



## Student voices

### **Using the Internet as a distance learner: Experiences of a Japanese student teacher in New Zealand**

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I am from Japan. I came to New Zealand in April 2004 to study English and early childhood education. I studied in a language school for the first 10 months and then applied for my current school, New Zealand Tertiary College, to focus on studying early childhood education. I began studying as a college-based student, with day-time, face-to-face classes. After the first semester, I changed my course to the distance learning program, and since then I have been working in an early childhood centre as a reliever as part of my diploma program.

When I made the move from class to distance learning I noticed a few differences for my learning. For me, one of the main advantages of studying in a class was being able to have a clear and deep understanding of the course that we were studying. I found that having the class lecturer explaining the ideas simply, and by sharing thoughts with the classmates, I could gain a good understanding of the content of the course. When I was in class, lecturers provided us extra useful readings, and also many books in the school library were always easy to access on the class days.

In the distance learning program, self-motivation and time management are much more important keys to successful study. Most of the time, I have to go through the study guide and readings all by myself and I can come to having a good understanding of the topic. There are some important benefits. I can study at my own pace, and I have great learning and teaching experiences when working at an early childhood centre.

The use of the Internet has been a big help in moving from learning in a class to distance learning. I have no complaints about the technology; it has helped my study a lot. I have a lot of familiarity with the Internet, because I have been using it for about 10 years, but email for only three years – I set up an e-mail account just before coming to New Zealand. Over the years I have gained more and more skills in using the Internet, little by little, and by myself – I have not done any courses or professional development for using the Internet.

I use the Internet for study purposes when I need extra reading resources, to gain support from my tutor when I find I am having trouble with my study, and also when I want to access websites related to early childhood education.

For instance I access the Ministry websites quite a lot, such as the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health websites. I also keep in touch with other early childhood related associations and networks like Plunket and Young Children. When I am looking for information from these and other websites to help with my assignments, I always need a reference for my essay. So, for example, I try to find and use official websites and readings. In other words, websites of well-known organisations, and readings that have an author's name, and a published year, are very important because I can see the readings are guaranteed. So the Internet enables us to search extra



readings, and also save time from going to the school library, as students can order their books library books from the New Zealand Tertiary College website.

I also use the Internet to develop my teaching resources. I sometimes learn children songs, and fun activities through researching on the Internet. I can also print out pictures from Internet websites and use them as my teaching resources.

I find that the Internet is helpful for me as a student that does not speak English as a first language. Emails help me to explain my thoughts and to understand my tutor's ideas clearly, as written English is easier than spoken English for me. And it is possible to re-open the mail box and make sure I have understood my tutor's suggestions, feedback, and so on. Emailing has also been useful when I communicate with tutors, because it allows me to describe my thoughts more clearly and specifically. I think communicating by email is very effective for both students and tutors because it does not require time arrangement, which is often an issue for hard working and busy students and tutors.

Another benefit of using the Internet for me is to be able to search Japanese websites on early childhood topics. For example, if I am having a difficulty with understanding Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model as the reading uses very academic English; I can possibly look up the same topic on Japanese sites and read the explanation in my language. This way I may understand the concept of the Ecological Model better.

Apart from language there are not such big differences between Japanese websites and websites in countries like New Zealand. But I think that Japanese websites may be updated sooner than NZ websites, so they are more recent.

The amount I use the Internet always varies, it depends on my study needs, but I guess I search information for my study twice in a week on average. On the other hand, I use the Internet almost every day for social purposes. I use two email services, Skype and a social communication site as tools of keeping in touch with my family, friends, agents and so on. Emailing enables me to have a constant communication with my family and friends.