

Claire's case: Introducing E-learning into a Japanese University EFL Class

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Abstract

The use of digital technology to provide learning materials and activities to students (e-learning) in EFL is rapidly expanding and there are many resources that show teachers how to use digital devices and software tools to do this. There are, however, relatively few research studies that describe and evaluate how an individual teacher has integrated e-learning within a specific context. This article reports on research that attempts to bridge that gap by showing how one EFL teacher in a Japanese university, Claire, introduced e-learning into her teaching. It details the reasons why she wanted to use e-learning, provides examples of her teaching activities and the technology that she used, and describes the challenges that teaching with technology presented to her pedagogy. It is hoped that this narrative case study will be part of a growing number of shared reports that will be useful to other teachers and institutions who might wish to experiment with their own approaches to e-learning, especially teachers who are relative novices at using digital technology in the classroom.

Keywords: *case study, digital technology, EFL, e-learning*

1. Introduction

The use of digital technology to provide learning materials and activities to students (e-learning) in EFL is rapidly changing from well-equipped CALL laboratories towards internet-accessible classrooms and off-campus online learning. Two major reasons for this are the ubiquity of digital devices such as smart phones and tablets and the proliferation of Web 2.0 software tools (ones that allow for interactive and collaborative activities) that are being adapted for learning purposes (Johnson, Adams & Cummins, 2012; Merchant, 2009; Selwyn, 2011). The opportunities for EFL teachers to use e-learning are widening and there are many practical articles, books and web-based texts with ideas and plans showing teachers how they could do this (see Compton, 2009;

Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Dudeney, Hockly & Pegrum, 2013; Motteram, 2013; Prensky, 2010, 2012). There are also an increasing number of academic case studies demonstrating different aspects of language teaching and e-learning. Recent examples include a study by Grgurović (2011) who compares face-to-face classroom learning and online learning in an ESL computer laboratory; Gleason (2013) identifies dilemmas that Spanish teachers face in implementing blended learning; and Smith and Craig (2013) describe action research on independent learning in a CALL environment in Japan. Such studies are invaluable in giving an insider teacher perspective on the process of introducing technology into the classroom, but there are few studies showing how EFL teachers who are inexperienced in e-learning can introduce such practices into their teaching repertoire. This paper attempts to bridge this gap in the practitioner research literature by showing how one EFL teacher, Claire, working in a Japanese university, introduced e-learning into her teaching for the first time. This case study will explore the reasons why Claire wanted to adopt e-learning, details the opportunities and challenges that this presented to her, and provides readers with information from an optimistic but grounded teacher on some of the issues that the use of technology in the EFL classroom raises.

2. Rationale of the study

Before describing the study in detail, we would like to explain how this research began and the roles of the two authors. The authors both teach EFL in Okayama University in western Japan. During the course of a previous project examining e-learning teacher practices (Cowie & Sakui, 2013, 2014), Neil began talking informally to Claire about e-learning and technology. Claire shared that she had just started to use a number of different kinds of digital devices in her classroom and was experimenting with various software tools. The two colleagues agreed that it would be fruitful to work together to understand what was happening as Claire tried out new e-learning ideas in her lessons. Claire's role was to report and reflect on the lessons that she was teaching to provide an emic perspective on the process and Neil's role was to be a supportive research partner to Claire. This paper is the result of the joint description, analysis and evaluation of that research process which tries to answer the following three questions:

Why would Claire want to use e-learning as part of her teaching repertoire?

How did she introduce technology into her pedagogy?

What did she learn about using technology in the classroom?

In investigating these questions, we place ourselves within a 'social constructivist' framework (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). As teacher-researchers we are the instruments of research and in interaction with each other we come to a jointly-constructed meaning making view of reality within our teaching environment. Our findings are 'therefore created interactively rather than discovered from a privileged perspective' (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 341). The findings described below are not the result of an objective

piece of research but are an interpretation of a set of situations and circumstances and not one that will lead to generalised rules or laws. Rather it is a form of narrative inquiry (Bruner, 1990) in which the telling of the story of one teacher's initiation into teaching with digital technology may provide resonance to readers; particularly other teachers who are considering implementing e-learning in their teaching environments for the first time.

