student.