

Both Local and Global: A Case of International Distance Learning

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This paper reports on an innovative partnership between an Australian and Japanese university: an international distance learning relationship between the University of Sydney and Gifu University. Since 2002, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney and Gifu University's Faculty of Education have participated in a lecture exchange program through which live lectures are transmitted through web-based video-conferencing. Lectures on Australian studies are transmitted from the University of Sydney; lectures on Japanese language, linguistics and culture are transmitted from Gifu University. The paper outlines how the program developed, from the perspective of the four lecturers involved.

There is a growing need, both in Australian and Japanese universities, to internationalize curricula and student experience. Established forms of international exchange between universities normally require students to travel abroad for a significant period of time. International distance learning, however, offers a unique possibility: it can provide domestic students with an accessible international experience. In this sense, distance learning can impart a global educational experience at a local level and create a different form of student mobility.

In this paper we will report on an international distance learning relationship which has been established between the University of Sydney, Australia, and Gifu University, Japan. Since 2002, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney and Gifu University's Faculty of Education have participated in a lecture exchange program through which live lectures are transmitted through web-based video-conferencing. Lectures on Australian studies are transmitted from the University of Sydney; lectures on Japanese language, linguistics and culture are transmitted from Gifu University. The Australian and Japanese students enjoy specialist teaching in a cross-cultural learning environment.

This program is a teaching and learning initiative which we believe is the only one of its kind. The National Institute of Multimedia Education (NIME), a Japanese government agency dedicated to research and development in e-learning/distance education in the tertiary sector, has reported that the current relationship between Gifu and Sydney universities is the only institution-to-institution program of

distance learning between a Japanese and an overseas university ("Current Status and Challenges of International Activities Using ICT in Japanese 4-year Colleges and Universities: Results of the Survey conducted in 2004" NIME Research Report 15, 2006). While a Japanese-Australian educational venture, this project is an example of an innovative partnership which addresses wider issues such as internationalization of the curriculum, the role educational technology can play, and institutional strategies for international education within the Asia-Pacific region.

The international distance learning project involves the exchange of lectures between the Faculty of Education of Gifu University and the University of Sydney's Faculty of Arts. Live lectures are transmitted through audio-visual links. From October 2002 and throughout 2003, trial lecture transmissions were conducted using both ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) dial-up circuits and IP (Internet Protocol) links. The latter proved to be both effective and cost-efficient. In March of 2004 an agreement was formally signed between Gifu University's Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney for the continuing provision of such lectures. Each year lectures on Japanese language, linguistics and culture have been transmitted from Gifu University and incorporated into Japanese studies courses for Sydney University students. Lectures in Australian studies have been transmitted from the University of Sydney to Gifu University and incorporated into existing courses in cross-cultural communication and English as a foreign language.

The project has generated considerable media interest, particularly in Japan. The inaugural trial lecture transmission from Gifu University to the University of Sydney was reported in the national newspaper, the *Australian* (13/11/2002). The formal signing of an agreement between the two universities was reported in Japanese television news broadcasts Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) Gifu and Gifu BC, and in four Japanese newspapers: *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* (nation-wide), *Chunichi News* (regional), and *Gifu News* (local). The lectures transmitted from the University of Sydney have received press coverage in Japan, on television (*Rabu Rabu Waideo Today* [11/1/05]) and in newspapers: *Gifu News* (12/12/02); *Chunichi News* (12/11/02); *Chunichi News* (12/1/05); *Gifu News* (12/1/05); and *Yomiuri* (1/2/06).

DESIGNING THE FOUNDATION FOR INTERNATIONAL DISTANCE LEARNING BY YASUO NISHIZAWA

While both the style and the content of international distance learning could, and perhaps should, embrace a whole set of their various combinations, we should be constantly aware that much depends upon the progress and innovations in the field of technology. Until quite recently, for example, we had to be dependent on ISDN and the use of eight telephone lines for a live communication of both image and sound, paying 80,000~90,000 yen per hour of connection. It was only in 2003 that Gifu University succeeded in connecting to Sydney University using Internet Protocol, reducing the cost almost to zero for communication itself. Now we are living in a new era: we are ready to concentrate much of our energy on the creation of a new system, a kind of platform for international distance learning.

