



Blogging in a Year 10 Japanese classroom

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Sharon Henry decided, for the Learning Inquiry project that she completed as part of TPD in 2011, to have her Year 10 students of Japanese complete a language task using blogs. She was interested to know what impact, if any, blogging might have on language learning. She decided to investigate whether blogging would improve the quality and quantity of writing of her students, and also to find out what they thought about blogging as a task.

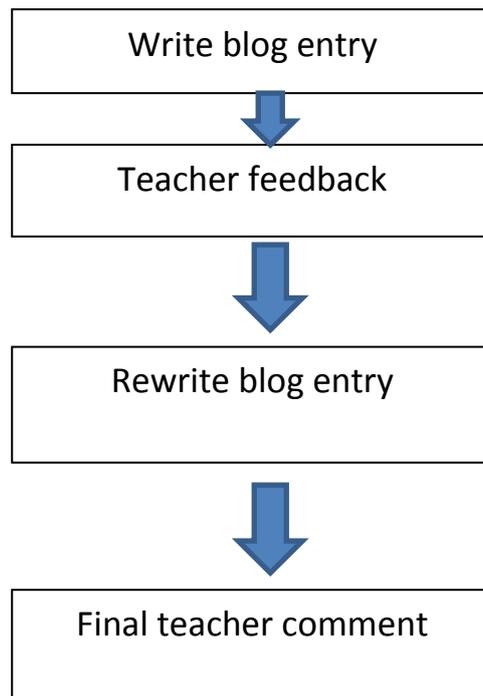
From reading the literature in this topic area Sharon knew that she would need to prepare her students carefully before introducing blogging and that she would need to provide a structured framework in order to support them in this new language task (Hourigan & Murray, 2010).

Sharon set up her 'blogging' project for Term 3. Her students typically had four hours a week of Japanese. Prior to starting her project Sharon got her students to set up their own blog, personalise it and write a first post. She then chose three topics for them to 'blog' about. They were: family, pets and food. For each one she set up a task according to the Ellis (2009) criteria. These were:

- a primary focus on meaning
- some kind of gap to be bridged by the communication taking place
- students needed to rely on their own resources
- a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language

Her task for the 'pet' topic had students design an advertisement for a pet so that it could be sold in their group's pet shop. The aim was to sell as many pets as possible and to see what shop would do the best.

After they had written each blog, students received feedback from Sharon. The sequence of writing in relation to feedback was as follows:



As we have already discussed, Sharon was first interested to see whether there was any change in the quality of writing over the time that students were blogging. So she looked at whether there was an increase in the number of language features that students used over the time they were blogging. To gauge whether there was change in the quantity of writing she looked at whether there was an increase in the total amount of symbols used. Sharon found that students did increase in the number of language features they used and also that there was an improvement in terms of quantity of writing for all tasks over time. Crucially students tended to use the teacher's suggestions in their rewrites, underscoring for Sharon the importance of building teacher feedback in to the blogging process.

When students were asked for feedback, ten out of the 18 students who took part in the project were positive about blogging and they were also positive about Sharon's feedback. A surprising discovery for Sharon was that some students preferred writing in Japanese on paper! Sharon hypothesized that this might have been because they had only recently started learning how to write hiragana (i.e., in Year 10) and so that this was possibly still a novel and satisfying experience for them.

More details about Sharon's project (including examples of a blog post and feedback) and her findings are in the article published in the 2011 edition of *The New Zealand Language Teacher*, Vol 37, pages 39-57. It is called: 'To blog or not to blog: How does it impact on writing in a Japanese classroom?'. Note that if you join the New Zealand Association of Language Teachers (NZALT) (www.nzalt.org.nz) you get free and unlimited access to this journal.

References

Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: Sorting out the misunderstandings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19(3), 221-246.

Hourigan, T. & Murray, L. (2010). Using blogs to help language students develop reflective learning strategies: Towards a pedagogical framework. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 26(2), 209-225.