Inter-class Collaboration Impact on Student Autonomy and Motivation in a Japanese University

John Jackson and Kathryn Tanaka

Otemae University

Abstract

In this article, we discuss inter-class collaboration and public presentations as a way to motivate students and develop a sense of autonomous learning in content and language integrated learning courses (CLIL). In two separate CLIL courses, World Tourism Geography, and Reading Canonical Japanese Literature in English, we addressed the subject of the environment and the way the courses connected to environmental themes. We discuss theories of motivation and the ways in which our methods boosted student motivation. Finally, we offer detailed explanations of the inter-class collaboration and consequent poster display and describe student responses to the project.

本論は、言語統合学習コース（CLIL）における自律学習の意識を啓発させる方法として総合クラスや公開された場での発表を紹介する。世界観光地理学と日本名作を読むという２つのＣＬＩＬの授業において、「環境」というテーマを取り上げて、どのようにコースの内容が「環境」と関わってくるのかを学生と一緒に考えた。そして、最終的に学生は環境に関わるテーマを選んでポスターと発表を総合クラスと学会でしてもらった。このコースでの調査の紹介をし、この公的な方法によって、どのように学生の意識が高まったのかを説明していく。最後に、総合クラスのコラボレーションとそれに伴うポスターの詳細な説明と、プロジェクトへの学生の反応を説明する。

The question of student motivation is a common problem to most educators. Getting students to use their language skills in a creative and productive manner can be a challenge. This has been a particular issue in Japan, with its traditionally teacher and lecture oriented education style (Aspinall, 2006; Harumi, 2011). At the same time, as part of globalization trends, more Japanese companies such as Honda and UNIQLO have adopted English as a business lingua franca (Neeley, 2012). As English becomes more necessary for social participation not only abroad, there have been calls for educational reform with the goals of creating autonomous and self-motivating students (MEXT, 2011). Indeed, in recent years pedagogies that support autonomous, self-directed learning and student motivation in Japan have been given greater attention (Apple et al, 2013; Yashima, 2002). Given this background, the authors of this paper developed

an autonomous student research project and presentation that treated research as a social and public event. Using this sample from two courses at a small university in western Japan, this paper examines the outcomes of the project, challenges students faced, and their response to the project. The paper contains five main parts: literature review, method, findings and discussion, and the conclusion.

Literature Review

Motivation and EFL Education

Language learning motivation (LLM), while an integral part of L2 pedagogy, is a nebulous concept. Since the 1970s, research into LLM has exploded and theories and models have multiplied (Dörnyei, 1996, 2001, 2005 and Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001 contain broad literature reviews). Despite the continued attention given to LLM, researchers and practitioners alike disagree on the components and roles of motivation in language learning (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998).

In terms of EFL education, since the 1970s motivation has been recognized as having a significant influence on achievement in SLA (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, Smythe, & Clément, 1979; Gardner, Lalonde, & Moorcroft, 1985). Gardner first defined motivation as "combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language" (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). From this point he developed and subsequently refined the socio-educational model of motivation (see Gardner, 2001 for a schema of this model). According to Gardner, there are two main types of LLM: *integrative motivation*, or a desire for a language learner to "integrate" or even assimilate with speakers and the cultural context of L2, and *instrumental motivation*, in which LLM is drawn from functional reasons, such as a desire for better employment or higher test scores (Gardner, 1985). Despite criticism (Oller, Jr., & Perkins, 1978; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991) Gardner's model defined the field of motivation study and remained influential.

As part of the global shift away from English as a second language, which often taught cultural assimilation as well as language, Dörnyei (1994) advocated an expanded approach and more nuanced to LLM than that laid out by Gardner. Dörnyei and his colleagues have complicated our understanding of motivation in EFL education, arguing LLM is inherently dynamic and fluctuating, impacted by cultural contexts and temporal elements (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012). According to Dörnyei, because ideas of the self and social experiences are a part of motivation, the authors of this article designed a classroom activity that required students to present their work in unfamiliar university settings that were also inherently social. The working hypothesis was that students would demonstrate more motivation and put forth more effort if their work was presented outside of their regular classroom and peer group.