In order to decide in which direction we should be heading for a further development of international distance learning, however, we must first examine, in some detail, what we already have and then decide which particular style or form of distance learning truly possesses the power of transforming higher education in the world.

Broadly speaking, we have three different technical categories by which we can classify the possible forms of international distance learning:

A. Lectures Delivered to Individual Learners by an On-Demand System

With this style of learning, the lectures are not live but are recorded: the students will have no chance of asking questions and getting the answers from beyond the screen. Its merit for the students is that they can attend the lectures at home at any time of the day and as often as they want. Discussions between the lecturers and the students are possible only through the Internet.

B. Live Lectures for Classes

By combining the Internet and the TV conferencing system, lectures can be live or two-directional. Lectures could be very much alive, inspiring and even thrilling for both lecturers and students by allowing some time for heated questions and answers.

C. Eclectic Lectures

With a series of lectures, A and B can be combined into a patchwork of lectures. The ratio of the combination could be changed according to the contents or the aims of each module of lectures.

Now let us try to classify the contents, in combination with proper styles in learning, that are prevalent in today's international distance learning. They would also seem to fall into three categories:

X. A Live Exchange Among Students

This type of learning is not a lecture but a kind of discussion, often designed and conducted by the students but within the time-frame pre-arranged by the teaching staffs of two universities. This type of learning could hardly occupy a regular place within the curriculum of any university. It would only be a sort of extra-curriculum activity or event.

Y. An Omnibus of Lectures Delivered by a Loosely Organized Set of Lecturers

This type of learning is possible in combination with any of the three technical categories (A, B and C) discussed above. This learning could easily occupy a part of a regular university curriculum. But it has its own limitations: since it usually consists of more than four or five lecturers of considerably different disciplines, the course as a whole would rarely be on an advanced level.

Z. A Course of Lectures Given by One Lecturer

This type of learning is similar to traditional face-to-face lectures and is a most orthodox and most powerful type of learning because it could aim at any level of learning, from the lowest to the highest, and it could cover all sorts of studies while technically all three categories can be applied.

The effectiveness of the type X and the type Y is almost self-evident. The unique good point of the type X consists in imbuing the students with a thrilling interest in a possible cultural exchange by any two groups of students living thousands of miles away from each other and in making them design the whole shape of discussion so that it would be a truly lively one. The type Y, on the other hand, craves an active participation on the part of the teaching staff seeking cooperative universities overseas. Its success very much depends upon a clever choice of topic too so that a team of famous lecturers could play their respective parts.

As for the type Z, no successful case has yet been reported in Japan so far as I know. A partial success of the type Z, however, was shown in the lecture exchange program which was signed and started in 2004 by two institutions, Gifu University and the University of Sydney, based upon a "modular lecture-exchange system". On March 2nd, 2004, the Faculty of Arts of the University of Sydney and the Faculty of Education of Gifu University concluded a memorandum concerning a lecture exchange program through distance learning systems, agreeing to exchange lectures with each other when they were judged to be worthy of being incorporated into an existing course by the other party as part of its regular curriculum.

This lecture exchange program proved to be successful for the years that followed. The majority of the students who took part in this program could enjoy the benefit of its unique experience. Both teaching staff and technical staff cooperated with each other. Thus at least one teaching staff, teaching Japanese at the University of Sydney, kept receiving lectures on Japanese language or Japanese culture from Gifu University and at least one teaching staff, teaching English, kept receiving lectures on Australian multiculturalism from the University of Sydney.

But how are we to estimate this program in relation to the future of our international distance learning? Before that, however, we should examine the exact nature of the program by asking such

questions as “Who started it?”, “What was the aim?”, and “How is it progressing now?”

In April 2002, I was working as a member of a newly organized team in the Faculty of Education for a joint project between Gifu University and the Gifu Prefectural Government. Our mission was to undertake joint research on international distance learning by finding a willing and cooperative university outside of Japan, possibly one in Australia because of the short time difference with Japan. Our final aim was to introduce at least one series of lectures from a university abroad, via Gifu University, to the International Network University Consortium run by the Gifu Prefectural Government. The Consortium had 17 local participant universities and colleges in the Gifu area, including Gifu University. The aim and mission of the Consortium was to enhance the educational quality of the local area.

