

# Using Multiply as a class management and communication system for EFL classes

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*This paper outlines the unofficial use of a social networking and blogging site called Multiply by several **EFL** teachers and their students in Tama University's English Shower program in Tama City, Tokyo. Five teachers used the system as a communication hub for their classes, requiring students to access it regularly to submit homework, receive corrected work, check their class schedules, and other tasks depending on the class and the teacher. At the end of the term, students were surveyed using an online form to assess the perceived usefulness of having used the system. Though survey results confirmed some issues for teachers that came to light half-way through the term, the responses of those having used the system were also positive.*

## **Introduction: Web 2.0**

Free, web-based resources are becoming increasingly common for educational purposes, and particularly teachers who do not have the chance to interact with students on a daily basis can benefit greatly from them. In a non-digital learning environment, university students often have to wait a full week before receiving feedback on homework submitted after the previous class. Communication is often limited to a preset, coexisting time and place, and students (and teachers) may have difficulty keeping track of what was done when, and when work is due.

The Internet has openly been embraced by the world of education since its inception, making the lives of teachers and students much easier. The Internet has helped extend communication beyond the **EFL** classroom, as well as supply access to a wealth of

resources. Teachers have created websites where they post learning content, links, schedules, deadlines, events, contact information etc., and students have done the same.

Enter Web 2.0 technology. Now that websites, Internet browsers, bookmarks, search engines, online databases, directories, address books, and other digital reference materials have become mainstay alternatives to print media (indeed having sometimes replaced it), there has been a sudden surge into *interconnectivity*. Web-based applications like Mixi, Blogger, Wikipedia, YouTube, Photobucket, etc., all of which are process rather than product-focused, are now becoming quite ubiquitous.

Alm provides a clear overview into to some of the changes we have seen with Web 2.0 through this table (2006, p. 30).

Table 1: Comparison of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
authentic materials (text, pictures, audio, video)	live materials (RSS, Flickr, last.fm, postcasts, videocasts)
webpages	blogs, wikis
discussion forums	blogs
separate applications for mails, chat, photos, music, video etc.	social networking sites (e.g., MySpace)

Though there is a great deal of hype about Web 2.0, the technology is actually nothing new; it is simply that it is now being used in different ways. The *structures* one can find online now are what is new, and they offer environments that are highly conducive to enhancing the efficacy of language teaching and learning.

This paper takes a look at how one of these Web 2.0 structures, a social networking/ blogging site called *Multiply* (<http://multiply.com>), has been used as a tool for computer-mediated communication (CMC) for several classes of low-level, compulsory EFL classes for non-English majors at Tama University. In addition to having dialogues with teachers on their experiences, or soliciting feedback from them online, a user-friendly, web-based, form-creating application called *Wufoo* (<http://www.wufoo.com>) was used at the end of the term to determine students' impressions of Multiply. The paper first outlines the benefits and limitations of adopting this web-based application for EFL courses, as observed by the author. Following that is an overview of collected data from students (and teachers) regarding its perceived usefulness. Finally, a few application ideas are offered that are not taken advantage of in Tama University classes.

## Benefits

Multiply is a social networking site that offers an impressive array of communicative tools, and emphasizes the ability to share media. The site was launched in 1999 and has close to 10,000,000 registered users. It is simple in its design and is relatively user-friendly. Users choose an ID which doubles as their site name (<http://myuniqueusername.multiply.com>), and get several built-in modules (sections) to do each of the following: create a welcome section; create blog entries (in which users could upload various types of files for download); showcase recipes; rate items such as books, movies, restaurants, and products; post music

(uploaded or linked); post video (uploaded or linked); create a calendar (schedule); paste photos; write notes; create a list of links; and receive general comments on a guestbook.

Users can also give and receive private messages with other *Multiply* users worldwide, participate in *Multiply groups*, and give and receive comments to postings of pretty much any kind on their own sites and the sites of others. In addition, users can customize their sites to a seemingly infinite degree, either by selecting from the variety of pre-set themes offered with *Multiply*, by searching groups like *Customized Themes* (<http://customizedthemes.multiply.com>) for thousands of unique, user-made themes, or by making use of any *CSS* coding skills they may have.

