



TLT RESOURCES

# TLT WIRED

## ...with Edo Forsythe

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<tlt-wired@jalt-publications.org>



In this column, we explore the issue of teachers and technology—not just as it relates to CALL solutions, but also to Internet, software, and hardware concerns that all teachers face.

We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editor before submitting.

TLT WIRED ONLINE: A linked index of articles can be found at:

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## Merging Web 2.0 technologies to create interactive websites for students

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Web 2.0 tools allow teachers to easily create interactive websites to support interaction among their students and with themselves beyond the walls of the classroom. Several Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Tohoku created a collaborative website which integrates several web-based learning tools. The website utilizes a number of free Web 2.0 tools such as graphic logs, interactive message boards, and voice threads in an attempt to give Japanese high school and junior high school students a forum

for authentic English communication, and to kindle within these students a genuine interest in foreign culture and the English language.

### The website

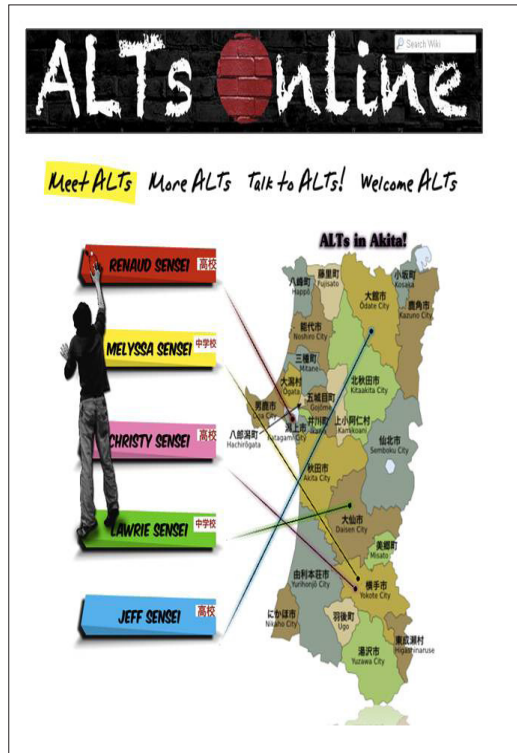


Figure 1. ALTs Online homepage with interactive map and list of participating ALTs.

The website was created at <wikispaces.com> and is a free educational wiki. This wiki platform was chosen due to its ease of use and ability to incorporate many Web 2.0 tools and widgets. For the more tech savvy users, Wikispaces also allows the page owner to access the CSS and HTML to make bedrock changes to the wiki's appearance and functions. The website titled *ALTs Online* <alts-online.wikispaces.com> was founded by over a dozen ALTs from Akita Prefecture, each with their own page containing a graphic log and interactive message board. Teachers who join the wiki can edit content on their own pages and any page on the wiki. Students can access

the site individually or as a class to participate in the activities. The website offers a downloadable worksheet to be used by teachers with their students along with a teacher discussion page for troubleshooting. Furthermore, students are also free to visit the website and post questions and comments as homework assignments.

When creating a website such as ALTs Online, the main challenge is selecting appropriate and simple Web 2.0 tools that will work together fluidly. There are many free educational tools available online. However, if students using the website have only a very basic understanding of English, it is important to select tools that are simple to use and which require no registration. Similarly, many teachers use the Internet, but lack experience using online software. With this in mind and after reviewing many options, the following free Web 2.0 tools were selected for inclusion on the ALTs Online website.

**Speakpipe < speakpipe.com >**

This tool allows visitors to leave voice comments. Once added to the website or blog, Speakpipe appears as a tab on the side of the screen. Users simply click on the tab to trigger a pop-up window which will prompt the user to begin recording their voice comment. Users can listen to their comment before sending it and have the option of canceling the recording and re-recording until they achieve the desired results. This application is simple and requires no registration for users, making it an ideal tool for not only general website feedback but also as a quick and easy way for students to practice their speaking skills. Speakpipe is compatible with the iPad, iPhone, and some other smartphones.

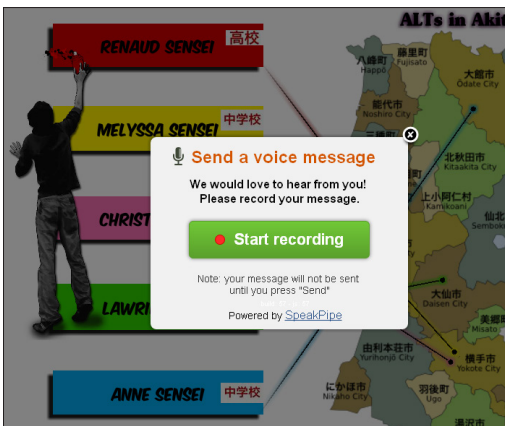


Figure 2. Speakpipe pop-up on the ALTs Online website.