In early September of 2002, I sent an email to Dr Sonia Mycak of Sydney University, although a complete stranger, who promptly replied the next day saying she would be visiting Nagoya soon and would like to visit Gifu University to see us. Almost immediately she had consulted about our proposal with her Head of School, who supported our project and arranged a meeting of negotiation between the delegate members of Gifu University and those of the University of Sydney one month later. After several meetings and several trial lecture transmissions, I decided to ask 1~3 of Dr Mycak’s lectures to be sent from Sydney to be incorporated into my new course of lectures entitled *Cross-Cultural Communication* which was to be opened in October in 2004. I was expected to offer this course to the curriculum of the Consortium. I acted accordingly, making one course available upon registration for every student belonging to the 17 local universities and colleges of Gifu prefecture. This was repeated until 2006, when I retired from Gifu University.

In March 2008, Dr Sonia Mycak suddenly decided to seek the possibility of expanding international distance learning into the whole of the Tokai area consisting of four prefectures: Aichi, Gifu, Mie and Shizuoka. Her wish was to deliver a series of 15 lectures to the same class in the style Z of live international distance learning. I also had a dream of my own to establish a network of participant universities, starting with the Tokai area. When Dr Mycak applied to the Australia-Japan Foundation (part of the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) toward the end of March for a subsidy, she asked me to work together as an adviser. So we decided to work together. Toward the end of July she had come to Japan and seen the president of Gifu University. She explained to him about her plan. He showed some interest in it and even suggested to make use of the Consortium.

I had sent emails to several major universities in the Tokai area, including Aichi University of Education, Aichi Prefectural University, Nagoya City University, Mie University and Shizuoka University. They were not against our plan. But they said they could not participate for several reasons. It became clear, however, that one of the most serious problems was the cost. Not the cost of communication but the cost of several other aspects cannot be ignored. For example, academic labor of developing and delivering a whole series of lectures must be duly paid. The cost for the work of technicians and the cost for the use of video-conferencing facilities should also be added in the bill.

What I would like to propose here is to set up a system which would ensure, for all supportive universities and colleges throughout the world, a kind of mutually beneficial service specialized in international distance learning much like the one that exists between Gifu University and the University of Sydney. International distance learning, with an effective worldwide system of its own, should be a basic educational infrastructure for the world, based upon mutual responsibility and supported by mutual understanding.

But how are we to establish such a system? Is it not just a dream?

A prototype of that kind may be found in the Gifu Station Course of English, a course of English open to the students of the 17 universities that belong to the Consortium. Imitating what I have done for three years from 2004, Associate Professor Tatsumi and Professor Hirota have offered one of the English courses as a trial course of international distance learning in which students, registering for the course, can choose to attend either the campus class or the class held at the Gifu JR station.

This course, by the way, is again a product of collaboration between Gifu University and the University of Sydney. Only this time we are offering a class consisting of local university students and citizens an entire course, a series of 15 live lectures sent from Australia. The main contents are the history

of immigration in Australia and the historical and social background of multiculturalism.

An interesting point is that Gifu University decided to pay a high cost. If it should succeed as a regular course of lectures, from which registered students can get academic credits, it will be a historical success, and may trigger a series of similar attempts. Yet it may take several years or more for this project to get full recognition on the part of the citizens and students.

A profoundly significant message for all the universities in the world, however, will be that any lecturer of any university, including renowned professors, would be available even to a remote university simply by applying for a certain course of lectures which would be absolutely necessary to maintain its high level of education.

One big problem, of course, is the language barrier. English is an ideal common language for international distance learning because it is most widely used in the academic world. But every lecturer will have to make an utmost effort to speak clearly and distinctly and at a more or less slow pace when they speak to students whose first language is not English. In addition, there can always be a certain number of lecturers speaking in their own mother tongues, such as a Japanese lecturer speaking to foreign students majoring in Japanese.

Another big problem is the high cost to pay for the work of the lecturers and the technical supporters as well as for the facilities. Only a very rich university will be able to pay the cost by itself annually. But a network of universities could share the expenses and have the lectures sent to their campuses simultaneously, which is technically possible.