3. Data collection and analysis

Data collection took place over a 16-week semester from October 2013 until February 2014. Every week Claire wrote a journal about her class focusing specifically on what technology she used and how she used it. She would reflect on what she was attempting to achieve and how well this worked out in practice. She emailed this journal each week to Neil who would respond with comments and questions that provoked a further cycle of reflections and responses from Claire. Claire and Neil also talked formally together at the beginning, middle and end of the semester and Neil wrote up notes of these meetings. In addition, Neil observed two of Claire's classes and Claire surveyed her students at the beginning and end of the semester about their experience of and attitude towards e-learning.

Neil qualitatively analyzed these different data sources to identify common topics and generate salient categories (Miles & Huberman, 1995; Richards & Morse, 2007). This process took place concurrently as the case study was being carried out so that research questions, topics, categories and analyses were refined in a cumulative, recursive process that went on from beginning to end. Writing up these findings in this paper was also a key part of the overall analysis because, as Hood (2009) points out, 'the actual writing up of the case study report can be considered part of the analytical process – the researcher makes sense of the case herself while simultaneously making sense of it for the audience' (69). The results of this analytical process are shown below after information about the case study approach and research context is given.

4. Methodology

The approach taken in this paper is that of case study, specifically an 'instrumental case study' (Stake, 1995) in which a single case (Claire) is used to investigate specific issues. For this research, the issues are why and how EFL teachers could introduce e-learning and digital technology into their teaching repertoire; and, as Yin (1994) claims (quoted in Zucker, 2009), a case study is a preferred strategy for answering questions of 'why' and 'how' in typical situations. We believe that Claire faces the common issues of why and how to adopt new digital materials and methods into her classroom practice and is a typical case from these two perspectives. We also acknowledge the fact that the two authors are both an integral part of the research process but in using

a qualitative approach we embrace this subjective position as a way of demonstrating insider knowledge (Wolcott, 2008). By clearly explaining the research process we hope that this will both provide a rich context for the analysis and evaluation to follow (Cresswell, 1998) and that this will lend credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rallis & Rossman, 2009) for any claims that we make.

The next section provides such a context by giving a detailed picture of Claire's teaching situation including her lesson aims; student familiarity with technology; and, a description of institutional facilities. In doing so, preliminary answers to research question one emerge (*Why would an EFL teacher want to use e-learning?*). Wherever appropriate, throughout the rest of the paper, illustrative quotations from Claire's teaching journal and emails to Neil are included; the number of the journal or the dates of the email are shown after each quotation.

Study context and subject

Claire has been an EFL teacher in Japan for 12 years in a variety of settings including high school and technical college. At the time of this study she had been teaching at Okayama University for three years. Okayama University is a public university with an annual intake of about 2,500 students spread across twelve different faculties. Each of these students takes four EFL skill-based classes in their first year; they are divided by a placement test into classes of 30 to 45 and are usually in mixed groups of two or three faculties. Claire taught three 'speaking' classes during the second semester of 2013. Each class met once a week for a 90-minute lesson and had 16 lessons in total. There is a guiding framework for these classes but teachers have a great deal of autonomy to choose their own materials and approach. Below are Claire's broad aims for the course:

I want to try to encourage students to take more responsibility for their learning – hopefully at least begin to understand the importance of autonomy in learning, try to give up worrying too much about making mistakes, learn to collaborate and learn more with each other and where possible, at least sometimes enjoy their learning. I don't believe there is or will ever be a methodology that will work well for every student in any class. I try to take an eclectic approach (including blended learning) and I hope that as I become better informed and experienced my students will gain more from this approach.