The author initiated use of this web-based tool for use in her own classes in the English Shower program at Tama University based on positive feedback from a colleague at another institution. Several teachers at Tama University then followed suit, adopting the platform for their own classes after being persuaded by the author. No analytical comparisons with other systems were made prior to adoption of *Multiply*, as the decisions were personal and unofficial. Also, time constraints prevented a more thorough consideration of alternatives. Finally, most teachers using the system, including the author, had no prior experience using online management systems for their classes, and therefore neither knew of many other alternatives, nor of what kinds of problems to expect. As a result, although many of the benefits of using *Multiply* were obvious to teachers before implementing the system, the drawbacks were not anticipated and were only really discovered once in use.

The following comprise the main reasons *Multiply* was adopted for non-official use by five teachers in the English Shower program at Tama University:

### 1) *Multiply groups*

*Multiply* allows users the ability to become members of common interest groups, or to create and administer their own groups. At Tama University, in addition to creating their own site and having their students create their own sites, most teachers using *Multiply* also created *group* sites for each of the classes they taught. Students with *Multiply* accounts were then invited to become members of their respective class sites and were given access to certain materials as well as the ability contribute to certain parts of that site. Once members, students could easily access their classmates' *Multiply* sites via a list on the group (class) site, viewable to all group members. The class's group site therefore acted as a classroom hub, which teachers set up as they saw fit. The author used her class site for the following:

- a) uploading assignment files for student download;
- b) posting the class schedule (calendar) including class objectives and activities, due dates, and dates that work is assigned;
- c) posting handouts (and homework) in the form of blog entries;
- d) posting links to outside resources, including video and audio;
- e) receiving work from students in one or two sections (modules);
- f) uploading audio and video recordings of student work, as well as model video presentations from students of the same course in previous years.

### 2) *Privacy settings*

The ability to set different levels of access is touted by *Multiply* as one of its key features. Teachers, as administrators of group (class) sites as well as of their own sites, can set

privacy levels on a per post basis, enabling a teacher to essentially run a private blog for class participants right on top of, or embedded within, a public blog. Both types of posts are treated the same by Multiply in terms of alerts to the poster and the poster's contacts, but the privacy settings limit the content to only those to whom the user wants to give access. What this means is that teachers can make some links and some blog posts public to anyone with an Internet connection, but limit access to who can view student work or any posts of a more private nature. This also proves useful in cases where students have purchased copyrighted CDs and do not have the equipment to access the data (as was the case with some Tama University students). Teachers could upload CD audio files, and through proper control of privacy settings, make this data accessible only to class site members.

### 3) *Bilingual administrative settings*

Multiply menus can be switched to Japanese for students if necessary. The whole sign-up/registration process could also be done in Japanese. Full use of Multiply in Japanese only is indeed possible. However, the most helpful source of Multiply knowhow on the Internet is to be found in the user forums, which are conducted pretty much exclusively in English, though a certain percentage are not native speakers.

### 4) *Management of student work*

The combination of private and group Multiply accounts provides an easy medium for teachers to read (and correct) students' written work and to interact with students outside class time. The benefits of submitting assignments on Multiply are as follows:

- a) Teachers who meet with students just once a week can collect and return homework in real time; students do not have to wait until the next class to submit late work, and teachers can return homework as soon as it is corrected.
- b) Although not required in any classes for the term in which Multiply was used at Tama University, students can upload their own audio and visual recordings onto the group site for teacher revision, class viewing, or to share with the world.
- c) Students can get exposure to working through a digital platform if they have not already been introduced to one.

