

# Social Networking behind student lines with Mixi

by Steve McCarty  
Professor, Osaka Jogakuin College  
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# ABSTRACT - particularly for viewers in Second Life

In a cross-cultural educational context with EFL students in Japan, the presenter sought to enhance integrative motivation through a supplementary online dimension. The social networking site (SNS) Mixi allowed the presenter to go behind the lines into student territory. However, negotiating with three 2007-08 classes where most students belonged to Mixi resulted in three different outcomes.

The presentation introduces the Japanese language interface of Mixi partly through a YouTube video made in a Computer Communication class in authentic collaboration with students. (Slides 7-9 can serve as an alternative to watching the video.) Social networking with Japanese students is an area where teachers have not customarily entered, involving issues of online technological proficiency, language skills, and the necessity of an invitation.

Student attitudes are probed as to a possible ambivalence in valuing their free expression versus the integrative motivation of social involvement with a teacher. There is also a sort of Heisenberg Principle whereby to observe a social phenomenon is to change it. One prediction was that results would differ with regard to whether or not a teacher was welcome in a student community depending on how students were approached for an invitation.

The presentation employs metaphors of lines and perspectives including “technoscapes” (Appadurai, 1990) in order to interpret social phenomena encountered in interactions with students. Social networking is proposed as a Web 2.0 educational approach that is authentic, collaborative, and immersive in cutting through power hierarchies and positively blurring the distinction between the classroom and the real life of students and teachers, which nowadays includes a virtual dimension.

# Students as unique subjects, not objects

## Treating students as unique individual subjects

- has methodological support in sociocultural theory
  - Students' contextual and developmental particulars can be of more value for teaching and research than abstract generalizations about aggregate populations. More important than constraining identities, changing roles are observed. Individual agency, creativity and self-reformation processes (cf. Roebuck, 2000, pp. 79ff) are presupposed. Thus, interpreting descriptive data on even one student can be of interest for research.
- is practiced in the Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) curriculum
  - A Computer Communication class with one student enrolled will nevertheless be offered again in 2008-09. The educational philosophy of OJC, a women's college where all students major in English, treats each student as "a unique individual of immeasurable worth" (Swenson & Cornwell, 2007, p. 109).
- enhances integrative motivation to learn EFL
  - Given the East Asian sense of reciprocity, student responsiveness and heightened motivation are predicted when a teacher models bilingualism, biculturalism, and practices reflect a self-actualizing target culture.

# Metaphors of lines in social spaces

- **Should students and teachers just read their lines?**
  - Choice to conform to a given role or to change the story line
- **Invisible lines in default human relationships**
  - Gender, age, power inequalities; default behavioral roles and constraints
  - Unwritten, unspoken expectations in societies and institutional cultures
  - Mutually exclusive affiliations in purportedly monocultural societies
  - Invisible lines of boundaries around socially acceptable, safe paths
  - Taken-for-granted assumptions, however, do not map across cultures
  - A contrasting culture can be like a minefield with invisible tripwires
  - Constructivism in instructivist cultures requires sensitive negotiations
- **Reading between the lines**
  - Reading the meaning of actions or omissions, words or symbolic texts
  - Discerning implications or motives, and noticing transformations
- **Reading behind the lines**
  - Interpreting language policies and programs for flexibility in order to empower local practitioner agency (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007, pp. 447ff)
- **Going behind the lines**
  - entering default student territory, in this case by online social networking
  - collaborating with students to enhance their L2 integrative motivation



# Mixed results crossing default social lines

Results of negotiations on teacher-student Mixi involvement in three OJC 2007-08 courses for 2- & 4-year college women

- **Bilingual Education** – before the teacher was a Mixi member
  - 13 Ss, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> year (of 4); 4 hours a week, 1 semester course
  - Thematically the course was unrelated to social networking (SNS), but e-mail, blog links to documents, & 2006 coursecasting site utilized
  - One active student agreed to invite the teacher into Mixi but never did
- **Computer Communication** – teacher tried again to get an invitation
  - 1 S & occasional guests, 2<sup>nd</sup> year (of 2); 2 hours a week, 1 semester
  - Thematically related to SNS, but not a formal part of class work; collaborated on an authentic YouTube video about Mixi
  - Readily invited the teacher into Mixi, then her friends agglutinated
- **Discussion** – teacher became a Mixi member early in the semester
  - 26 Ss, 1<sup>st</sup> year (of 2); 3 hours a week, 2<sup>nd</sup> semester (of 2)
  - Thematically unrelated, but with e-mail & Web references
  - Idea of a class Mixi community to stay in touch, but it did not happen because not all students were Mixi members yet as the semester ended

Teacher-administrator frontier: analogous to student-teacher lines & inhibitions?