(Email 28th October 2013)

Claire had almost always used traditional EFL textbooks in her teaching and for two of the three speaking classes she continued to do so. She explained that a good textbook provides a framework and variety of activities with many opportunities for controlled

and free practice that can be monitored by the teacher. However, for the third class Claire chose not to use a textbook but instead wanted to experiment with e-learning and digital technology. It is the experiences in this class alone that are the basis of this paper. This is not a comparison of Claire's three classes to see if using e-learning promotes better outcomes than traditional approaches (although that of course is important) but is a description of and reflection on Claire's story of teaching with technology in one class. One important point to note is that Claire is representative of many language teachers in that she works part-time and has little of the privileges of a full-time teacher in terms of budgets or time for training and development. She is, therefore, a 'typical' teacher with constraints and limitations in how she can learn about and introduce new pedagogy. Claire is reflective of many unsung teachers who experiment with new ideas but do not always have the resources to document them formally. We think, therefore that this record of Claire's experiences is valuable for that reason alone.

Claire had two main reasons for wanting to use e-learning: firstly, she wanted to use technology to provide more language input to her students:

Far too often, especially in Japan, learning English is difficult because there just aren't many opportunities for our students to use English on a daily basis. E-learning can expose our students to a large variety of world Englishes, not just their teacher's English.

(Email 15th January 2014)

A second reason for Claire to use technology was that she believed it could help:

... my students to be more active in their learning, to collaborate more with other students and construct their own paths to learn. I think giving student options (that technology makes available) personalizes their learning, hopefully generating more enthusiasm to learn.

(Lesson 10 Journal)

In sum, Claire wanted to experiment in one of her classes with technology in order to overcome the problems of a lack of English-speaking role models in an EFL environment and the sometimes passive nature of students enrolled in a compulsory language lesson. The focus of this paper is on Claire's perceptions of e-learning and, as mentioned above, there is no account of any effect on student learning outcomes. However, surveys taken by Claire do show that students were positive about using technology. At the beginning of the semester Claire surveyed the 29 students in her class about how they used their mobile phones and how they thought technology could help them to learn English. The results showed that although all students had phones and used them every day, some for more than three hours a day, very few students used them to learn English other

than for accessing online dictionaries. Despite this, 75 percent of students felt that using a mobile phone could help them to learn English and 80 percent thought that using technology in general would also be useful. These results are reflective of what Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray & Krause (2008) found in their study of first-year Australian university students who showed a difference between using ‘living technology’ and ‘learning technology’; that is, to be able to use technology in everyday life and the ability to benefit educationally from it. Many students do not have the latter experience.

Claire was keen to use technology and it appeared that her students also wanted to but only three classrooms at the university language centre are specifically equipped for e-learning. There are two CALL laboratories that have desk top computers for each student and there is a third area called a ‘social learning space’ that has laptops and internet access. However, as there may be up to 30 EFL lessons taking place simultaneously, only three of 30 teachers can use these facilities at any one time. More positively, although most classrooms are not equipped with computers for individual student use, most do have internet access and a projector that the teacher can use. This was the kind of classroom that Claire taught her lessons in. One further important detail is that Okayama University did not at the time of the study have a Learning Management System (LMS) through which teachers can provide students with instructions or materials and students can upload projects and take part in various kinds of online activities (discussion groups, wikis, and peer assessment). This is further evidence that Claire is working in a typically constrained teaching environment. She is not especially privileged in terms of equipment or facilities and so the story of how she uses digital technology in such an ‘everyday’ environment can provide insights into the kinds of challenges that teachers face when trying to introduce new technology.

5. Results

Having described Claire’s teaching context we continue in this section with an examination of the results of the data analysis. As detailed above, several different kinds of data were collected, including journal entries and emails. Four categories emerged from an analysis of this data: digital devices; materials and software; teaching and learning activities; and, challenges to e-learning. Each of these is now described.

5.1 Digital devices. Claire and her students used a variety of digital devices during the course. Claire used her own laptop computer for most classes and connected it to a projector in order to show websites and PowerPoint. Claire also used this computer and her own iPod and iPad for playing audio materials. When necessary students used their own smartphones and were also provided with small digital voice-recorders (one per pair of students).