Some teachers had students submit work on students' own sites, but using the group site for collecting student submissions has many additional benefits:

- a) Using the class site as a central hub means that teachers only have to check one site for homework.
- b) As the date and time are recorded automatically, it is easy for teachers to keep track of whose homework is late and to what degree it is late. If students submit written work on their own site, they have the capability of altering these dates and times.
- c) If students submit their work on a group site, other students can more easily access it, and give feedback right below the submission in the *comments* section (which is also where teachers can leave feedback or make corrections). It could be argued that students, knowing that peers are able to see their submissions, are more motivated to create quality work.
- d) It is very obvious to the teacher if students copy from the work of their classmates.

## Limitations:

Many limitations related to *Multiply* only became evident after the system was implemented.

### 1) PC & online access

All Tama University students are supposed to be equipped with a laptop **PC**, and there is wireless Internet access on campus. However, for one reason or another, a few students in one class did not own a laptop computer, which meant students had to share when *Multiply* access was required in class. When two or more classes were simultaneously accessing *Multiply*, access was often severely hampered. One of the goals of implementing a web-based system was to develop accountability in students; no longer could students say, "I didn't know this was for homework," "I was absent," or "I lost the handout," as everything was now accessible online. However, now a new set of excuses emerged: "I don't have a computer," or "The Internet was down."

### 2) Student unfamiliarity with web-based platforms

**a. Sign-up procedure.** For those students who had never joined any sort of online community, comprehension of basic tasks was sometimes limited. Email confirmation is a standard requirement when signing up for web-based applications of any kind. Three students in one of the author's classes could not understand notes left by *Multiply* administration in their *Multiply* account asking them to check their regular email inbox for a message to confirm their email addresses. When that email message was finally located (with teacher assistance) in each student's email inbox, students were still confused as to how to proceed when it was simply a matter of clicking the **URL** provided. Language was not the issue here, as in all three cases the email message was in Japanese.

**b. Managing email.** Once students had signed up for *Multiply*, they were asked by teachers to go to their *Multiply* account settings to configure their settings for *email alerts*. This was necessary to control the amount of email *Multiply* users receive regarding activity related to their websites. *Multiply* users are able to check boxes corresponding to the activities for they would like to receive alerts:

*Replies to my posts*

*Replies to posts I've commented on*

*Personal messages to me*

*... and replies*

*Posts by my contacts*

*... and replies*

*Posts to groups that user is a member of*

*... and replies*

*Invitations to be a contact*

*Monthly newsletter*

*What you've missed*

Clearly, with all alert boxes checked, the registered email accounts of users who have membership in several groups and/or who are very active with *Multiply* could become inundated with mail messages. Many students who had not turned off all but basic alerts as instructed when they signed up were subsequently confused and overwhelmed with irrelevant email, often in English at that. Again, language ability could not be fully to blame as instructions for this process were available in Japanese.

**c. Homework submission procedure.** Depending on the teacher and the class site setup, students were requested to submit homework on the class site by clicking the “add note” button in the “notes” module, the “add review” button in the “reviews” module, etc. However, at the beginning of the term, several students from three classes submitted homework in the “comments” section underneath a previously submitted assignment from another student. Obviously, “comments” are for feedback, but the mistake could just as easily have been contributed to unfamiliarity with social networking or blogging systems as to unfamiliarity with language. This was problematic from a class management perspective as well, because unless teachers had the corresponding email alert on their class site set to “on,” they would not be alerted by email that the student in question had completed the homework.

**d. Accepting group invitations.** Once signed up and email-confirmed, students were invited to join the class site. How this was done depended on the class and the teacher – some students were asked to email, or write down on paper and submit, or tell their Multiply ID directly to the teacher, while others were instructed to leave a note on the teacher’s personal Multiply site guestbook. A few students did not catch this part, but many more misunderstood the requirement of confirming their invitation in their personal Multiply inbox once invited. If teachers had high privacy settings on their group (class) site, students who did not become members by accepting the invitation to join the group were not able to access the whole site. Nor did they show up on the member list to make themselves accessible to other group members.

