Consolidation of Coursework Using Video Projects: A Review

動画プロジェクトを用いたコースワークの統合―再考察

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Abstract: A central problem with content based ESL courses lies in how best to review and consolidate students' knowledge of topics that have been covered over the duration of a course. A series of oral presentations offers one solution. The recent ubiquity of smartphones and video making technology offers another. This paper examines how ESL students may benefit from participation in both individual and group video projects and how such projects may be viewed as an alternative to oral presentations. It is posited that giving students a creative outlet to make use of English in a permanent medium may have longer lasting and further reaching benefits than the traditional presentation model. Potential drawbacks, such as the time consuming nature of video projects and some frequently encountered technical difficulties are discussed and solutions are offered. The implementation of video projects is illustrated with reference to two second year Global Issues classes at a university in the Kansai area of Japan.

Keywords: video project, consolidation, global issues

要旨

　ESL コースで学んだ全てのことを、復習、統合することが困難であるということは、英語教育ではよくある問題点である。一つの解決策としては、口頭でのプレゼンテーションというのがあるが、今や普及しているスマートフォンや動画作成技術を用いることも有効な手段である。この論文では、個人及びグループの動画プロジェクトがどのように学生の役に立つのかということと、口頭でのプレゼンテーションの代案として有効であるということが述べられている。従来の口頭でのプレゼンテーションを用いた勉強法よりも、常習的に創造力を要するプロジェクトに参加する方が、学んだことを忘れないだろうと思われる。動画プロジェクト作成に時間がかかることや、よくある技術的な問題などの解決策も提案している。動画プロジェクトを用いた関西地区の大学二年生の二クラスが、例としてこの論文にあげられている。

キーワード：動画プロジェクト、復習、グローバル問題

Introduction

The question of how best to consolidate the work done over the duration of a semester is often answered with final assignments, tests and presentations. Some courses, however may benefit from an alternate approach; one that is not only effective in terms of review and consolidation but is also engaging, practical and long lasting. Adopting a qualitative assessment program can pay dividends especially towards the end of the semester when student motivation levels can suffer under the weight of exams and other quantitative assessment methods.

　Last year, I began teaching a new Global Issues class at a university in the Kansai area. As the name suggests, the course is concerned with the many challenges that face global citizens. Along with discussion activities in class and some written assignments, the syllabus requires that the course includes a presentation element. While

developing my plan for the curriculum, I considered ways in which I could maintain students' focus on the topics covered while avoiding obvious repetition and the accompanying negative effect on interest levels. Furthermore, I wanted the students to focus on the impact of today's issues on tomorrow's world and for that to happen, students were routinely requested to speculate as to how a given issue would be manifest at certain points in the future. For instance, after discussions on problems within the educational system that would be informed mainly by the students' own experiences, we would spend some time reflecting on whether the same problems would trouble the students of tomorrow or whether other social trends or technological advances would shift the paradigm. One oft-cited problem was that of students not being given enough time to actually speak English during class time in high school. Many students opined that virtual reality and artificial intelligence technology would have a profound effect on how languages would be learned, and that students of the future would be able to travel and communicate with people without actually leaving their classrooms. Such exercises in imagination would be valuable preparation for the second project, discussed below.

Taking all of this into account, I settled upon offering the students a chance to produce videos based on the content of the course. Such exercises had the pedagogical value of reviewing the course content, as well as providing the students a platform on which to express their ideas while developing presentation and computer skills that would be of real world benefit to them. I had had some experience of assigning similar projects in previous classes though only on an ad hoc basis. This would be my first opportunity to make them an integral part of the curriculum.

At the beginning of the semester the classes were given the opportunity to vote between traditional presentations and video projects. Giving the students a say in the course was designed to foster a sense of autonomy and ownership that can often be lacking in the classroom. In both classes, the students voted overwhelmingly in favour of producing the video projects, citing a lack of interest and a sense of fatigue with the traditional model. It is worth mentioning that the fact that the students were not required to actually appear in their videos was another motivating factor. Many students are reluctant public speakers and view presentations as an ordeal to overcome rather than as a opportunity to express themselves. The students who expressed hesitation were mainly concerned with the technical production of the videos which was not surprising, as few students (less than 10%) had had any experience of even basic video editing.

The First Project - Video Presentation (Individual)

Table 1: Phase 1 topics

Transportation
Food
Education
Marriage
Poverty

The broad themes covered during the first part of the course are set out in the table above. Once we had covered enough material to facilitate variety in terms of subject matter, the students were given the particulars of the first project in the form of the following instructions: "Please propose an idea for a video presentation relating to a topic that we have covered up to this point in the semester. Once your proposal has been accepted, please prepare a video presentation of at least five minutes duration. You are free to use any software or app as long as it is able to blend video, audio, text and images."