5.2 Materials and software tools. The software tool that Claire used most often was the free LMS called Edmodo (for a recent overview, see Hourdequin, 2014). Once students had registered with Edmodo, they could access the site at any time and Claire would sometimes project the site on to a screen during the lesson. In her lesson seven journal Claire expressed how she particularly liked using Edmodo as it made managing her classes easier. All the materials that she made or collected (such as YouTube sites, PowerPoint presentations and Word documents) were made available on the site which enabled students to easily review and prepare for future lessons. She could also upload answers to exercises which she believed would encourage students to mark their own work and help them become more aware of their own mistakes. Further reasons that Claire gave for justifying her use of Edmodo were that it is visually stimulating to students and that it saves paper. There is less of a need to provide handouts but it can be a backup for paper resources if a student were to lose their copy.

As well as using Edmodo, Claire showed video clips from YouTube and iTunes for language and content input; and she used PowerPoint to present ideas to a whole class. Claire also integrated a number of Web 2.0 software tools into her teaching: Padlet is a kind of electronic bulletin board where a teacher and students can ‘pin up’ their ideas, comments or links; MyBrainshark was used to give verbal comments on students’ written work. It allows users to narrate their voice onto texts to create what is called a ‘talking white paper’.

5.3 Teaching and learning activities. As explained above, Claire’s classrooms did not have computers installed so the e-learning activities that she could carry out during a lesson tended to revolve around teacher-fronted use of a technology and relied on students using mobile phones to complete a task. For example, students would work in groups to brainstorm vocabulary and then post their ideas to Padlet using one student’s phone. These ideas could then be projected on to a screen so that all the students could see them and carry out further pair and group work. Similarly, Claire used YouTube video clips in a variety of ways during a lesson. She would often show one short clip in order to set the scene for a new topic and to stimulate discussion about it. Examples of topics include people and relationships, food and health issues, and mobile phones and technology. After class, students were often asked to look at further clips and carry out a variety of tasks for homework.

Claire had four main reasons for using YouTube: students can look at videos in their own time; videos provide contextual clues that help students predict information; videos can increase student awareness of other cultures; and, videos of non-native speakers can reassure students that they can be hesitant and make mistakes but still be very persuasive. Claire also used YouTube so that students could collaborate with one other in making their own listening ‘cloze exercises’; a stock-in-trade task for EFL teachers but

less common for students to have to do:

Students... are asked to give the name of the song and a brief introduction or explanation, then add the cloze exercise on a Word doc. I check the cloze exercises, then post a variety on Edmodo and students are allowed to choose which cloze exercise from those songs they will complete for homework. It saves me a lot of headaches trying to work out what might be popular with my students.

(Email 15th January 2014)

Claire used a different technology, digital voice recorders, as a useful classroom management device to encourage pairs of students to practice speaking together:

When students use the voice recorders, they speak in English and seem to make an effort to continue the conversation until the time limit (five minutes) is up. In order to sustain a conversation for this time, they ask each other a lot more questions, and try hard to say what they really think. They very rarely, if ever use Japanese.

(Lesson 7 Journal)

Neil observed this activity in two of Claire's lessons and witnessed that the students were deeply engaged in the speaking task and did not use Japanese.

5.4 Challenges to e-learning. Claire discovered that there were a number of challenges that she had to overcome in order to carry out e-learning. Not least was finding out how technology works and the concomitant anxiety of trying something new:

This is the first class... I've decided not to use a textbook with. A lot of this class will include e-learning and I worry because I have no training whatsoever in terms of computer literacy. I wish there were a guidebook of possible resources or a seminar (online or otherwise) to provide information and feedback. We kind of need someone... who understands how it all works, what problems we might encounter and possible ways of overcoming them.