Student Presentations in L2 Classrooms

In designing this project we built on the work of Constance Leonard (2015), as well as Matthew Apple and Keita Kikuchi (2007), all of whom advocate the use of oral presentations as a component of developing communicative skills in EFL education.

Further, Ginar, Pinar, and Trapp (2011) demonstrated that presentations in general promote greater class

participation and interaction. More specifically, Brooks and Wilson (2015) argued that there are five main benefits to the use of oral presentations in the classroom: "They are student centered. They require the use of all four-language skills. They provide students with realistic language tasks. They have value outside the language classroom. They improve students' motivation" (203). The presentation of research in particular teaches a broad set of skills. As Leonard (2014, n.p.) concludes, research presentations meant that "students learned the conventions of academic writing and documenting resources, became familiar with the library resources, and, most important, discovered the social aspects of learning, which pushed them to achieve." Building on this notion of social sharing as a motivating factor in research, this project sought to make student presentations higher-stakes by holding an inter-class presentation event and exhibiting student work in the university's library.

Methodology

Subjects

A total of fourteen students (eleven from a literature class, six from a tourism class, with three students taking both classes) participated in this project. The students were primarily second through fourth year students, ranging in age from 18 to 23, and one older, continuing education student. While the majority of the students were Japanese, three students in the literature class and one student in the tourism class were inbound study abroad students from other institutions whose first language was neither Japanese nor English. All students had an upper-intermediate level of English.

Design and Implementation of the Project

The two classes we chose for this inter-class presentation collaboration were CLIL courses, *Tourism World Geography* and *Reading Canonical Japanese Literature in English.* While they seem to be unrelated courses, the common theme of the final research project and poster presentation in both classes was "Environment and Nature in Japan." The instructors chose to hold the presentation event between courses that seemed to have little in common in order to illustrate how issues studied in different classes were related.

The final project consisted of the following parts. First, students created a poster that presented their research topic. A joint-class presentation session held on a Sunday in place of the final examination for both classes (2 class periods, 180 minutes total). The research posters were printed out and hung on a classroom wall. When students presented, their poster was projected on a screen behind them. Students presented their work individually or in pairs, with each presentation lasting 15 minutes.

During the presentations, students evaluated their peers' work and wrote one question they had. Then, during the after-presentation discussion session students circulated the room and looked at their classmates' posters. To facilitate conversation, students asked their questions and recording their peers' answers. Finally, after the discussion, students took their posters to the university library. There, a two week, bilingual library exhibition was held showcasing student posters and books related to student research. As the culmination of their project, students submitted their written research paper.

In the literature class, the sixteen students selected a literary work that addressed nature or the environment in Japan. As the class was quite large, students were allowed to work individually or in pairs, and they could choose any form of literature or writer they liked, although the works were subject to instructor approval. Many students chose short stories, but several chose novels. The students' selections are displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Literary Selections

Student 1 & Student 2	Ishimure Michiko, *"Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow"*
Student 3 & Student 12	Shigematsu Kiyoshi, *"The Charm"*
Student 4	Ibuse Masuji, *"Black Rain"*
Student 6 & Student 7	Kajii Motojiro, *"Under the Cherry Trees"*
Student 5	Abe Kobo, *"The Woman in The Dunes"*
Student 8	Murakami Haruki, *"After the Quake"*
Student 9	Miyazawa Kenji, *"The Restaurant of Many Orders"*
Student 10 & Student 11	Kawabata Yasunari, *"The Old Capital"*
Student 13 & Student 14	Ishii Shinji, *"Lulu"*
Student 15	Kakuta Mitsuyo, *"The Eighth Day"*

The works ranged from 1920s literature, such as Kajii and Miyazawa, to contemporary work by Ishii and Shigematsu written after the 2011 nuclear meltdown in Fukushima. Overall, the literary works addressed several broad themes. Works such as *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow*, "Lulu," *Black Rain*, and "The Charm" dealt with trauma and environmental pollution in Minamata and Fukushima, or the fallout from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Other pieces, such as *The Old Capital* or "Under the Cherry Trees" took up Japanese aesthetic ideas of nature. Finally, "Lulu" and "The Restaurant of Many Orders" foregrounded the relationship between humans and animals.