# YouTube video introducing Mixi



Made in class with student collaboration and interaction, this video introduces the Mixi Japanese language interface. It also discusses students' attitudes and possible ambivalence about inviting a teacher into their SNS peer communities.

# A Mixi user's site – top of the profile page

The screenshot shows the top of a Mixi user's profile page. At the top left is the Mixi logo with the text 'mixi ミクシィ' and 'β version'. Below it is a navigation bar with icons and labels for Home, Diary, Community, Video, Photo, Music, Review, News, mikly, Find friends, Invite friends, Help, and Logout. A second navigation bar below it has links for Top, Message, Diary, Video, Photo, Music, Review, Favorites, and Settings. The main content area shows a warning message: '他の方から見たWAOEさんのトップページです。 (URL は http://mixi.jp/show\_friend.pl?id=14556233 でプロフィールを変更する場合「プロフィールの変更」よりお...'. Below this is a photo of a man (WAOEさん) with a red arrow pointing to it. To the right of the photo is a profile template with fields: Name (Steve McCarty), Gender (Male), Current Residence (Osaka Prefecture Higashi-Nakano City), Birthday (August 22), Blood Type (O), Hometown (USA), and Hobbies (Outdoor, Travel, Language, Reading, Internet). Each field has a 'Public' button. A red arrow points to the 'Public' button for Gender. At the bottom right is a 'Help' button. Two purple callout boxes provide additional information: one on the left explains the nickname and login status, and one on the right explains the profile template and public display options.

Two tool bars below, explained at the bottom

Caution: this is how others see one's site; its URL; update profile

Nickname + -san; friends; recent login



Intrusive ads at the top and here, with a help menu below

Profile template & whether to display each item publicly: bio-data & hobbies







Functions of possible interest to educators: upper tool bar for the whole Mixi site: news, reviews, communities, finding & inviting friends; lower tool bar for this site: send private message without having to know the friend's address, blog, videos, photos, favorites, log linking all Mixi users visiting this site, change preferences.



# A Mixi user's site – middle of the profile page

  [写真の変更](#)

**マイミグシー一覧**

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <br>ゆかちゃん☆<br>州さん (59) | <br>かっちゃんさ<br>ん (27) | <br>よっちゃんさん<br>(80)     |
| <br>わーちゃんさ<br>ん (74)   | <br>さゆさん (48)        | <br>+ベル+さん<br>(4)       |
| <br>たらめさん<br>(50)     | <br>えみりーさん<br>(58)  | <br>乖離@米寿完<br>了さん (21) |

 [全てを見る \(19人\)](#)

**職業** 教員 [全体に公開](#)

**所属** 大阪女学院大学・短大 [全体に公開](#)

**自己紹介** 米国ボストン市生まれ。ハワイ大学の修士号(M.A.)。大阪女学院短期大学／大阪女学院大学教授。世界オンライン教育学会名誉会長(会長、1998-2007)。2006年から、ベネッセコーポレーション<Worldwide Kids English>監修(バイリンガリズムとグローバル教育)。2004年から、国際協力機構JICAの「日本の社会と日本人」に関する講演者。名古屋人の妻。息子二人(1989,1992生まれ)。

**好きなホームページ** <http://waoe.org/steve>

**好きな言葉** バイリンガル

**好きな習いごと** オンライン教育技術

**最新の日記** [全体に公開](#)

- 12月30日 ... [Voice slide show](#)
- 12月19日 ... [Mt. Fuji visible from Tokyo](#)
- 12月07日 ... [YouTube video about Mixi](#)
- 11月10日 ... [Nikki rocks Osaka Kosen](#)
- 10月24日 ... [YouTube video made at Osaka](#)
- 10月15日 ... [Animation & music movie prof](#)
- 10月11日 ... [Article in Japanese about bi](#)

**Profile (cont'd):**  
Self-intro, link to homepage, what one likes to study


**One's recent blog entries**

**全般**

- [ヘルプトップ](#)
- [全般的な質問](#)
- [利用上の注意](#)
- [利用上の注意\(よくあるご質問\)](#)