A truly global solution for these problems, however, rests on a mutually beneficial system supported by all the participant universities forming a network with rules. One thing we should be doing, at an earlier stage of development, is to establish a rule that any university that offers a course of lectures to any participant university will obtain the right to get one course of lectures of its own choosing from one of the participant universities. Repeated international transference of money would be troublesome for any university, but a mutually beneficial exchange system will effectively and drastically reduce the trouble.

Another thing participant institutions should be doing, at a little later stage of development, would be to provide academic information which tells about the scholarly career of every lecturer belonging to the participant institutions, with a list of selected publications. Thus every participant institution would be provided with basic academic information, which would be absolutely necessary for any institution to search for suitable lecturers when it decided to reorganize or improve its curriculum.

A LECTURE EXCHANGE FROM AUSTRALIA TO JAPAN BY SONIA MYCAK

My role in this project has been to develop and deliver lectures for transmission to Gifu University. It is from this perspective that I would like to discuss my experiences of teaching Japanese university students using this particular form of distance learning.

Objective

The content of my classes may best be classified as ‘Australian Studies’. The broad aim is to introduce Japanese students to the history, society and culture of Australia. As the settlement of Australia includes the original Indigenous people, the arrival of the British in 1788, post-war immigrants from Europe, and more recently people from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific, my lectures present the development of Australian society and culture from the perspective of Australia’s British colonial history, Aboriginal Australia, and the history of immigration and the development of multiculturalism.

The objective is to learn about Australia from the perspective of multiculturalism and the cultural diversity of Australian society. The intention is for students to develop an understanding of how Australia has developed from a British colony settled in 1788 to one of the most multicultural countries in the world. We also explore the relationship between Australia and Japan.

While Australia is of particular interest to Japan given our strong trade and strengthening security relationships, multiculturalism is now increasingly relevant to Japan. Immigration and the settlement of foreign residents is one of the most critical issues facing contemporary Japan. This has been evident in

recent debate within government and political circles about whether to implement greater levels of immigration as a response to a decreasing and ageing population. This question is most pressing for those in the Tokai area of Japan (to which Gifu prefecture belongs), as these municipalities have the highest number of foreign residents (due to employment in local manufacturing industries). The scholarly focus upon multiculturalism within my classes, together with special attention to the Australia-Japan relationship, is intended to increase the Japanese students' understanding of cultural diversity as an increasingly shared interest with Australia.

My overall objective is to provide a positive educational experience through which Japanese university students will develop a basic although well-grounded understanding of Australian history, culture and society. It is hoped that as a result the students will be better equipped should they wish to pursue connections with Australia in their own fields of endeavour and throughout their own professional careers. In this sense, the ultimate purpose of this project is to deepen links between Japan and Australia.

Developing Specific Teaching and Learning Materials

Participating in this international distance learning project has required my developing specific teaching and learning materials: writing lectures and selecting accompanying textual and audio-visual material. The teaching and learning materials have been tailored specifically for a cohort of Japanese students. Rather than reproducing existing Australian studies material aimed at students in Australia, I have developed new materials for tertiary students who are non-native users of English, and have little or no prior knowledge of Australian history, culture and society. This also entails drawing upon cross-cultural pedagogical strategies and adapting them specifically to an Australia—Japan context.

Perhaps the most pressing pedagogical issue is the differing level of English language proficiency within student cohorts. The students of Gifu University are not native speakers of English, and even within the one group there can be varying levels of English language ability. The challenge is how to make the material accessible and comprehensible, given the language of instruction is English. In preparing and presenting the material, I try to use clear and concise language that would be easy to understand. I repeat the most important points two or three ways, using a different sentence structure each time. I avoid the use of jargon or figurative speech. In short, I need to use language that is not complicated, even when talking about quite complex concepts and ideas.

I employ a number of teaching methods, as I endeavour to incorporate key skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Depending on the number of classes I give, to some extent the students experience a variety of learning styles. Most often my classes open with a conventional 'talk and chalk' lecture, supported by a written copy. As I speak, the students can follow using their own printed text. At times I stop and direct the students to annotate their copy. Punctuating the lecture in this way is a way to maintain immediacy. Audio-visual material plays a very important role in both reinforcing the lecture material and introducing new subject matter. At times the students undertake responsibility for their own learning, as they are expected to complete a small research or assessment task outside of class. Active questioning is encouraged during class-time, and students also take up the invitation to email comments and questions following each class.