In the Tourism Geography class, students discussed Japanese World Heritage Sites, both natural and cultural. Together, they established which sites were most familiar amongst Japanese and international tourists and the reasons for the high visitation rates. The students then chose a site and worked individually to create a report on an existing or pending natural World Heritage Site in Japan. In addition to discussing geographical and geological terms, the students were encouraged to use emotive language to describe the sites and the attraction they held from a personal and aesthetic perspective as they examined the positive and negative tourism impacts of their chosen site. Furthermore they had to research the steps taken by the government and other organizations to safeguard these locations for future generations. The selection of the sites students chose to research can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. World Heritage Site Selections

Student 8	The Ogasawara Islands
Student 5	Mount Fujii
Student 16	The Shiretoko Peninsula
Student 17	Sacred Sites and Pilgrimages in the Kii Mountain Range
Student 9	The Tottori Sand Dunes
Student 3	Yakushima Island

Students presented these posters and their autonomous research first in a formal setting, then again during the more informal discussion session. The library exhibit served as a third presentation space, and their final research reports reflected the feedback and ideas students received from each forum. This multifaceted approach to presenting the results of their work required students to summarize their work effectively for the poster as a stand-alone piece while they also had to think about how to supplement the poster during the oral presentation. They also had to consider the final shape of the written research paper. These steps necessitated engagement with their topic in multiple ways, which again served to create interest and increase student motivation.

Results

Questionnaire Findings and Observations From Student Presentations

On the day of the presentations, fourteen students attended. Of these, three students were enrolled in both classes, an overlap that was unavoidable in a small university.   All of the fourteen students completed a post-project survey (see Appendix A).   The questionnaires were anonymous, and students were told their responses would only be used for research purposes.

Out of the 14, eleven students indicated in their answers to Q4 that giving the presentation in front of students from another class made them slightly anxious but motivated them to do well:

:

It made me anxious to do well, but it is a good chance to tell my opinion. (S16)

That made me nervous, but I could do presentation as usual. (S13)

The public exhibition of their work in the library, however, was highly motivating for eleven out of the fourteen students. Indeed, instructors were surprised to see social media posts on the exhibit and the general good reception of the public display of student work. In response to Q5, most students expressed their enthusiaum for this forum:

Yes. Because people will see my work and I don't know who is going to see it. (S6)

Yes, because I don't wanna show like looks not good my work. I want to show good my work. So yeah I
try to do better. (S14)

At the same time, three students wrote that they were not motivated by the fact the posters would be exhibited in the library. Of these, S7 and S1 expressed this was because they did not use the library, and S17 stated that not knowing who would see their work was actually demotivating: "I don't care wherever you exhibit because I don't think people care to the posters."

For the majority of the class, however, responses indicate that the poster display in the library was more motivating than the joint class presentations. Indeed, only S2 had a somewhat negative reply to Q6: "I'm sorry, I cannot enjoy for it. But it's new for me. It's interesting to share with each other. I think I'll enjoy it in the future." They majority of students answered Q6 with enthusiastic support:

> I worked very hard to finish it. (S9)
>
> Yes, I do because I had some question to someone. Also, I enjoy having a public forum. (S14)
>
> I enjoy because people who are not from my class also able to know my other class presentation. (S1)
>
> I enjoyed it. Because I learned so many things. (S3)

Such answers indicate that for students, the social element of the presentations and library exhibit was an important part of the sharing process. Many students specifically stated that part of what they enjoyed about the event was learning about the same subject from so many different angles, and the discussion fostered by the posters and library exhibit proved to be the highlight of this project. In response to Q7, 12 out of 14 students responded with positivity to the joiny presentation and expressed a desire to do it again:

> It's the first time to do a joint presentation session for me. I like it. Because I can learn more new things. For example, the enviroment protection's problem. (S11)
>
> Yes! It gives a chance to know many people's thinking. (S16)
>
> Yes. Because we had same topic, but what we presented were different, and those were really interesting. (S13)
>
> Actually, I'm taking both class, but I could see different ideas.... I like that, because many people are there means I can listen, many people's opinions. (S9)
>
> Yes, I would love to! The more people watch us presenting, the more motivated we become. (S8)

The two students who answered Q6 negatively wrote that this was because the higher stakes made them nervous:

> No. Because I'm nervous. (S15)
>
> No!! It was hard for me. (S17)

In summation, student questionnaires indicate this project increased student motivation and promoted research as a social event.