From a practical perspective, some points are worth noting. The students were encouraged to seek out niche subjects so as to avoid as much overlap between projects as possible. Proposals were accepted on a first-come basis. Students whose proposals covered similar ground to those already accepted were asked to re-submit alternative plans. The classes were shown some examples of comparable work that had been previously submitted by students from earlier classes so that expectations could be set at an appropriate level. Some class time was given to the students for research, planning and writing and they were encouraged to share their knowledge of available technology. The majority of the work was to be completed outside of class so as not to unduly disrupt the syllabus.

The main purpose of the project was to review and consolidate topics, themes and vocabulary from the first phase of the course. The secondary goals were to build rapport within the class, facilitate understanding of the production process and develop the skills required to edit videos. A strong emphasis was placed on research and support of statements with solid facts and statistics. Students were free to conduct their research in either English or Japanese and to draw information from any reliable sources. To limit the time spent explaining the software, I demonstrated on the classroom screen how to perform some of the basics while pointing out the wealth of online tutorials available in both English and Japanese.

The screening of the projects took place three weeks after the projects were assigned, and before viewing their work, the students held group discussions and completed a questionnaire detailing their experiences, both positive and negative. There were some interesting findings. The average time spent on the production of the video was just under four hours, which, when added to that spent on research and composition, represents substantially more time

Table 2: Examples of Phase 1 Projects

Theme	Project Title
Transportation Issues	Why We Are Late – Traffic Problems in Osaka
	The Electric Car Is Coming
Food Issues	Beef Tastes Good But It Is Bad
	Will You Eat Insects Soon?
Education	Japanese Universities v U. S. Universities
	Problems With Studying English In Japan
Marriage	When Do You Want To Get Married?（A survey)
	Increasing Divorce Rates In Japan
Poverty	A Day In My Life In Malawi
	Who Donates The Most Money To Poor Countries?

than would be expected to prepare for a traditional presentation. The students were asked to anonymously rate the project out of ten in terms of how enjoyable it was to produce. The average rating from the forty nine students was 5.5. The main reasons given for such low ratings were the difficulties encountered during the research and editing processes. Another question asked students to rate how beneficial they found the project. This field garnered an average score of 7.2 with students citing the technical skills they had learned as well as the opportunity to learn more about their topics and express themselves successfully through English.

As expected, there was an assortment of ideas based on the themes we had covered up to that point. Some examples are listed in table 2, below.

While not every student was able to produce work of the highest quality, the overall standard was good in terms of both content and production value. Some of the better videos followed the simple pattern of identifying a problem, investigating the causes and suggesting some possible solutions. To illustrate an example, we can examine The "Electric Car" project mentioned above. The student spent the first two minutes discussing global warming and its causes. She identified the amount of CO2 released into the atmosphere from transportation alone and then introduced what would form the essence of her project, the electric car. Each of her main points was accompanied by images and diagrams sourced from environmental websites. She was able to clearly demonstrate the difference between the engine of an electric car and that of an internal combustion engine by showing both at work in GIF format. She included a short video of an electric car in motion while giving further information as to the current state of the technology. The final part of her project focussed on the future of the electric car and its expected effect on the environment. The student did not actually appear on camera at any point ; a trend which was
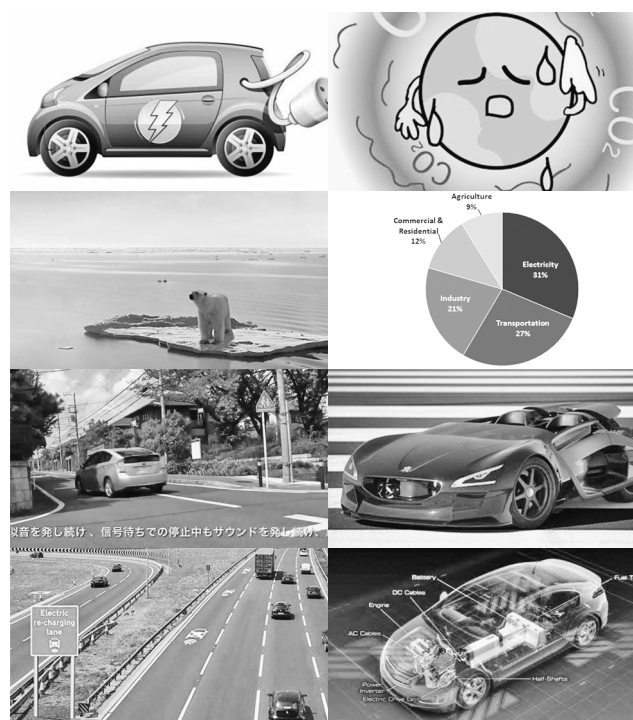

Image 1 : Images from "The Electric Car is Coming"

observed in both classes with only a few exceptions.

