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INTRODUCTION

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## **ADVANCED MEDIA ENGLISH: AN INTRODUCTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Advanced Media English is an elective course offered to English language majors at a Japanese university. This project-oriented course combines a variety of technologies including Web 2.0 in order to foster development of language digital literacies. Integrated CALL, PrOCALL and principled task design informed the creation of the course. This paper provides the theoretical background of the course and outlines the goals of future action-based research.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Advanced Media English (AME) is an elective course at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) English Language Institute (ELI). Using current events as a basis of exploration, the course aims to develop a variety of literacies beyond paper-based and other traditional forms. Instead, the course trains students' reading and production of digital texts such as podcasts, videos, and blogs. Moreover the course aims to empower them as informed participants in the new media landscape. The course has been designed and taught by the author of this paper. Action research has been implemented to monitor course feedback, especially students' evaluation of the tasks and perception of their own skill development. This paper will provide background of the course, outline course basics, and discuss the rationale of the action research.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Prior to teaching at the university in 2009, the author worked as the project lead for AfterEd.tv, a web-channel funded by the EdLab at Teachers College Columbia University. The project launched in 2006, just two years after Tim O'Reilly popularized the term Web 2.0 to describe social uses of the Internet often involving media beyond written text (Pegrum, 2009). The author, with a staff of video producers, graphic designers, and web developers, was tasked to report on the future of the education sector by producing web videos. Videos were published weekly on a custom website.

With the option for ELI teachers to teach elective content-based courses, the author sought to re-create the atmosphere of a professional newsroom within a classroom. KUIS had the facilities and technology necessary to support the class and freedom was given to design an innovative curriculum. It was known from the author's experience that creating digital media requires its creators to think creatively and work collaboratively with others. Therefore this class appeared to offer ample opportunities for students not only to use the target language, but also to acquire skills relevant to the future economy such as new digital literacies, creative thinking, and teamwork.

### ***2.1 Literature Review***

The potential of multimedia and the Internet has been discussed in the field prior to the advent of Web 2.0. Warschauer (1996) summarized the history of CALL and theorized the next phase as Integrative CALL. Within this framework computers, multimedia and the Internet can become tools for meaningful and authentic communication involving all language skills, often simultaneously, with the goal of becoming more competent communicators. Using this approach, AME was designed so that tasks and projects used

technology as opportunities for both discussable and productive communication. For example, in the former case, every week students share links about news, which could be in the form of videos, photos, or information graphics (infographics) and talk with each other about them. In the latter case, students must negotiate with each to accomplish creative group tasks.

While Integrative CALL guided the use of technology and media, Project-oriented CALL (ProCALL) informed the choice for a project heavy syllabus. Jeon-Ellis, Debski, & Wigglesworth (2005) defined ProCALL as a “holistic learning approach aimed at employing modern technology to trigger students' ability to act with words and create social realities in and out of the classroom, and thus to facilitate learning” (p. 121). ProCALL is based on Vygotskian social constructivist learning principles that Swain (2000) later applied to language learning (ibid). In this context, it was assumed that AME students were inexperienced with Web 2.0 and media production. Therefore it was thought absolutely essential to scaffold the development of new skills upon ones they had already known. Through a ProCALL approach students might learn and acquire skills necessary to complete projects via “collaborative dialogues” (ibid).

Theoretically, Web 2.0 has been welcomed in the literature as relevant to language learning. Pegrum (2009) praised the potential for Web 2.0 in this context. He stated that using these web-based tools not only has the potential to make the classroom even more interactive and engaging but also might prepare them for the digital skills necessary in today’s information-based society. “In short: in the Web 2.0 environment, there is a dynamic fusion of media and a rich blend of cultures, languages and, within languages, evolving codes and registers” (p. 22). Therefore not only does AME offer language learning opportunities, but it also provides a space for students to acquire digital skills relevant to the students’ future lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century information-based economy.

## **2.2 Course Description**

AME builds on skills students have acquired in the second year Media English course, required for all KUIS English majors. Typically in Media English classes, current events are the source of class discussions. Other topics such as newspaper structure, types of articles, and media literacy may have been covered, depending on the previous teachers' preferences. Class discussions can take a variety of forms: student-student, teacher-student, debates, small group discussions. The class projects usually entail student-led presentations, often using Microsoft PowerPoint.

While continuing to use current events and class discussions, AME adds the exploration and participation in the new media landscape associated with Web 2.0 through podcasting, web videos, and blogs. AME focuses on building visual literacies such as how to read photographs and how to communicate visually. Camera-centric skills, such as shot composition for still and video, are also covered. Finally students learn computer specific skills such as operating the Mac OS, iMovie, Garageband, Moodle, and using a variety of free web tools such as Google Docs, Visual.ly, Tumblr.

