PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

~ Five Projects That Stimulated Student Learning ~

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ABSTRACT

This paper, based from a classroom research project, examines a variety of projects which can help students become positive learners. The first chapter gives relevant background information and introduces the reasoning behind and implementation of five particular projects, which I used in the classroom. The following five chapters each focus on one particular project (skit festivals, textbooks, poster presentations, class visuals, and response papers), and each chapter describes and analyzes each project, and also includes student feedback. The appendices, which follow each of the five projects, include photos of the students and their output, and this should help demonstrate the outcomes of each project. It is hoped that this paper will suggest new styles of teaching to the reader.

Topic: Classroom-based research project

ERIC: Conversational Languages Courses

   Student Developed Materials

   Teaching Styles

   Class Activities

   Group Instruction

   Individual Instruction

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

This classroom research project was done during the years 2000~2002. At that time, I taught EFL to university students at different universities and adults at three company classes in Japan. All classes met once a week for ninety minutes, thirteen to fifteen times per semester. At some schools English was a year-long course while at others, it was semester-long.

The university students took English as one of their required foreign language courses to receive credits for General Education (Liberal Arts), and they were assigned an English class rather than being allowed to select one based on class content. I taught first, second, and third-year students, and in a class, the students were grouped with students of the same year. Some problems I experienced in these classes involved the fact that the English level of the students in a single class ranged from beginning to advanced, that they had not all mastered the same skills, and that they had both positive and negative attitudes. Class sized ranged from small to large, from eight to fifty-five students.

The adult students, on the other hand, took the classes because they wanted to improve their English. Like the university students, the adults' English levels were mixed; however, the adults were motivated, and they attended because it was their choice. Their problems involved time and continuity. Varying work schedules meant that not everyone could meet on the same day; therefore, some students came regularly, while others came once every month or two. Weekly class sized varied from one to twelve.

How And Why I Got Started In Project-Based Teaching

In the years before I started this classroom research project, I often had my students do many activities in class. Although they did tasks in class, made original materials, did homework, and projects, the students and I never did anything beyond that. We thought neither about what we had learned, nor how we could improve on it. All the information, that I introduced during the semester and that the students learned in the class, was just floating in the air and was never brought back down and analyzed. This was when I came up with the "student textbook project" idea with my advisor Michael Jerald during my IYTP year in the fall of 2000. At that time, I posed the following four questions:

1. How would student-generated materials and project-based teaching affect my students' learning?
2. How could my students be more responsible for their own learning?
3. How could I have students bring meaning to their own learning, and then, have them summarize, or bring closure to the semester or their weekly learning in a concrete form?
4. Would being responsible lead to higher motivation?

After that, between the years 2000~2002, I began doing the five "closure" projects which

will be explained in this paper. For each, I kept the four questions mentioned above in

mind.

What Kinds Of Projects?

I tried the following five projects with the students during the years 2000~2002:

1. Skit Festivals
2. Student-Generated Textbooks
3. Poster Presentations
4. Class Visuals
5. Response Papers

The skit festivals, class visuals, and some textbooks were done as group projects. The

poster presentations, response papers, and some textbooks were assigned as individual

projects. With both project types, students prepared projects on their own and mostly

outside of class. Later they performed in front of, presented to, or shared their project

outputs with other groups or members in the class. This enabled the students to work

both on their own and within a group. These projects were done during the semester if

the class was a semester course, or during the second semester if the class was a year-

long course. Except for the class visuals, the other remaining projects were mainly

prepared outside of class as homework. The students presented their final project outputs

in class.

Why did I assign the projects as homework? Because of the limited number of

classes in a semester and the fact that classes met only once a week, preparation for these

projects necessarily became part of their homework. If the students had worked on the

projects during class, we could not have been able to cover the materials for the semester or year. Also, particularly with the large classes, the students had more than five classes per day, most of which did not involve English, and it was more feasible for them to work outside of class. Assigning project preparation as homework gave students more time to think and prepare for their projects. In addition, the homework gave students more chances to ask me specific questions in class, help each other, and discuss the projects in class.