Limitations and Conclusion

Throughout the presentations, broad themes emerged, surprising the instructors with the way students actively made their own connections between the courses. Many students were interested in the impact of humankind on the environment, in particular in terms of pollution. Students repeatedly returned to the topic of the interconnectedness of humanity and the environment.

Students actively discussed the way manmade environmental issues created a bridge between both classes, although one student did express a wish that instructors had tightened the theme. S3 wrote, "We should have connection between the two classes.   This time, literature used disease and illness but tourist class choose world heritage site." For this student, a more explicit connection between illness caused by environmental pollution and the problems of environmental degradation at World Heritage Sites may have been helpful. Thus, the lack of explicit guidance from instructors could be a limitation for some students, although the majority responded enthusiastically to make their own connections.

Perhaps the greatest challenges, however, was the scheduling of the presentation and the coordination with the library for the exhibit. Holding such an event on a weekend worked very well but did require extra coordination. Furthermore, school libraries may not always be prepared to display student work. In that case, treating the inter-class presentation as an event open to the public may prove to be motivating. Despite our small study size, our results indicate that the joint-class platform is broadly adaptable and its challenges are minimal.

The benefits far outweigh the limitations. Overall, both students and instructors considered the joint-class presentations and the library exhibit of student work to be a success. In addition, thirteen out of the fourteen participants stated that this was a positive and highly motivating experience. Ultimately, the presentation session and library exhibit demonstrably boosted student motivation and created a bridge between and beyond two very diverse classes.

Thus, in addition to broadly positive feedback from the student participants and the perceived increase to LLM, the poster presentation and the library exhibit allowed students to make connections between the content studied in different classes. Through the treatment of their autonomous research as a social presentation event, students were able to make new connections and study similar subjects in multifaceted ways.

References

Abe, K., & Saunders, E. D. (1991). *The woman in the dunes*. New York: Vintage International.

Apple, M. (2011). Autonomy as a predictor of English proficiency. *OnCUE Journal 4*(3), 191-216.

Apple, M. & Kikuchi, K. (2007). Practical PowerPoint group projects for the EFL classroom. *The JALT CALL Journal 3*(3), 110-122.

Aspinall, R. (2006). Using the paradigm of 'small cultures' to explain policy failure in the case of foreign language education in Japan. *Japan Forum* 18 (2), 255-274. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09555800600731197

Brooks, G. & Wilson, J. (2015). Using oral presentations to improve students' english language skills. *Kwansei Gakuin University Humanities Review*, *19*, 199-212.

Crookes, G. & Schmidt, R. W. (1991). Motivation: Reopening the research agenda. *Language Learning 41*, 469-512.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00690.x

Dodd, S. & Kajii, M. (2014). *The youth of things: Life and death in the age of Kajii Motojirō*. Honlulu HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

Dörnyei, Z. (1990). Conceptualizing motivation in foreign language learning. *Language Learning, 40*, 46–78. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1990.tb00954.x

Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *Modern Language Journal 7*, 273-284. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1994.tb02042.x

Dörnyei, Z. (1996). Moving language learning motivation to a larger platform for theory and practice. In R. Oxford (Eds.), *Language Learning Motivation: Pathways to the New Century* (pp. 71-80). Honolulu HI: Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center, University of Hawai'i. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s026144480001315x

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). New themes and approaches in L2 motivation research. A*nnual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 43-59. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s0267190501000034

Dörnyei, Z., & Ottó, I. (1998). Motivation in action: A process model of L2 motivation. *Working Papers in Applied Linguistics (Thames Valley University, London), 4*, 43-69.