**Glogster < edu.glogster.com >**

Glogster is an interactive graphic log (glog) that ALTs have used to create self-introduction posters and which has been embedded into each ALT's page. The Glogster website allows users to create interactive posters in which pictures, music, and video can be uploaded or embedded. Teachers can also create student accounts enabling students to generate content as well. Furthermore, Glogster now has an HTML5 viewer allowing it to be seen on mobile devices. One very important point regarding Glogster is that it is extremely easy to use thanks to its simple drag and drop interface. Glogster's user-friendliness and popularity made it the first Web 2.0 tool to be added to the website.

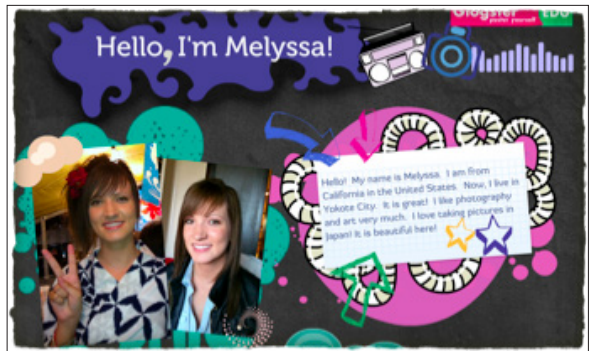


Figure 3. An example of an ALT's Glog.

**Linoit and Padlet < en.linoit.com > < padlet.com >**

Linoit and Padlet are interactive message boards that have been placed below each ALT's glog to allow students to communicate with ALTs through messages and share pictures, music, and videos. Linoit offers full Japanese support along with an iPad app. Both Padlet and Linoit message boards are very self-explanatory with no login required.

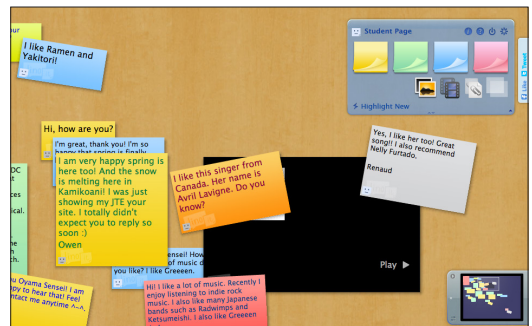


Figure 4. Linoit Message Board.

### VoiceThread <voicethread.com>

The ALTs Online VoiceThread allows students to communicate with ALTs via voice using a microphone or through video using a webcam. VoiceThread also allows for communication to occur simultaneously with a slideshow that can incorporate both images and video. The ALTs Online website has an embedded VoiceThread which features video self-introductions by ALTs from different parts of the prefecture as well as a link to another VoiceThread featuring ALTs from all over Japan. The self introduction videos appear around a world map and the speakers in the videos can write or draw on the map as they are speaking. The video option in VoiceThread allows students to see the ALT talking which serves as an excellent tool for raising pragmatic awareness. The main benefit of VoiceThread is that it is an asynchronous discussion. Consequently, students may record their spoken comments to the ALTs video introductions numerous times, listen as many times as needed, and take as long as they need to respond to questions and comments. The result is increased self-monitoring, increased comprehensible input, and the ability for students to work at their own pace.

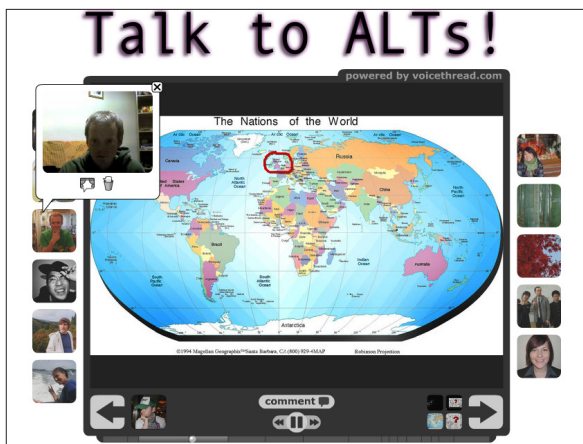


Figure 5: Snapshot of an ALT VoiceThread.

### Conclusion

There are a plethora of wonderful and free Web 2.0 tools that teachers can utilize with their students; however, many teachers often use such tools in isolation. The Web 2.0 tools discussed in this article can complement and build on each other. They can be creatively combined to work fluidly in Moodle, a blog, or a wiki. Merging such tools can create a dynamic and multifaceted

online learning experience that will both engage students by providing a creative space to practice English and encourage autonomous learning within a single, online space.

**Editor's Note:** If you are having success with using technology in your classroom, consider submitting an article to the *Wired* column to share your experience with other readers of *The Language Teacher*. This author highlights several creative tools available for teachers to use in creating online spaces to engage their students in the exciting online world of the Internet. These tools are very intuitive, easy to use, and they are a great way to make your classes *Wired!*

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