Why did I include some of these projects at the end of the class and semester? I wanted to find alternative ways to evaluate and bring closure to student learning, something other than the "traditional" style of written exams or quizzes. Also, through these projects, I wanted the students to understand in a meaningful way what they had learned and to reflect on ways they could improve. I also wanted the students to use their creativity, share and present their projects with others, and have a good time throughout the semester or year.

<u>Why Do Projects Work In The EFL Classroom?</u>

Both Sheppard and Stoller (1995) quote from Fried-Booth's definition of a project as "students working together to achieve a common purpose, a concrete outcome." In addition, Kayser (2002) quotes from Sheppard and Stoller's (1995) definition of a project, which says that:

> characterized by student collaboration on concrete outcomes, project work has a number of benefits including a purposeful language use and increased student involvement and responsibility.

From my experiences during the years 2000~2002, I would also add that projects help

students assess what and how they have learned, what they have accomplished, and how

they have responded to the (weekly) class or during the semester.

Both Kayser (2002) and Fried-Booth (2002) discuss how effective project work is

for students and for their learning development. "(Project work) offers them the

opportunity to use their language skills in a new and challenging way." Also, both

Stoller and Sheppard (1995, 1997) have proven that projects, which:

> are widely endorsed by educators require cooperative learning, learner autonomy,
> communicative competence, a higher level of thinking and problem-solving skills,
> and purposeful language learning.

Thus, students not only acquired language and communication skills, but they also

learned to be active and "democratic" (Kagan 1986) participants in society and to be

more aware of their inner selves. Clearly projects go beyond the course objectives along

with "positive affective outcomes" (Arnold 1999). It was for these reasons that I

continued to include projects in my classroom.

Stoller (1997) concludes from her own findings and from the work of other

experts such as Carter and Thomas (1986), Feragatti and Carminati (1984), Fried-Booth

(1982, 2002), Haines (1989), Legutke (1984, 1985), and Ward (1988) that projects are an

important and effective teaching method because "(students) work on their own, in small

groups, or as a class to complete a project, sharing resources, ideas, and expertise along

the way." This is also the foundation for "cooperative learning" (Arnold 1999).

In my classes, the students were able to tap into their inner resources and were

able to pass their knowledge on to others. My students were engaged in the course

content during class-time, thus they participated in the projects and discovered the joy of

learning English. They then incorporated creativity and imagination into the five projects, which made the projects more rewarding. I was relieved of spoon-feeding them information, and students took more initiative in the learning process. The classes transformed themselves from teacher-centered to student-oriented and student-directed learning environments. I found my students learning more for themselves and less for the sake of passing the course, and they were able to produce more original outputs.

Stoller, quoting from other specialists (Carter and Thomas 1986; Feragatti and Carminati 1984; Fried-Booth 1982, 2002; Haines 1989; Legutke 1984, 1985; and Ward 1988), believes that educators find projects successful because:

> (project work) is potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging. It usually results in building student confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy as well as improving students' language skills, content learning, and cognitive abilities.

Arnold (1999) in addition lists other benefits to project work:

> anxiety reduction; increase in listening to and producing language; opportunities to develop cross-cultural understanding; understanding and friendships; positive social skills for respecting alternative opinions; consensus achievement; development of higher order and critical thinking skills.

In conclusion, project work is "conceivably a more stimulating and satisfying learning and teaching experience for students and teacher alike." (Sheppard and Stoller 1995)

<u>How Did Project-Based Teaching Work In My Classroom?</u>[1]

1. What and why

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[1] As mentioned earlier, the questions were:
- "How can my students be more responsible for and motivated about their own learning?
- "How can I have my students bring meaning to their own learning, and then have them summarize or bring closure to the semester or their weekly learning in a concrete form?"

Before I planned my courses, I first decided on the theme I wanted the students to

focus on in the class. This would become the focus of the projects.