Dörnyei, Z. & Schmidt, R. (Eds.) (2001). *Motivation and second language acquisition*. Honolulu HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

Dörnyei, Z., & Skehan, P. (2003). Individual differences in second language learning. In C. J. Doughty, & M. H. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 589-630). Oxford LUK: Blackwell.

Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Language Learning*. London UK: Edward Arnold.

Gardner, R. C. (2001). Language learning motivation: The student, the teacher, and the researcher. *Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education 6*, 1-18.

Gardner, R.C., Lalonde, R.N., & Moorcraft, R. (1985). The role of attitudes and motivation in second language learning: correlation and experimental considerations. *Language Learning 35*(2): 207-227. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1985.tb01025.x

Gardner, R.C. & Lambert, W. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Gardner, R. C., Smythe, P.C., & Clément, R. (1979). Intensive second language student in a bicultural milieu: An investigation of attitudes, motivation and language proficiency. *Language Learning 29*(2), 305-320. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1979.tb01071.x

Ginar, T., Pinar, A. M., & Trapp, P. (2011). An exploratory study of class presentations and peer evaluations: do students perceive the benefits? *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal* 15 (1), 7-93.

Harumi, S. (2011). Classroom silence: voices from Japanese EFL learners. *ELT Journal* 65(3), 260-269. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq046

Ibuse, M., & Bester, J. (1971.) *Black rain*. London UK: Secker and Warburg.

Ishii, S. & Elliot, B. (2012). Lulu. In E. Luke & D. Karashima (Eds.), *March was made of yarn: Writer's*

respond to Japan's earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown (pp.71-91). London UK: Harvill Seckler.

Ishimure, M., & Monnet, L. (2003). *Paradise in the sea of sorrow: Our Minamata disease.* Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan.

Kakuta, M. & Mitsutani, M. (2010). *The Eighth Day.* New York NY: Kodansha USA.

Kawabata, Y. & Holman, J. (2006). *The old capital.* Reprint edition. Berkeley CA: Counterpoint.

Leonard, C. A. (2014). Writing research papers: A social event. *ESPIS Newsletter.* Retreived 7 March 2016 from http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolespis/issues/2014-02-14/6.html

MEXT (2011). Kōtōgakkō gakushū shidō yōryō [Course of Study for foreign languages: Upper secondary school], provisional English version. Retrieved 7 March 2016 from http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/04/11/1298353_9.pdf

Miyazawa, K. & Bester, J. (1993). The restaurant of many orders. In: *Once and forever: the tales of Kenji Miyazawa* (pp. 115-125). New York: Kodansha International.

Murakami, H., & Rubin, J. (2002). *After the quake: Stories.* New York NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Neeley, T. (2012). *Global Business speaks* English: Why you need a language strategy now. *Harvard Business Review* 90 (5), 116–124.

Oller, J. & Perkins, K. (1978). Intelligence and language proficiency as sources of variance in self-reported affective variables. *Language Learning 28*(1), 85-97. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1978.tb00306.x

Shigematsu, K. & Hunter, J. (2012). The Charm. In E. Luke & D. Karashima (Eds.), *March was made of yarn: Writer's respond to Japan's earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown* (pp.13-33). London UK: Harvill Seckler.

Ushioda, E., & Dörnyei, Z. (2012). Motivation. In S. Gass & A. Mackey (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 396-409). New York NY: Routledge.

Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to Communicate in a Second Language: The Japanese EFL Context. *The Modern Language Journal* 86 (1), 54-66. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00136

Appendix A

Questionnaire on collaborative poster presentation

1. Did doing presentations with another class help you to think about the topic of the environment and Japan in new ways?

2. Whose presentation did you like the best?　Why?

3. Whose presentation did you find the most difficult?　Why?

4. Did the fact that you had to give the presentation in front of new classmates make you anxious to do well, or were you not bothered?

5. Did the fact the library will exhibit your work motivate you to try to do better?

6. Do you enjoy having a public forum to display your coursework?　Why or why not?

7. Would you like to do a joint presentation session for another class?　Why or why not?

8. After seeing the other presentations, are you happy with your own?　Why or why not?

9. If you were going to do this project again, what would you change and why?

10. Did you know much about the other class members' topics before this presentation?　What did you learn?