There are varying levels of student participation, depending upon the objective of the lesson. The more conventional lectures designed to provide maximum information are perhaps the most 'passive' in terms of the students' contribution to the learning environment. On the other hand, one of the most interactive lessons I have given was one in which I introduced the students to an Australian literary text that portrays cultural diversity and explores the issue of cross-cultural communication. The intention was to actively involve the students in the reading and comprehension of the text. To this end I selected an excerpt from a radio play, since this type of writing is designed to be read out aloud rather than be performed on stage. Since the students had been given a copy of the text, several could take on roles in the play, while the rest could closely follow the script. I gave some contextual information, explaining who the characters were and when and where the action was set. By prior arrangement with the Gifu University professor who was supervising the class, certain props were also obtained and brought into the classroom. Then we performed the play. The students seemed to find this enjoyable as well as

informative. Discussion of the theme and issues raised in the play completed the lesson.

Audience

The distance learning arrangement between Gifu and Sydney universities has functioned according to what Gifu University colleagues have called "a module-exchange system" whereby a series of up to three lectures are transmitted from the sender university to be incorporated into an existing course taught by the receiving university. My classes in Australian studies have been received by professors Norio Hirota and Toru Tatsumi and incorporated into their "Communication by Foreign Language (English)" course. Hence one audience for international distance learning classes at Gifu University has been learners of English as a foreign language within the Faculty of Education. As a form of content-based English language instruction, the value of such international distance learning lessons may be self-evident. Indeed, when Gifu University students were surveyed after taking the classes (in 2007) a majority of students (81%) concluded that international distance education is effective for studying English. A significant number (60.3%) stated that this form of tuition should be introduced (32.8% were undecided while only 6.9% disagreed). (These figures are taken from a report supplied by Gifu University's Faculty of Education titled "On the results of questionnaire measured in the class 'Communication using foreign language [English]' in 2007").

As a vehicle for exposure to native language use and specialist content and vocabulary, a module of international distance learning classes may, to a certain extent, stand alone. However the intention to provide such classes to students other than those who are studying English, to draw upon the distance education more for content than for language tuition, raises an important issue: incorporation within the existing Japanese syllabus. Whether it concerns the possibility of introducing an entire course or including a series of lectures within an already established course, an important factor in the success of distance learning is the degree to which it can be integrated into the existing curriculum.

My lectures on Australian culture and cultural diversity were included within a course entitled "Cross-Cultural Communication" convened by Professor Yasuo Nishizawa. My brief was to provide a module of three lectures but those lectures needed to complement Professor Nishizawa's classes, and match the material already covered in the course. My aim may have been to give the students some understanding of the history of immigration and settlement and the reality that contemporary Australia is a place in which people from different countries and of different cultures live. However, this needed to be meaningful in the context of the entire course and relevant to the broader aims of study. There was scope for bringing out both points of similarity and divergence between Australian society and culture and that of Japan. Real benefit would come from the students developing a comparative awareness, and some insight into the ways countries other than Japan have experienced the interaction of cultures in a profound way. I needed to make such connections obvious, so that my module of lectures would not seem disconnected or incongruous. Therefore I introduced my series of lectures by citing the words of Kakuzo Okakura, a prominent Japanese intellectual whose work the students had studied during the course. Quoting from "The Book of Tea", I highlighted Okakura's concern for potential misunderstanding between cultures, but also his belief in the possibility of different cultures coexisting and 'supplementing' each other. Okakura's thinking had developed in response to Japan's relationship with the West, but his thoughts could also be insightful for understanding cultural diversity within other societies, such as that within Australia. Indeed he may have been surprised to find that Australia is now like "a tea-cup in which humanity has met". The interface of cultures provided a theoretical ground from which Professor Nishizawa could re-evaluate Japan's 'cross-cultural communication', both in terms of ancient relationships with China and Korea, and Japan's more recent 'westernization'. What I tried to bring was a meaningful contrast and comparison with Australia's post-war expansion in terms of industry, economy and population, and the development of Australia's multicultural society. Together Professor Nishizawa and I hoped the students' understanding of Australia's cultural diversity would relate to their exploration of the impact of cross-cultural communication upon Japan.