2. How

I then scheduled the projects and decided the type of project with the following

questions in mind:

- What kind of projects should the students do: Group project? Individual project? Short and simple project? Long and complex project?
- When will the students do the projects? How often will they have projects? What projects are appropriate during class? What projects are appropriate toward the end of the semester?
- Will the project theme be personal? Will students share their projects with others? How will they share their project output?
- Will the project bring meaning to student learning? Will the project bring closure to each class and semester?

I also provided basic guidelines for the students and notified them in advance about what

projects they would be working on. However, I tried to keep the project ideas and

guidelines open and abstract in order not to limit, restrict, or hinder the students' creative

freedom. I provided examples of former students' project works as well as my ideas and

expectations for students who needed a more concrete explanation. However, I noticed

that the less I explained, the more creative the students became.

3. Group dynamics and formation

I strongly believe in the importance in "community building" in the classroom.

For a project to succeed in my classes, a sense of community and a safe learning

environment are essential. Arnold (1999) states that:

cooperative learning has been shown to encourage and support most of the
affective factors which correlate positive language learning: i.e. reducing anxiety

(negative or debilitating), increasing motivation, facilitating the development of positive attitudes toward learning and language learning, promoting self-esteem, as well as supporting different learning styles and encouraging perseverance in the difficult and confusing process of learning another language.

Following are some of the methods I used to foster a sense of community and a safe learning environment.

On the first day of class, some of the students were shy and did not know the other students in the class. To remedy this, I arranged the students' desks and chairs to form group tables: four desks put together made one table, thus encouraging students to choose a group with whom to sit. Some students preferred to sit with people they already knew and stayed with the same group during the semester or year. Other students enjoyed changing groups because they found it stimulating. From the beginning of the semester, I introduced group activities so that the students could get to know each other better. Once they became friends or found groups that they felt comfortable with, their motivation level increased, and thus learning increased. I found that when students were comfortable in their groups, they were better able to concentrate on the activities in class, to relax, and to support their group members.

For many of my students, the image of a "classroom" was perhaps one of a "quiet lecture-styled" instruction in which the teacher provided all the information and facts, and students sat separately, rarely interacting with each other or with the teacher. Because my class-style was different, it was "fresh" to many students because they had to contribute to the class, we had to work together to create a safe, relaxing learning environment.

4. My involvement as a teacher in the class and the project-work

Throughout the semester and in the five projects, which will be discussed in this paper, I encouraged student autonomy from the teacher and interdependence with each other. I believe that the teacher should not be the sole information provider because students have inner resources, and they have community with their classmates. As a teacher, I wanted to support my students with limited teacher intervention and control.

The students and I were a team in the classroom, and the students were teammates with each other. Sometimes I was the coach, other times, I was the cheerleader. As a team, we generated ideas and worked with them to create output. As a teacher, I had to have a concrete agenda, presenting the subject content and making sure the students understood that content through practice, thus enabling them to present a new product. At other times, I acted as a facilitator and guide in the students' learning process, helping them to tap into their hidden resources, imagination, talents, and knowledge, and providing support for them to express themselves using English.

From the first day of class, I usually would give indirect answers to the students' questions. For example, when a student asked me, "How do you say (Japanese word) in English?" I would ask, "What do you think?" If a student asked me, "What are we supposed to do for #1?" I would reply, "What do you think you are supposed to for #1?" However, if it were a question that needed a specific solution, I would give a direct answer and provide an explanation. At first, students were taken aback by my indirect responses because they presumed that a "teacher" provided all the answers and gave detailed instructions for them to follow. This was probably a result of the Japanese education system, which rarely requires student initiative, to think on their own and to express their ideas and opinions in a classroom. In my classroom, students soon learned

