Cognitive and non-cognitive skills acquired through two collaborative e-learning projects

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Computers, music players, smartphones or tablets, youngsters of today seem to always be multi-tasking with one or more of these at the same time. Whether we like this or not, this is something that will only escalate with time. There is no doubt that this trend is having a huge impact on education (Martin et al, 2011). Up to now many students would probably not associate their mobile devices, at least in the Japanese context, with learning. However, if technology can be introduced to promote collaborative learning there is a far greater potential for autonomous learning to occur outside the classroom.

This paper presentation will introduce two projects that differ slightly in the way technology has been used to advocate autonomous and collaborative learning. The first project involves a collaborative e-learning exchange project between high school students in Japan and Australia sponsored by the Australia-Japan Foundation. Whereas the other project involves Japanese economics university students and how they have used ICT tools to communicate and learn collaboratively amongst themselves.

The theoretical framework which this study is based around includes Kolb’s “Experiential Learning” (1984), Gibbs’s “Reflective Cycle” (1988) and Ash & Clayton’s “Reflective Framework” (2005) which stress the importance of “reflection” in student learning. According to Kolb and Gibbs, “reflection” about learning is indispensable for students in terms of raising and maintaining motivation to learn.

Regarding the first project, students in Japan learning English, created 5 sets of multimodal digital stories introducing local and national cultural elements while their Australian counterparts did the same, but in Japanese. All digital stories were exchanged every 2 months over the course of one academic year. Students in Australia provided feedback online in English, whereas students in Japan did the same, but in Japanese. Student created eBooks were made with various forms of iPad apps including Comic Life, iMovie, PuppetPals, Tellagami and Book Creator for iPad. The second project however involves students from the department of economics at a medium sized private university in Western Japan and how they used ICT to collaborate and learn towards joint goals. Through the use of these edu-tech tools this paper will highlight the value of ICT usage in the context of foreign language education and students in the department of economics in recent times. It was discovered that not only digital literacies but also various cognitive and non-cognitive skills like teamwork discussion skills developed in the process.