Delivery Quality and Delivery Techniques

Aside from course content and pedagogical approach, other factors have been crucial for the success of the international distance learning classes: delivery quality and delivery techniques. Teams of technical support staff at both Gifu and Sydney universities have worked tirelessly to ensure smooth transmission and reception of the video-conferences. This bespeaks the need for strong institutional support, including expert technicians, video-conferencing equipment and other technical resources. Unfortunately this also raises the possibility of institutional constraints, given the lessons designed for international distance learning may not always be suitable for domestic students. Departments and Faculties may be limited in the resources they can assign towards developing distance learning units of study for use by students of other universities.

The technology supporting the long-distance learning link-up between Gifu and Sydney universities can be taken advantage of to create an interactive learning experience. Various forms of multimedia have been employed, using a high visual component (video, photographs, images). The use of real-time transmissions has maximized immediacy. Given there is no significant time difference between Australia and Japan, video-conferencing is a particularly effective vehicle for distance learning classes. Nonetheless our plans for the future involve investigating the possibilities for providing on-demand transmissions and E-learning technologies to complement video-conferencing. We aim to develop forms of video-conferencing beyond the standard lecture format to include new strategies for student-to-student and student-to-lecturer interaction.

Reflections

While certainly challenging, international distance learning is ultimately very fulfilling. Feedback from students has reinforced this fact. It was satisfying to learn, for example, that “Sonia’s English was easy to understand” (email from student dated 12/1/05). It was rewarding to see careful consideration: “I read through the study material of today’s class in the train back from university. And now I have questions from today’s class...” (Email from student dated 11/1/05). And of course I was pleased to hear my students say, “I’m looking forward to meeting you again next week” (email from student dated 11/1/05).

A LECTURE EXCHANGE FROM JAPAN TO AUSTRALIA BY SEIKO YASUMOTO AND TORU TATSUMI

Our role in this project has been to advance the reception of Japanese lectures from Gifu University to the benefit of Sydney University students through video-conferencing. Ms Yasumoto has integrated video-conferencing into her third year option course ‘Media, Culture and New Japan’. This is part of her commitment to teaching excellence aiming for teaching best practice utilising existing and evolving technologies. She is of the view that rather than teaching by rote, creating an effective multifaceted learning environment in the Australian classroom stimulates student commitment to the learning process with enhanced outcomes. The use of video-conferencing in real time is an important element in the overall teaching strategy for the student to learn about Japan within the boundaries of the course parameters.

Background of the Unit of Studies 'Media, Culture and New Japan'

This course aims to discourse the new Japan and its youth culture and to guide Sydney University students to understand and broaden their knowledge of inherent and changing aspects of Japanese society and culture. The course content includes newspaper reading, video analysis, discussion and research presentation, and video-conferencing. Themes to be covered are from Japanese traditions through to contemporary popular culture. Students explore Japan utilising six modules:

- 1) Positioning and status of people in Japanese society, changing values;
- 2) Popular Culture in Japan; J-pop music, J-Anime, J-Manga and its reception in East Asia;

- 3) Japanese print and television media, sociological and cultural impacts;
- 4) Evolution of traditional Japanese traditions and external influences;
- 5) Discourse, J-pop language relating to social issues;
- 6) 'Soft Power' and Youth Culture.

The course also provides students with opportunities to pursue their individual interests and develop analytical and communication skills. Students are expected to do research on their selected topic(s) on Japanese society and culture. It is not easy to learn about Japan in Australia without spending time in Japan. Video-conferencing is playing a significant role in bringing 'Japan' into the Australian classroom. The audio-visual transfers in real time challenge, stimulate and motivate the students. The process is interactive and moves the students forward from perceived stereotypes of Japan to current realities including the rapid social changes happening in Japanese society. Each video-conference session is planned and themed prior to the individual video-conferences taking place, ensuring that the content and context is relevant to the overall course objectives.

Who Are the Receivers?