that they would have to tell me what they understood, and then I would scaffold (guide) them to the answers. At first, this was a highly demanding and frustrating task for the students because they had to do their own thinking and to take action; however, I tried to be patient and give them enough space to come up with the answers. The interesting thing about doing this was that as students responded to my indirect questions, they came up with answers on their own, or the other students in the class guided them to the answers. I noticed during each semester that students managed to find people or groups that they felt the most comfortable with, or those who could bring out the best in each other, thereby building their own "communities" and support groups. Furthermore, they learned to rely less on me and rely more on each other because they realized that they themselves were the "active participants" in the learning process. The students learned to take more initiative. When students prepared their projects, they incorporated their classroom skills into their projects. I believe that this was due in part to the fact that I tried to stay outside of the students' learning circle as much as possible. The students had to think on their own, and in the process, became independent learners. During the group activities, I also emphasized that the students would be "learning by doing", and that they would be progressively more responsible for their learning every week. They found this confusing and troublesome at first because they were used to passively ingesting information, but as they learned within the group and reflected after the activities, they clearly saw their progress and the benefits of my teaching-style. I supported the students from the outside once I saw that they understood the content and what they had to do.

Group work made the students' learning more fun and worthwhile and allowed them to become independent and active participants in the classroom. I always added creative and surprising touches to the group activities so that they did not become monotonous. And, I found the students becoming more creative and vocally expressive in the class, which as a result, many of the students' project outputs were very interesting and unique. As the semester progressed, the majority of the students tended to shift from speaking both Japanese and English to using mostly English during the class time. Group work helped the students to practice and experience the language they were learning as well as to acquire communication skills and explore "learning".

5. Reflection and response papers

From the beginning of the semester, I introduced questions designed to both help students reflect on their own learning and also give me written feedback. I have found that written reflection and feedback suits the students' learning styles by giving them more time to think. Each student or each pair would turn in reflection or response papers every week.[2] I always added written comments to students' papers and then returned them the following week. Students have commented that they appreciated having the teacher write back; it made them feel that the student and teacher were "engaged" and added a personal dimension to the learning process.

Students reflected on and took responsibility for their learning. At first, students commented in their response papers on what they did in class, but as they progressed, they explored on what, how, and why they had learned and included their feelings, motives, and methods about the subject matter. They also kept the returned papers so

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[2] I will explain more about Response Papers in Chapter 6.

that they could see that they were doing it for themselves. They were able to see how the quantity, quality, and attitude of their response papers progressed and improved. Additionally, students were asked to bring meaning to their own learning, emphasizing the constantly evolving learning cycle. This helped bring closure to everything they accomplished in class and during the semester or year.

6. Sharing

I had students share their work with their classmates during class and their projects as often as possible, first in groups of two to four members, then eight to ten, and finally with the whole class. This gradually accustomed them to making presentations in front of other people and communicating with their classmates.

I also initiated a "discussion time" at the end of every activity and project. This helped students interact with each other and understand the various aspects of "learning". The students came to understand that learning involved not only acquiring the subject matter as presented by the teacher, but that it also had other dimensions. I imagine those dimensions as a three-layered cake. The first layer is the "what", the content, the subject matter, which the students acquired, or occasionally, were not able to absorb. The middle layer is the "how", the process, the methods, the ways by which students learned as well as the obstacles which hindered their learning. The bottom layer encompasses the "why", the reasons behind the two top layers, the feelings and areas for improvement. Students also preferred sharing their work with others because they enjoyed discovering things about each other and learning from each other. They managed to have fun, study, and learn all at the same time.

I compiled the students' works into a "collection" and gave a copy to each student so that they could see what other class members were doing and thinking. Sometimes I videotaped their presentations, but I was not able to show them the videotapes during the semester because I usually taped their projects at the end of the semester. By the time I was finished dubbing, the semester had already ended. Students who requested could watch the tapes in their free time, but I usually showed the tapes to the students in a new class to give them an idea of what their projects might look like and what I expected from them.

7. Flexibility and open-mindedness

Even though the results of some projects were below expectations, I did not lose faith in what I was doing, and I tried to remain flexible and open to changes. I reminded myself to be patient even when the project's output looked vague, incomplete, or headed in the wrong direction. I tried to keep in mind that the students were in the process of exploring new ideas, and interestingly enough, sometimes their ideas were translated into creative project works. If an individual project was not going well, I suggested group work instead, and if a group's work was not progressing, I steered them toward individual projects. The students were also given opportunities to contribute ideas or suggestions to the projects. If there were problems with the class, in the projects, or in my teaching style, I gave students the freedom to openly express their opinions and point out the problems so that we could work it out together. If any problems that the students and I noticed were easily solved, we could change or adjust certain parts. Students were indeed creative when they were given the chance and became more willing to challenge

themselves and take risks. The results were best when the projects I assigned had broad, flexible, and open-ended guidelines and when I limited my involvement in the projects.