(Email 28th October 2013)

Claire's understandable anxiety and need for a mentor was met in some way during the course of the study by the initiation of a group for teachers interested in e-learning. Okayama University had decided to introduce e-learning classes for year two students from April 2014 and the teachers responsible for these new courses created an informal support group that started to meet both face-to-face and online. Although Claire was not teaching these new courses she joined the support group:

I'm really glad about the e-learning group. Having a chance to ask other teachers about how to use certain technology or if something exists to replace something I've tried that doesn't work for some reason makes life a lot less stressful.

(Lesson 10 Journal)

But Claire was not always reliant on others and as the semester progressed she expressed how she was becoming used to using technology:

One thing I've realized is that to use technology more successfully, a teacher must be both a student and a manager. First trying everything out as a student, then working out how to apply and manage as a teacher. It needs quite a bit of time, but it is intriguing.

(Lesson 6 Journal)

There were several practical challenges Claire had to overcome. There were initial problems with registering students for the Edmodo site and it took two or three lessons for students to get used to the signing-in process. In a similar way, students' response times in class varied greatly. Some responded very quickly, for example when using Padlet for brainstorming, whilst others were not even signed in to use the tool. This could be because students varied in their familiarity in using digital technology but often students had different devices with different platforms which led to issues of incompatibility. Claire tried to overcome these problems by getting students to work together in groups so they could share devices and know-how. In more general terms, Claire found that e-learning was very time-consuming; especially when giving feedback to her students and exploring what kinds of technology to adopt and learning how to use them. Students, too, needed time to become familiar with devices and software which decreased classroom time available for them to be directly learning English.

6. Discussion

In this discussion section the three research questions that were posed in the introduction are addressed: *Why would Claire want to use e-learning? How did Claire introduce e-learning in to her pedagogy? And, what did she learn about using technology in the classroom?* In addition, Claire also reflects on her experience and shares what she thinks will happen next.

6.1 Why use e-learning? Claire started to use e-learning for a combination of practical and philosophical reasons. Her initial goals were to use technology to widen student access to language and to encourage students to be more active; in addition, she seems to be drawn to use e-learning in her teaching as it resonates with her own *'somewhat*

constructivist approach to teaching' (Lesson 10 Journal). This is particularly true of the Web 2.0 tools that she adopted as they, at least on the surface, fit well with constructivist ideas of peer to peer learning through collaborative activities (Pegrum, 2009). It is difficult to assess whether Claire's pedagogical approach in the e-learning class resulted in many practical differences from her other classes but philosophically at least she felt that technology provided the possibility of active student-centered learning; for example, by finding their own online materials and using software tools students do not have to rely on a teacher and can pursue self-selected choices of topics and language use. For Claire, this aspect of e-learning was a very practical option to encourage students to find EFL interesting and more motivating to learn:

I really like the flexibility that using technology offers. I don't have to use a textbook, written a few years ago, parts of which are not so interesting, other parts of which are not so useful. Instead I can get my students to negotiate more of their learning and become more involved in their learning. I think using technology, for example showing students how to use YouTube to help improve their English skills etc. can encourage our students to become more autonomous learners [and] critical thinkers.

(Lesson 9 Journal)

For teachers like Claire the resources made available through digital technology offer many opportunities to make language learning more relevant and readily available to students. Interestingly, Claire did not state that she wanted her students to learn to use the technology itself, which is a common justification for e-learning (Lee & Finger, 2010). Instead she clearly felt that e-learning widened opportunities for her students to learn English regardless of whether they learned about technology or not.

6.2 How can a teacher introduce e-learning into her pedagogy? It is generally true that every institution and teacher will differ in how they can introduce a curriculum change such as e-learning. However, there are some general approaches that Claire's experience can help identify. Firstly, what digital devices and software are available? In Claire's case there were very limited options for digital devices provided by her institution so she used what she could in terms of her own computer and other devices and student smartphones. This is also reflected in her choice of LMS and software tools (Edmodo, Padlet, MyBrainshark and YouTube), which are all free and relatively straightforward to use. Students can also register for them anonymously which is less troublesome for a teacher but does mean that it can be harder to track student responses. Claire decided to use teacher-fronted technology in lessons with students being asked to do limited tasks that involved their own smartphones. Most of the time that students spent on e-learning was for homework. This seems a good way to begin e-learning for both

students and the teacher. In restricted class time a teacher can give students a taste of what resources and activities e-learning can provide and students can then, in their own time, explore those possibilities further.