### *3) Teacher unfamiliarity with web-based platforms*

Teachers using Multiply for the first time experienced some problems at first, mostly in the teaching of how to use it. A couple forgot to remind students of the email confirmation process and email alerts settings, which exacerbated students’ problems. Initially many teachers posted one entry for each lesson in the calendar module (used as the class schedule), but this proved troublesome as both teachers and students could not easily make reference to events in the past or future. Revision-making was also painstakingly slow. As a result, most teachers using the calendar function altered it slightly from its originally intended use, creating only one entry for the whole term that was constantly edited.

### *4) No static pages*

A static page is one that is seen on traditional websites – it does not have dated entries, like a blog. Multiply users cannot create static pages, although the welcome module could be defined as a static section of a page as it can be easily changed and does not contain dated entries. Unlike blogging sites such as *Wordpress*, users cannot create the additional pages (often with tabs in a menu bar) that would allow users to expand their sites into a fully functioning **WCMS** (web content management system). If students wish to showcase an essay, or teachers want to post lengthy, easy-to-access, permanent pages about plagiarism or class rules, they are limited to how they present this information in Multiply. Such content would likely be inserted as blog entries, which can easily get lost as a site thickens with data.

### 5) *No search function*

Multiply does not have a search section that allows users to search a blog for information. Nor does it have a categorization system that would allow teachers to group their information according to topic. This might have been helpful when students were looking for something specific on a class site that was packed with information, and spent a seemingly great deal of time searching for it in class. Multiply does, however, allow users to display tag clouds in the welcome module (tags are words or short phrase descriptors for every blog entry users make on their sites, allowing viewers to see and click on the tag to access any entries “tagged” with the same key words/phrases). However, tagging tends to be used for micro concepts as opposed to major themes, so it is therefore more useful in helping users locate details on a topic. Furthermore, at Tama University, many users were not very computer literate and therefore not likely aware of what tags are and how they are helpful. Subsequently, they would not have bothered to tag entries on their own blogs and displayed them in a tag cloud. Students in this study were not required to build up their own Multiply sites, although some did. As such, students had very few, if any, of their own entries to tag.

### 6) *No Java applications*

To differentiate itself from other platforms, Multiply is adverse to the use of third party software for mini applications. While this arguably keeps the system simpler than other comparable platforms, it was frustrating for the teacher who wanted to showcase widgets (mini applications) or embed forms of media from sources other than Multiply partners such as YouTube.

## Student feedback

Although five classes of up to 24 students each made use of Multiply in the term, completing the survey was not compulsory. Teachers encouraged students to complete them in free time if class time was not available, but in the end only 43 students completed the survey. After requesting basic class information, subsequent questions in the online survey aimed to determine students’ perceptions of the merits and demerits of using Multiply for their English classes. The survey was bilingual, and although students were encouraged to answer in English, Japanese responses were permitted. See Appendix A for the complete survey in English.

Survey results automatically generated from Wufoo indicate that 23 of the 43 surveyed visited the Multiply system two or three times a week, 16 visited once a week or less, and the remaining few used the site more regularly. Checking the site two or three times each week was the expected minimum that students would access the site. The fact that so many checked once or less a week may explain why some students had difficulty with the system; they were not getting enough exposure.

In terms of ease of use, 56% percent claimed it was difficult at first, but they got the hang of it. The remainder or respondents were divided fairly equally between “It was difficult. I still don’t understand” and “it was easy.”

As expected, the top three most useful aspects (modules or sections) of Multiply were, in order, the blog section (where teachers inserted class information and handouts) the input

section (whatever it was titled – where students submitted assignments) and the calendar section (where teachers had the class schedule and deadlines posted).

The results showed that 47% thought that Multiply was effective overall, 16% said it was not, and the remaining 37% were uncertain. The table below shows the number and percentage of students who thought the benefits listed on the survey applied to their own situation.

Table 2: Benefits of Multiply cited by students.