8. Assessment and evaluation

Students assessed and evaluated each other, and these evaluations became part of their final grades. However, the final evaluation would be done by me, taking account of student assessment. I believe that since the students are the "active participants" in the learning process, it is fairer to them if they are made responsible for assessing and evaluating themselves and each other. Students gave oral and written feedback on the main aspects of the projects and commented on what they understood, liked, found interesting, unique, or helpful, or considered lacking or in need of improvement. They submitted written feedback in the form of reflection journals and response papers. I found that students made many of the same comments and suggestions as I did, so I filled in the smaller gaps in their evaluations with more detailed comments.

What I Hope Other Teachers Will Learn From This Paper

These are the questions I want the reader to consider when reading this paper:

- What did I do in my classes?
- What were the results?
- How did the projects affect my students and their learning?
- What can you do to help your students to learn better?
- How can you apply my project ideas to your classes?
- What do you want your students to achieve in your classes?
- How can you help your students feel as if they have learned and accomplished something?

About This Paper

This paper is divided into seven chapters, the introduction being the first. The next chapter concerns Skit Festivals, the third Textbook Projects, the fourth Poster Presentations, the fifth Class Visuals, and the sixth Response Papers. Chapter seven is the conclusion. In each chapter, I will first explain the project in order to give the reader a basic idea of the project guidelines, and I will also discuss what my students did for each project. I then conclude each chapter with student feedback along with my comments, observations, and project results. I strongly recommend that in addition to reading chapters two through six, the reader refer to the examples of student works in Appendices 1~13. Please refer to Appendices 1~5 for the Skit Festivals, 6~7 for the Textbooks, 8~9 for the Class Visuals, 10~12 for the Poster Presentations, and Appendix 13 for the Response Papers.

CHAPTER 2

SKIT FESTIVALS AND THE EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING

Brief Explanation

Prior to this classroom research project, I had always used role-plays and skits in my conversation-based classes, and the majority of my students obviously enjoyed doing them. I found that role-plays and skits were a way to put the students' learning of various phrasal expressions to practical use in various communicative (real-life) situations. Most of my students were creative and expressive, and they enjoyed assuming the roles of various characters in varied settings. In addition, these skits could be improvised, so they were seldom the same. According to Arnold (1999), skits and role-plays are considered as cooperative learning, and the students could engage in them without suffering any negative affective factors. Since my students regularly acted out role-plays in class and progressively warmed to them, I wanted to see if they were able to combine their role-plays with recently acquired language to create one long skit. That was the birth of Skit Festivals. I used the term "festival" instead of "contest" or "exam" because it sounded less threatening and less competitive. Of course, the skits in the Skit Festival project were a type of a final exam; however, I wanted the students to view this final exam in a different way. The Skit Festival project was more like an event and an opportunity to

show everyone, in a creative way, what each person and group had learned in the class. That was the other reason for having the Skit Festival project.

There were two types of Skit Festival projects. In one, the students began performing in the skit festivals after just two or three weekly class sessions, totaling four or five skits in a year-long course. These skits actually served as a "review" of the weekly lessons, students having had a week to prepare outside of class for this activity. The other option was to have students perform skit festivals at the end of the semester, in which case the skits were a review of all the lessons from the semester. They were also an opportunity for sharing creativity at the end of the semester in the form of a "closing ceremony". The students had three weeks to prepare for the end-of-semester skit festivals. With both types, students' awareness of what they had learned was greatly enhanced (Ueland 1987).