A second question concerns what institutional expertise can be shared. There was, at least initially, only a limited pool of expertise in the university so Claire had to rely on her own resources to try things out. However, she did join a small group of teachers who wanted to develop e-learning courses together. Collaborative support groups are a common way for teachers to improve their knowledge and expertise and often grow out of a specific issue or problem. It is interesting to note that this support group emerged when the university introduced new e-learning courses and teachers that did not normally work together decided to do so. So although this was a teacher-initiated change, it still needed an element of compulsion to encourage teachers to develop together.

In contrast to the advantages that using technology offer, there are potential disadvantages which teachers may face. It takes a great deal of time and energy for a teacher to research how devices and software tools work; and then it takes precious classroom time to adapt them in the most appropriate way for a specific context. Claire chose a particular cross-section of digital devices and software tools to support her speaking course but there are many others that she could have used to try and match her student needs. This ‘curation’ (Swanson, 2013) of technology and content is both a challenge and an opportunity for teachers and institutions that wish to use e-learning; that is, finding out what devices, what software and what materials to be used and then managing them to create new courses. A teacher needs to be very strongly motivated to want to invest in this kind of conceptual change in their teaching approach. Claire is clearly very committed to this process and learnt many new skills and gained knowledge about digital technology which she then transferred to her classroom; however, even she was nervous about using new tools and would have liked help from a mentor or knowledgeable colleague in going through the process. It is clear that if teachers would like to implement some form of e-learning they may need considerable support to do so, both in terms of technical knowledge and the collegial development of appropriate pedagogical techniques. This idea is pursued further in the next section.

6.3 What did Claire learn about using technology in the classroom? We would like to identify three main points that Claire learned: if a teacher or institution wishes to implement e-learning successfully they need to have a flexible mindset, share ideas with colleagues, and be strongly committed to change.

Firstly, technology can help solve problems but teachers need a flexible mindset when introducing e-learning. For example, Japanese university teachers may well be familiar with the frequent need to remind students to speak in English but by using digital recorders Claire found an innovative way for students to alter their behavior and monitor their

own English and Japanese use. However, as well as solving problems the use of technology also creates new challenges that teachers need to be aware of. No matter how straightforward a software tool or device appears there are often frustrations and delays that arise and a teacher must try to accept that these will happen. When introducing online technology, students need adequate training both in the form of procedural instructions given before the learning activities begin and continuous support throughout the activities. For this to be possible, teachers need to acknowledge that in getting used to technology a teacher must be both a student and a teacher; that is, teachers need to try out all the digital activities that they expect their students to do in exactly the same way that students will experience them. This takes more time and energy than when using paper-based materials and even then lessons may not always go according to plan. This may not be easy for teachers who have expectations that a lesson should take a certain course and it is likely that e-learning lessons will not be as predictable in their implementation as more traditional ones.

Secondly, it seems important to collaborate and share ideas with colleagues when introducing any new idea in teaching, and e-learning is no exception. The nature of the medium actually means that teachers can share ideas online and try out the very tools that they wish their students to use. Having said that, Claire still needed to learn for herself how digital technology worked and understand how software could best be used by her own students. There seems little alternative to investing time and energy in acquiring the know-how necessary to use e-learning. One benefit that e-learning has is that teachers can learn a lot about new technology from their students; and in fact if students did not 'bring their own devices' (Lee & Finger, 2010) Claire would not have been able to do as much as she did. It is probably a mistake to believe that so-called 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2012; Thomas, 2013) know how to learn languages using digital technology or have the desire to do so, but the fact that many students are both familiar with various devices and with learning how software tools or mobile applications work is something that a teacher can take advantage of.