<b>No. of students</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
26 (60%)	I could check what homework was due when.
11 (26%)	I could access handouts from the teacher if I missed a class or lost my papers.
5 (12%)	I could easily communicate with my teacher.
0 (0%)	I could easily communicate with my classmates.
11 (26%)	I could read comments about my work from the teacher online.
10 (23%)	I could read other students' work.
5 (12%)	I could enjoy making my own homepage.
0 (0%)	I could make contact with people outside my class, sometimes from different parts of the world.
0 (0%)	I could search for and join Multiply special interest groups.
7 (16%)	I could improve my computer skills.
3 (7%)	I really enjoyed using Multiply for my class.

Only three students among the 43 surveyed checked that they really enjoyed using Multiply, but two more said that they would continue to use Multiply after the course finished. 18 Students responded that they would not continue to use Multiply, and the remaining 20 indicated that they were not sure.

Appendix B shows students' comments in original form. Some negative feedback, such as connection speed, typing ability, language, and general computing skills, did not directly relate to Multiply. One student was worried about visibility of his/her recorded speech, and another seemed unaware of option of submitting homework on paper, which was likely due to a miscommunication with the teacher. One unanticipated concern for students was Internet access off campus. There is campus-wide Internet access at Tama University, so it could be surmised that students without home Internet access did not want to spend more time on campus than necessary. A legitimate concern for student users of Multiply was "page length." If users want to search blog content from the front page of a Multiply

website, they have to click the “view all” button, which takes the user to complete, full-text, reverse chronological order blog entries. With so many blog entries to search through in some cases, it obviously would take students a great deal of time to find what they were looking for. As stated earlier, one of *Multiply*’s main drawbacks is the lack of search and categorizing capabilities.

Students did confirm some of the benefits, the most obvious being that it is convenient to be able to access information regardless of space and time. They also confirmed that having an online schedule is useful, and that access to students’ work is beneficial.

## Teacher feedback

Feedback from teachers on the benefits and drawbacks of having used the systems was also collected, through informal face-to-face interactions during the term, or through the Internet at the end of the term (two teachers did not respond to this request). A sample of comments is recorded in Appendix C. Fostering of student accountability and convenience were the most commonly heard or cited benefits of using *Multiply*, and demerits included the lack of search function and technical setbacks.

## Future applications

Obviously, feedback collected in this small study suggests that having taken advantage of the *Multiply* social networking and blogging platform was problematic, but also beneficial for students as well as teachers. Despite the glitches, the overall experience was positive, and all teachers reported that they planned to continue using it. Many problems encountered by both teachers and students can be remedied through experience.

Some possibilities with potential that were not exploited on *Multiply* include the following (and these could apply to other web-based structures as well):

1. Student site development: Students could use their own sites more as a term project, uploading their own audio and visual recordings, etc. as well as journaling and showcasing written work in blogs.
2. Peer review: Whether on each others’ sites or on the class site, students could do more written peer review in the form of comments submitted after others’ posts, or replies to comments. With the continued development of social networking, more than ever students are able to communicate easily with each other in online environments.
3. Collaborative projects: For example, one student uploads a project draft, another student working on the same project downloads, edits, and uploads it again for other students to continue the process.
4. Penpaling: Whether with strangers in classes in the same school or from classes in other countries, *Multiply* could serve as a platform for letter-writing projects.

Of course, newer and better platforms continue to appear, and just as users become comfortable using one web-based structure, another one with different and/or improved features comes along and tempts users to switch. For individual teachers, one positive result of having used *Multiply* as a class management system with little or no prior such experience is that they are now better able to evaluate and compare other and new systems in order to find one that best meets their needs. The learning curve will also likely not be as steep with subsequent platforms. It is with this spirit of gained knowledge that the author will

experiment next term with *Edublogs*, a *Wordpress*-based blogging platform that contains plenty of search options, is java-friendly, and is specifically targeted at teachers and learners. The detailed privacy settings and social networking aspect of Multiply are sadly going to be sacrificed in the hope of gains in versatility.

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## Appendix A

### *Tama University multiply usage survey*

This questionnaire was created to find out how you feel about having used the blogging/networking site Multiply for your English class. Please answer the questions below and click the submit button.