Each project was confidentially peer-assessed with students filling in the following evaluation table.

Table 3 : Project 1 Peer Evaluation Sheet

Name	Topic	Strong point	Weak point	Style/10	Content/10

The data was collated and pertinent feedback was provided to each student so that improvements could be made in time for the second project. One mistake that I made was to allow and even encourage the students to use video files ripped from video sharing websites without clearly stipulating that this should be done sparingly, particularly with regard to the accompanying audio. Several students used long segments of news reports or interviews which had the effect of padding out their projects with language produced by third parties. When providing general feedback, this issue was highlighted and subsequently emphasised when outlining expectations for the second project.

The Second Project - News Program (Group)

Broad headings for topics covered over the second part of the course are detailed in table 4.

Table 4 : Phase 2 topics

Technology
Population
Global warming
Crime
Media
Globalisation & Advertising

As when covering earlier topics, students were asked to further examine issues from a future, speculative perspective. How would crime be punished in thirty years time? Will people still watch nightly news on TV? Furthermore, in the week prior to the announcement of the second project, the classes were given a short written assignment. Each student was asked to write a letter to themselves from their future selves, describing the world around them in 2050. By assigning this activity, it was hoped that the students would be able to hit the ground running when it came to generating ideas for their second project.

On the day of the assignment of the second project, the classes were randomly divided into groups of four (or three where class numbers required). The instructions given were as follows:

"Please produce a nightly news style program from December 2050. Each team must prepare a minimum of four

news stories that relate to topics that we have discussed over the course of the semester. The program must be at least ten minutes in duration and must also include at least two advertisements of your design. Keywords highlighted during the initial class discussions should be signalled by title cards as and when they are uttered during the video."

The students were given two periods of class time to plan, research and write their stories. This allowed opportunity for some mentoring on my part, acting as a sounding board for some ideas as well as to offer encouragement. Groups were encouraged to spend more time outside of class on additional preparatory work before shooting and editing their videos. One element that differed from the first project was the requirement that at least one student from each group actually be seen on camera in an anchoring role. This stipulation was intended not only for the purposes of authenticity, but also to encourage other members who might be so inclined to come out from behind the camera and participate directly as reporters or actors.

Table 5: Examples of Project 2 items

Issue	Topic
Crime	"Killer Robot in Tokyo"
Food	Enjoy a McRoach at McDonalds (Commercial)
Global Warming	Skiing Holidays in Okinawa (Commercial)
Technology	"First People Leave for Mars"

While the students had opportunities when preparing for their first project to exchange ideas and help one another out with regard to production techniques, the collaborative nature of the projects particularly came to the fore during the second project. The teams each brought their own personalities to their projects resulting in a variety of styles and tones, and the items featured on the "broadcasts" touched on nearly every topic we had discussed over the semester.

Before the exhibition of the projects, I again asked each student to anonymously rate how much they enjoyed the process. The average rating was 8.2. The difference between this and the comparatively low rating given to the first project can be explained by the camaraderie that many groups forged during production. Another factor mentioned by students was that the technical experience gained during the first project stood them in good stead for the second. When asked what their greatest challenge was, most students cited language and composition related issues. There were few complaints about the production process. A final point worth mentioning is the creative scope that this project afforded was motivating for many students. Creating stories, acting, using special effects and stop motion animation are skills that are rarely practiced within the classroom. Many students commented that they enjoyed this aspect of the project most.

As before, the students were asked to rate the usefulness of the task. The average score was 7.8. Students mentioned that they learned a lot about the world around them during the research and had begun to think more

Image 2 : Still images taken from Project 2 news reports

about the future. Others were satisfied that they had learned new skills and had a better understanding of the creative power of the phones in their pockets. The factor most often mentioned was gaining experience working as a team.

The students completed another peer evaluation table after viewing the projects.

Table 6 : Project 2 Peer Evaluation Sheet

Team Name	Strong point	Weak point	Style/10	Content/10

Conclusion

When canvassed about their opinions on the traditional presentation model at the beginning of the semester, the overwhelming majority of students, regardless of ability, expressed negative feelings. Implementing the video project program allowed me to keep my classes motivated and fresh. The first project allowed students to consolidate their theretofore coursework in a new medium. Improvements were made in research standards.

Technical skills were acquired. Many students from these classes will study abroad over the next two years, and they will take these skills with them and use them to record and share their experiences. Issues that had been discussed in class were viewed through a different lens. Students were afforded the opportunity to express themselves creatively and to collaborate with and learn from their peers. While traditional oral presentations are ephemeral by nature, the students from these classes will have their work with them for as long as they wish.