Thirdly, teachers and institutions need to be very committed to instigating e-learning as it is an educational option with its own challenges. Claire introduced e-learning in to her lessons because she was motivated to try it out. This enthusiasm is hard to replicate at an institutional level if a school wishes to introduce curriculum change for more than one class and more than one teacher. There needs to be strong commitment for formal support in terms of facilities, equipment and the development of institutional knowledge as how to make best use of devices and the software tools that are increasingly becoming available. Many software tools are free and students can bring their own devices to class so on the surface e-learning can look like an economical option for an institution. But there still needs to be a considerable investment in teacher time and energy to develop new ideas and that knowledge needs to be distributed across a school for successful

change to take place. We acknowledge that the use of digital technology has been enthusiastically introduced or coerced by managers in many universities, especially in western contexts, without the input or consent of teaching staff with resulting limited pedagogic value (Selwyn, 2014). It is the experiences of teachers such as Claire that are vital to be taken in to account when administrators seek to jump on the digital technology bandwagon.

6.4 What happens next? In this final section Claire reflects on two aspects of her experience in using digital technology: 1) the effects of technology on student learning outcomes and their overall experience in the classroom; and, 2) her decision to further expand her knowledge of and skill in using various kinds of technology to develop her own personal learning network.

Firstly, during the time Claire took part in the case study, she began to learn how using technology to create learning activities that integrate student-generated content can enhance interaction and help foster a participatory learning community within the class. She felt that this would improve learning outcomes although it was not possible for her to compare learning outcomes between similar classes using technology with the learning outcomes of classes not using technology. However, with the introduction of homework and class activities using Web 2.0 tools, Claire felt that students who used technology in the classroom were able to take advantage of more differentiated learning, could learn more at their own pace and according to their own needs. She understood that blended learning, especially using the affordances of mobile learning, could provide more opportunities for students to develop their English skills than textbook-driven classes and felt that students seemed to be more motivated and engaged. Claire wanted to develop a foundation for more participatory learning, with less teacher-centred lessons in which students become responsible for developing parts of the coursework which fosters more self-directed, personalized learning. For this reason, Claire has now changed all her classes into blended-learning ones.

Secondly, Claire feels that the opportunity to reflect on and assess her teaching with the help of a mentor has stimulated her to find further ways to improve her teaching. She has developed her own learning network of colleagues, professional organizations and online information in order to do this. Her goal is to foster an effective learning environment for her students and to expand her teaching repertoire with the help of Web 2.0 tools. For this reason, Claire has recently taken three online courses about teaching with technology and is learning to become a networked teacher that can create her own personal learning network (PLN) and help her students to create their own personal learning environment (PLE).

Claire is also involved in networking with other teachers; working together to discover which Web 2.0 tools can solve various instructional tasks or problems. This began through

sharing the various tools mentioned above such as Padlet and MyBrainshark, but has developed into discussions about tools for class management, resource management, communication, collaboration and creativity. These now include Classcharts, Evernote, Jing, Skype, Google Drive, WeVideo, Voicethread and others. Claire's digital journey continues.

7. Conclusion

This paper has attempted, by focusing on one EFL teacher in one Japanese university, to answer the questions of why and how a 'typical' language teacher, with constraints on time, budgets, development opportunities and equipment might wish to adopt e-learning as part of their teaching repertoire. The case study participant, Claire, strongly wanted to use e-learning to enable her students to become more autonomous, to collaborate, to access a more personalized and wider variety of language materials, and to be exposed to more models of English than just she could provide. In a teaching environment that was limited in access to software support and digital devices she used a teacher-fronted style of technology delivery which relied on students using smartphones for limited participation during lessons and emphasized more extensive practice with technology in out-of-class time. Claire faced frustrations and anxieties in carrying out these new kinds of lessons but felt that it was worthwhile to continue to explore and exploit the rapidly changing world of educational digital technology. We hope that Claire's story will resonate with readers and be part of a growing number of shared experiences which will encourage other language teachers to experiment with their own approaches to e-learning or be a priming device for more technology savvy teachers to use in discussions with their teaching and administrative colleagues.

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