The following are the AME course objectives:

- Learn basic journalistic storytelling practices
- Learn how to use media production hardware and software to tell a story
- Participate in Web 2.0 communication forums including blogs and social networks
- Craft a message according to a specific medium and audience

Students are assessed mainly from coursework both inside and outside of the class. They are expected to check and complete weekly online homework managed by Moodle. A significant portion of their grades stem from five intensive media projects: infographics, photo essay, audio podcast, and two video projects (see Table 1). In the final project, students select any topic of interest, research it, and publish their reports through a blog or website

that integrates all of the previously learned skills from prior projects. All of the projects, except for the first one, creating a personal infographic, are collaborative.

Table 1.

*Outline of Course Projects*

Project	Task	Learning Objective	Type
Infographic	Create an infographic about yourself	Visual logic and expression	Individual
Photo Essay	Tell a visually based story	Sequencing through still images, visual literacy	Group
Audio Podcast	Tell a story from your life	Narrative oral storytelling skills	Pair
Superhero Video	Create an advertisement of a new superhero solving a social issue	Develop movie editing skills, illustration skills, Foster international social awareness	Pair
8 shot video	Create a visual story using moving images without dialogue	Familiarization with cinematic grammar	Group
Final Project	Combine on all previously learned skills and report on any topic of interest	Repeat previously learned skills, develop web production blogging websites	Group

### **2.3 Task Design**

All AME coursework was designed to thoughtfully incorporate technology. Tondrow and Vallance (2004) provided a checklist in which using CALL might enhance language learning tasks. They suggested that a technologically-based task:

- makes possible activities that could not be done as easily, if at all, in the print based-realm
- allows the integration of (digital) media
- allows students and teachers greater flexibility in terms of when and where learning occurs
- allows access to a wide-range of information
- allows for a focus on both the products and processes of learning
- allows didactic material to be stored and recycled
- encourages discussion and consultation
- provides a channel for feedback and assessment
- does not involve the unnecessary duplication of previously produced material
- saves time, over time (p. 105)

This checklist was helpful in establishing a set pattern within each project unit. First, as a homework assignment on Moodle, students watch an introduction video of a professional explaining his or her craft. They comment on the video so that they are primed for a class discussion. Next, students listen to a short lecture on the unit's topic, which is then followed by student-to-student discussion activities. The lecture features professional examples and key works, such as iconic photographs, famous videos, etc. Since the author is an American, works of cultural importance are highlighted.

The next stage of the unit involves project work. Students are introduced to the project that they will create next. They are shown student examples from previous classes. Then they are given a brief tutorial about how to use the technology necessary for accomplishing the project. After that class time is provided for students to complete the project. Students are free to discuss and collaborate with group members. Students are also encouraged to ask for help when they encounter a problem or have a question. The teacher also critiques drafts of the project, so that students refine their work on an ongoing process.

In the last stage of the project unit students share their completed work. They upload digital versions to Moodle. In class, their work is presented and displayed. For homework students are required to give feedback to each other's projects. They receive critical feedback from the teacher. In the next class, students vote on the best projects and the teacher also selects his own favorites. The teacher discusses best examples and common problems from the project. Finally the teacher uploads the best work to a public blog, so that a worldwide audience can appreciate their work.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

Because AME is an experimental course, and there are few models of similarly integrated courses that weave multiple Web 2.0 tools in the literature, the author thought it vital to undertake an action research project in which student performance and feedback is constantly monitored and used to improve the course. It is concerned that the course might be too difficult for students to grasp. Perhaps there is too much time allotted for project work. Or it is worried that this class does not meet the expectations of students.

Task assessments and surveys are vital to make adjustments. Assessments for both form and content are conducted after each project. They judge both design and language



aspects. From these assessments, it can be determined if a project was too difficult for students. A pre and post survey has been created to measure students' feedback on the course as well as their perception of skill development. Results of the action research will be shared in a future publication.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The primary goal of AME is for students to use the target language to become digitally literate and capable participants in the new media landscape. Since the adjustments to the course will be necessary to ensure the realization of course goals, action research has been chosen as the most appropriate paradigm. Action research was thought to be most appropriate because changes must be with theoretical consistency and the "circumstances require flexibility, the involvement of the people in the research, or change must take place quickly or holistically" (O'Brien, 2001). It is also hoped that the course provides ideas and examples to CALL practitioners interested in creatively combining a variety of technologies and Web 2.0 tools based on the principles of Integrative CALL and ProCALL.

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