1. For which class did you use Multiply?
2. How often did you check the Multiply homepage for your class (**NOT** your personal Multiply site)?
  - a. once a day or more
  - b. 4–6 times a week
  - c. 2–3 times a week
  - d. once a week or less

3. How easy was it for you to learn how to use *Multiply*?
  - a. It was easy.
  - b. It was difficult at first, but I got used to it.
  - c. It was very difficult. I still have problems using it.
4. Overall, do you think having a *Multiply* homepage for your class was effective?
  - a. Yes
  - b. Not sure
  - c. No
5. What sections of your class homepage on *Multiply* were the most helpful to you? Check your top three.
  - a. the calendar section (class schedule)
  - b. the blog section (notes from teacher)
  - c. the homework submission section
  - d. the video section
  - e. the links section
  - f. the photo section
  - g. another section (explain in later section)
6. What do you think were the benefits of using *Multiply*? Check all that apply.
  - a. I could check what homework was due and when it was due.
  - b. I could access handouts from the teacher if I missed a class or lost my papers.
  - c. I could easily communicate with my teacher.
  - d. I could easily communicate with my classmates.
  - e. I could read comments about my work from the teacher online.
  - f. I could read other students' work.
  - g. I could enjoy making my own homepage.
  - h. I could make contact with people outside my class, sometimes from different parts of the world.
  - i. I could search for and join *Multiply* special interest groups.
  - j. I could improve my computer skills.
  - k. I really enjoyed using *Multiply* for my class.
7. Please explain any drawbacks you found working with *Multiply*. Also, if there were any benefits not listed in the above section, please indicate so here.
8. What suggestions would you make to enhance your *Multiply* experience?
9. Will you continue using *Multiply* after the course is finished?
  - a. Yes
  - b. Not sure
  - c. No

## Appendix B

### *Verbatim written feedback from students*

(Author's translations in square brackets, with additions in round brackets)

Drawbacks (in addition to "nothing in particular"):

- At first, I didn't understand how to use. It is very complicated.
- 使い方が分かりにくかった [It was difficult to use.]
- Make more clear!
- Multiply is little confusing.
- Explain How to use this is no good
- We need PC feeld then.
- あまりPCを使わない人には使いづらいかもしれない [It was likely difficult to use for people who are not familiar with computers.]
- 授業中にinternetに繋がらなくて困った。電池が足りない。[If Internet access failed in class, it was a problem. There wasn't enough power (in our PCs).]
- インターネットがおかしくなったら確認が出来なくなる [If there was a problem with the Internet, we weren't able to check.]
- ページが長すぎて見にくいし使いにくい。[Pages were too long and as a result it was difficult to see (find) and use what we were looking for.]
- I dont know the reasons but when I used mutiply, it was really slow to show up. That made me so frastrated.
- There is too much information so I think it's confused to see.
- 画面が見にくい [The screen was difficult to see.]
- サイトに飛ぶまでの時間が長い [Connection time to the site was too long.]
- ビデオは大学内の人間だけが見れるのかどうかかわからない。あまりビデオのシステムは好きではない [I wasn't sure whether or not others at school could access the videos (of us). I didn't like the video system.]
- もし家でネットにつなげない環境の持ち主だったら宿題とかわからずに単位を落とすってこともあるからやめておいた方がいいと思う。[If I was in an environment where I couldn't connect to the Internet, I feared I wouldn't get credit/ would fail, so I thought I'd be better off not using the system (and submit assignments on paper).]
- デメリットはほとんどが英語で書いてあったので理解できないところがあった。[A demerit was that because everything was in English, there were things I couldn't understand.]
- It is difficult for people who can't access Internet at home.They are can't submit homework at home.
- タイピングが苦手な人はちょっと苦勞すると思う。[People who can't type well had a hard time.]
- PCを使うことによって、タイピングが速くなりました [Depending on the computer I was using, typing (input speed) got slower.]
- ES以外で使用しない。[We didn't make use (of Multiply) outside ES (the English program).]
- 家でインターネット出来ないとき遅れをとった。[If I couldn't use the Internet at home, I fell behind.]
- 見るのが面倒だった。[It was bothersome to have to look at (interact with?) the system.]
- いちいち見るのが面倒 [It was annoying to have to access (the system) all the time.]