They are third year students who are learning Japanese language and Japanese studies at the University of Sydney. Their majors vary from Arts, Science, Engineering, Music, Law, Business and Commerce. Language backgrounds are primarily English, Chinese and Korean. The enrolment number varies each year; typically 40 to 50 students take this course. Most of them have never been to Japan and never experienced Japanese life first-hand. From year to year a few students will have visited Japan, but just for a short time. Their language ability at third year varies; the Japanese language proficiency level is from five to six on a Sydney University scale of ten where ten is the highest level. Video-conferencing is particularly challenging for students as they have to look, listen and concurrently take notes.

Lectures: Content and Process of Delivery from Gifu University

Two lectures were delivered each year from 2006 to 2008. The first lecture was about 'Edo Hayashi', traditional Japanese festivals and events, and the origin and changes of traditional Japanese music, given by Professor Aoyagi. The second lecture was on 'Kieru Jidou' (Emotional Outburst) given by Professor Tachibana and it was about current social issues among children 10-15 years old, harming other children physically and psychologically. In 2009 two lectures were delivered. One was on 'Futokou to Hikikomori' (Social Withdrawal) given by Professor Miyamoto. This addressed one of the critical social problems among junior high school and senior high school students in Japan who are withdrawn from life for more than three to four years. The other lecture was given by Professor Morita on 'Restoration of Edo Culture Instead of Treating Edo Era as a Primitive Japan', giving a new value to Edo culture as an origin of modern Japanese society and culture. Professor Morita described similar issues both Edo and modern Japan share, such as social hierarchy, education, environment and diversity of the society. Reviewing Edo culture in this way gives a new perspective on modern Japanese society and culture.

An extension of the video-conferencing required receptor students to make notes summarizing the main lecture points, participating in ensuing discussions and finally submitting an assignment. The assignment guidelines required the students to isolate major issues from each video-conference, critically analyze the issues, and express their views and opinions. The feedback from the students towards video-conferencing has been very positive: "hard to listen to, difficult, but challenging", "interesting, and want more", "never had opportunities of learning through video-conferencing", "give us more time for an assessment task". In the lecture by Professor Miyamoto given last year, he outlined the theoretical perspectives regarding socially withdrawn youth. Following the lecture a young Japanese student, who had experienced social withdrawal for a number of years, gave a most moving account about his personal experience. His willingness to speak out in an international video-conference had immediacy with the audience and particularly resonated with an Australian student in the receptor group. The Australian student, after exchanging experiences with the Japanese student, informed me later that he had been withdrawn for many years and that exchanging his experience with the Japanese student was very

rewarding for him. This combination of a theoretical perspective with a case study gave the students a very balanced account. This was an example of a cross-border social benefit arising from a video-conference and had the effect of drawing the diverse cultures of Australia and Japan together and in this environment maximizing the conjoint learning experience for the students.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Video-conferencing has a theoretical and practical part to play in the teaching and learning process. It lifts the classroom from local to international. The interactivity of the video-conference helps to dissolve real or imagined barriers to the learning process and is also edifying for the video-conferencing lecturers. Video-conferencing helps students, with the regimen of subsequent group discussion and assignment preparation, to develop critical thinking and analytical skills.

The Sydney—Gifu collaborative program provides the ongoing opportunity for video-conferencing as a supplement to the boundaries of the classroom, to the educational and social benefit of both Japanese and Australian students. Video-conferencing gives Australian students opportunities for direct contact in real time with Japan to learn about selective aspects of Japan. This tool is an important part of the evolving teaching aids and helps to create an effective learning environment. Transmitting lectures about Australia to Japan addresses a growing desire within Japanese universities to internationalize curricula by expanding the classes presented in English and providing domestic students with an accessible international experience. For Australian universities too, broadening the student learning experience has become an important aim, as has the need to raise awareness of Australia's place within the Asia-Pacific region.

The broadest aims of international exchange can now be served through international distance learning, by allowing students a readily accessible but truly global educational experience. We believe that the video-conferencing lecture exchange between Gifu and Sydney universities, as a successful example of collaborative work between a Japanese and an Australian university, is playing an important role in the development of education across geographical boundaries in the emerging global village.