**機能別ヘルプ**

|                          |                            |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| <a href="#">表示</a>       | <a href="#">マイミグシー</a>     |
| <a href="#">写真</a>       | <a href="#">日記</a>         |
| <a href="#">ラゲガキ</a>     | <a href="#">メッセージ</a>      |
| <a href="#">コミュニティ</a>   | <a href="#">フォトアルバム</a>    |
| <a href="#">mixi動画</a>   | <a href="#">mixiニュース</a>   |
| <a href="#">足あと</a>      | <a href="#">レビュー</a>       |
| <a href="#">mixiモバイル</a> | <a href="#">mixiプレミアム</a>  |
| <a href="#">お気に入り</a>    | <a href="#">ミュージック</a>     |
| <a href="#">新着お知らせ</a>   | <a href="#">フォトアップローダー</a> |
| <a href="#">機能要望</a>     | <a href="#">ツールバー</a>      |
| <a href="#">その他</a>      |                            |

 [一覧へ](#)

**General & specific help**

**Above:** change one's default photo or image among three available free; first nine friends, usually not the real photos of female students.



# A Mixi user's site - bottom of the profile page

コミュニティー一覧

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  <p>Worldwide Kids English<br/>(133)</p> |  <p>大阪女学院大学/短期大学<br/>(656)</p> |  <p>せかいを☆えいごで☆たのしもう (71)</p> |
|--|---|---|

[全てを見る \(3\)](#)

最新のアルバム



One's photo album; upload up to 10 free [一覧へ](#)

マイミクシイからの紹介文



乖離@暇公言

関係: 父上のお父様の長男坊

この方のおかげでハーフになりました。  
特に嬉しくも悲しくもないけど、ありがとう！  
母上にもよろしく！

One's communities, with a relatively large proportion of OJC 2- & 4-year college students evidently using Mixi

Testimonials from "My Mixi" friends, first specifying their relation to this user, in this case the author's son saying he is glad to be half Japanese thanks to his dad

The last function of introductions by others reflects Japanese culture, where self-image depends to a great degree on acceptance by others, and connections or introductions are important in certifying one's worth.

# Discussion of hypotheses & questions

## Why the varied results on social networking with different classes?

- Japanese values & group dynamics provided compelling explanations
- Time-place-occasion sensitivity & individual motivations also evident

## Did metaphors of lines and social spaces scaffold issues suitably?

- Invisible lines, social territories, crossing boundaries, hierarchical lines & the like proved useful by forefronting socio-cultural norms & expectations

## Did social networking with students enhance their L2 motivation?

- Not confirmed longitudinally, but enjoying learning can be transformative
- Integrative motivation of an intrinsically motivated student was reinforced
- Other students agglutinated of their own will once the wall was breached

## Did “technoscapes” serve to map individual & group perspectives?

- “Global flows” lack precision to account for the particular context in Japan
- Focus on perspective, but this is involved in treating students as subjects

## What needs further research in SNS or Web 2.0 for L2 learning?

- ‘Self’-centered motivation theories are not yet proven applicable to East Asian educational contexts. Alm (2006, pp. 30-34) cites self-determination theory in finding Web 2.0 activities motivating in Australia for German. This presentation agrees but points more strongly to the social in SNS for Japan.

# References

- Alm, A. (2006). CALL for autonomy, competence and relatedness: Motivating language learning environments in Web 2.0. *The JALT CALL Journal*, 2(3), 29-38.
- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7(2,3), 295-310. Retrieved February 26, 2008, from [http://www.intcul.tohoku.ac.jp/~holden/MediatedSociety/Readings/2003\\_04/Appadurai.html](http://www.intcul.tohoku.ac.jp/~holden/MediatedSociety/Readings/2003_04/Appadurai.html)
- Ramanathan, V. & Morgan, B. (2007). TESOL and policy enactments: Perspectives from practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(3), 447-463.
- Roebuck, R. (2000). Subjects speak out: How learners position themselves in a psycholinguistic task. In J. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning*, pp. 79-95. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swenson, T. & Cornwell, S. (2007). Pulling a curriculum together: Addressing content and skills across English and Japanese. In M. Carroll (Ed.), *Developing a New Curriculum for Adult Learners*, pp. 107-129. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

# Websites

- Mixi: <http://mixi.jp> (for an invitation e-mail: [mccarty@mail.goo.ne.jp](mailto:mccarty@mail.goo.ne.jp))
- YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com>
- “Social Networking in Japanese Student Territory with Mixi” (the video made in class for this presentation): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXBwr6gMrrM>
- Coursecasting Bilingual Education: <http://odeo.com/channel/93074>
- Presenter’s online library: <http://waoe.org/steve/epublist.html>