*Merits (in addition to “nothing in particular”):*

- オンラインであるため、いつでもどこでも使用できるのがよかった。[Because everything was online, we could access it anytime and anywhere.]
- It can use whenever and anywhere because of it is internet.
- メリットはいつまでに宿題を出すべきだとかが書いてあったから便利だった。[A merit was the convenience in having assignment deadlines written on the site.]
- I think maybe no disadvantage, this site.
- わかりやすい。[I could easily understand everything.]
- It is delicate customized.
- I think it is so convenient to use multiply!
- It can see another students assignment so improve my English ability
- タイピングが早くなりました [My typing skills improved.]
- 使いやすい [It was easy to use.]

*Suggestions made by students:*

- もっとページのレイアウトをシンプルに。[Simplify the page layout.]
- わかりやすくしてほしい。[Make it easier to understand.]
- I need documents distributed. than become usable Multiply.
- ページを短くしてクリックアイコンを減らす。背景と文字がマッチしていない。ページに工夫をしすぎて表示に時間がかかる。[Shorten the pages and make the click icon clearer. The background and writing didn't match well. It took too much time to move between pages (connection speed was slow.)]
- Change design.
- Don't use to submit homework. For example "Reading Marathon"
- You should tell students how to use multiply more especially to repeaters class because I think most of them didn't understand what is on the multiply.
- わかりやすくプリントにまとめる...とかはどうでしょうか [It might be useful to distribute summarizing handouts etc.]

## Appendix C

### *Feedback from teachers about Multiply*

*Drawbacks:*

- Blog entries appear in reverse chronological order.
- I tried to upload their performance videos but didn't know how to do it.
- Some students had difficulty signing up and I was not able to successfully troubleshoot the reason for some time.
- Tama University changed student email accounts half way through the term and this caused some problems for some students who had used their Tama university emails to register with Multiply.
- Students had extremely different levels of computer literacy.
- Students could not quickly find the information they were looking for on Multiply.
- I didn't know that some students already had a Multiply account used in a previous class lead by another teacher- I made those students create new accounts when it was not necessary.

- It would be better if the site had static pages so information like the schedule could be more clearly shown.
- I needed more time to instruct students how to properly use the site; the learning curve was sometimes steep.

*Merits:*

- Teachers could access all students' work in one place.
- Reading assignments were inputted weekly so teachers could monitor and grade accurately.
- Students couldn't lose drafts etc. that they needed to build on for subsequent assignments, so lessons were not interrupted for that reason; submitted assignments were safely stored online.
- I didn't have to worry so much about physically filing my different class assignments. It was great to have so much less paperwork.
- All my materials were instantly available to me anytime.
- Giving information visually through Multiply in addition to orally was effective.
- Students became personally accountable for all their work; there were fewer excuses. Even absent students could be made accountable for preparing for tests and doing assignments.
- I stopped worrying about whether I had remembered to tell students something in class or not – as long as I had remember to write it online. And if not, I could just update the class site.
- I saved a lot of paper. If students requested, I would give them hard copies, but it was so much less wasteful and time-efficient to not have handouts several pages long for every student.
- Students learned how to use a real Internet site and improved their computer skills in English.
- I could easily provide further resources to students in the form of links to other sites.
- It was useful that students could see the work of their classmates, but I should have taken more advantage of this.

## **Author biodata**

**Cathrine-Mette Mork** arrived in Japan in 1995 to teach in the **JET** program, and has continued to teach mostly at the university level since. Her experience spans from young children at private English schools, to retirees in community-sponsored continuing education classes. Her interests include intercultural communication, **CALL**, and learning strategies.