

STUDENTS' COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS INVOLVING COMPUTER
TECHNOLOGY AND JAPANESE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: This paper describes two projects in which students acted as writers, editors, performers, and media technicians to create new supplementary teaching materials for lower division Japanese classes. The authors report how the projects were designed and carried out. The students' responses to the projects will also be shared.

Keywords: collaborative projects, supplementary teaching materials

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes two collaborative projects carried out by two levels of students. One group (students of the third year, 6th semester Japanese) was asked to create new supplementary teaching materials targeted for 2nd semester Japanese students. The other group (4th semester Japanese students) was instructed to do the same for 3rd and 4th semester Japanese classes. The projects asked students to: 1) plan how to present 2-4 new grammar structures to students of a target level; 2) write scripts (plots) highlighting the new grammar structures; 3) read and orally practice the scripts; 4) design and create a set; 5) video-tape their performance or create animation or use other presentation method (e.g., puppet shows); 6) save their work in QuickTime format; and 7) present their work in class using a computer console equipped in the classroom. Our goal was to promote students' involvement in their own learning and to enhance students' motivation and persistence in improving their Japanese. In the study done by Aida, Hatanaka, Katayama, and Suito (2005), it was found that students enjoy a cooperative group activity in which they can use their creativity. We thought that the grammar video production project would become such activity that the students can participate with positive attitudes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON MOTIVATION

Motivation is regarded as an important factor for learning and achievement among educators. Many teachers and researchers recognize there exist two different types of motivation, i.e., intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). With intrinsic motivation, people do something simply because it is enjoyable or

satisfying in and of itself. In language learning, this type of motivation is similar to Gardner's (1985) integrative motivation (the importance of learning a foreign language in order to permit interaction with and share cultural experience with people who speak that language.) On the other hand, with extrinsic motivation, people do something in order to gain some external reward or to avoid some undesirable outcome. In language learning, this type of motivation is similar to Gardner's instrumental motivation (how useful a student considers the learning of a foreign language to be in his/her career, and academic and social situations.)

Generally, activities that are intrinsically motivating are more likely to produce work of high-quality and creativity (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Okada, Oxford, and Abo (1996) recommend language teachers to "employ activities that engage and enhance the learners' motivation" (p. 118) in order to maximize language learning. Therefore, it is a challenge for teachers to design classroom activities for which students perform willingly and with enthusiasm.

Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000) posits that students' academic performance and persistence are greatly enhanced by opportunities to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The more the autonomy, competence, and relatedness students experience, the higher their motivation becomes. The present authors believe that our grammar video production projects include these three components. First, the students were able to experience autonomy. They were allowed to make decisions in all aspects of creating new grammar teaching materials (e.g., plot development, selection of the context and setting, sound effects, and performance styles). Instructors served as not a controller but a facilitator providing feedback and suggestions. Secondly, students were able to perceive themselves as competent participants. They had the opportunity to experience a challenge and a sense of self-efficacy, a sense of being able to produce desired outcomes through effort, (Bandura, 1997). The students took the role of an active teacher in designing a skit, anime, or puppet show that were not only educational but also entertaining. Instructors offered encouragement and showed their confidence to the students that they had skills to carry out these projects. Lastly, the students internalized the values of the proposed grammar projects (relatedness). They understood that the projects would serve as a valuable review opportunity for them, at the same time, it would benefit the students who would

be enrolled in a lower division classes. They could reflect their own learning and apply their experiences to these projects. They also enjoyed the active involvement of making new teaching materials that would be uploaded to our Japanese Program web site so that they could be viewed globally.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECTS

At the beginning of the semester, students received the guidelines to follow to complete the projects. First, students were instructed to participate in all meetings (in-class and outside of class), practices, and videotaping in order to receive full credit. Secondly, they were asked to write scripts. Each script must explain one or two grammar structures that are one minute to one and a half minutes long. Scripts should be typed double-spaced and include English translation for each Japanese line as well as a short plot summary in English. Students were encouraged to use a variety of vocabulary learned up to the chapter in which the target grammar structure is introduced. All the group members must equally take part in the writing of the scripts; and the scripts were revised and corrected twice according to the suggestions and comments given by the instructors. The coversheet contained the names of the group members, the titles of the scripts, and the target grammar structures. Thirdly, each group must save the completed work on a CD or DVD in VD full quality, or .mov format. Each group turned in the final draft with the original coversheet together with the CD or DVD.

In order to complete the projects, the following equipments and software were necessary: 1) students - a camcorder or digital camera and a computer for converting mini-DV tape to QuickTime format, and 2) instructors – a microphone, iMovie, Final Cut for editing, and QuickTime Pro for audio recording (voiceover when necessary). The instructors rented a camcorder from the Liberal Arts Information Technology Services and from the Department of Asian Studies for students' use. The students used their own computers.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the semester, we asked students to answer a short survey on the grammar video production projects. The majority of 4th semester students indicated that the projects had improved their speaking (47 out of 64 students) and grammar knowledge (63 out of 66 students). Even though the 6th semester students worked on 2nd semester

grammar, surprisingly 18 students out of 27 indicated that the project helped them in understanding the grammar. These results show that the overall reaction of the students toward the projects is favorable, which is encouraging for the instructors to keep the projects in their curricula.

The projects were exploratory in nature. The students completed the projects successfully, but also encountered several problems, e.g., 1) not enough equipments were available; 2) some errors were not detected before the final products were submitted; 3) some groups used copyrighted materials without permission; and 4) some inappropriate materials and offensive language were used. For the coming semesters, we would like to resolve those issues and to raise the quality of students' work and learning, which will lead to better outcomes.

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