In this chapter, I will focus on the latter type of the skit festival (end-of-semester) because during the years 2000~2002, the majority of my classes were semester-long. The results achieved were the same with both types of skit festivals; the main difference being that with the periodic festivals, student attitude and language level improved after each skit, and students became more supportive of each other as well. They always seemed to look forward to what kind of skit stories the other groups would be presenting. The guidelines for the two types of the Skit Festival projects were the same.

Guidelines For The Skit Festival Project At The End Of The Semester

1. Announcement

I notified the students three weeks in advance that they would be having a Skit Festival project. There were two reasons for the three-week advance notice. First, by this time, students were finishing up the functional themes for the semester, and I wanted to tell them what to expect for the remaining few weeks in the semester. Secondly, the skit festivals were held toward the end of the semester when students were busy preparing for final exams in their other classes. In addition to the announcement, I also gave them copies of the guidelines and showed them a video of a skit done in the past. The guidelines consisted of the following four basic points:

(1) Groups

Each group had to consist of two to three students, and each group member needed to contribute ideas, play roles, participate as a team member, and practice the group's skit. Group members would have two roles in the festivals, as skit performer and an audience member.

(2) Themes

Each group skit had to incorporate four or more of the thirteen functional themes covered in the semester. Each group was required to choose and prepare its own story lines using the selected themes and the appropriate phrasal expressions learned in the class. I expected each group skit to be original and each group to have fun.

(3) Things to bring

Each performing group was required to provide any handouts, posters, name cards, props, costumes, and visual aids necessary to help the audience understand the skit. Each group had to be able to explain each scene to the audience, and

each group was required to ask two listening comprehension questions to the

audience (not yes/no questions, however). The questions had to begin with

interrogative words such as: what, who, where, how long, which, when, what

time, and why.

(4) Time

Each group was given eight to thirteen minutes to set up for and perform its skit,

and about five minutes for a discussion time at the end of each group skit.

2. Group formation

Students were asked to form groups of two or three people. I found that students

tended to speak more or less equally when they were grouped in twos or threes instead of

groups of four or more. Also, I noticed during the semester that students chose people or

groups that they felt the most comfortable with or who brought out the best in them, a

form of building their own "communities". Even groups of six people could sub-divide

themselves into twos or threes. Most students took this Skit Festival project seriously

and tended to be creative, perhaps due to the fact that the skit festival was their "final"

project.

3. Skit festival scheduling

By the third (final) week of preparation, the groups had chosen the day on which

they would perform during the three-day festival.[3] In order to avoid scheduling conflicts,

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[3]   If there were fifty students in the class, the skit festival was divided into three days with 6~7 groups per day. If there were less than thirty students in the class, then the festival was separated into two days with 4~5 groups per day. If there were less than fifteen students in the class, then the festival was done in one day with 6 groups.

I put an empty chart of the festival schedule on the board with the three festival days and the possible time slots. As I pointed to each day and time slot, group representatives would raise their hands. The first hand up would get the first time slot, and I continued to write the names of the group representatives next to the time slots in consecutive order until all the time slots for each day were taken. Generally, students were satisfied with the skit schedule.[4]

Usually there were four to seven groups per day; however, there were times when there were too many groups for one day and too few for another. In such cases, the group representatives themselves decided in a "democratic" way. Usually it was either _janken_ (rock/scissors/paper) or a lottery style. They would then tell me which group would perform on the other remaining dates which had fewer groups.

I also told the students that they only needed to attend the skit festival on the day they were scheduled to perform. The groups who signed up for a particular day were the only ones who would attend that festival. Each student would act as a "performer" in his/her group skit as well as an "audience member" for the other groups. If there were other students who wished to come and watch their friends' performances, or if they needed to see an example of a live skit to get a better picture of how the festival worked, I allowed it.

4. Student preparation

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[4] When there was not enough time during the class to decide, I would post the schedule on the school bulletin board so that students could sign-up outside of class, but in a lottery-style. There would be a lottery box set at the Student Affairs Office, and each group representative would line up and pick a number from the box. For example, if the representative picked a lottery with a number 2, then on the schedule, s/he would sign the names of his/her group members next to the number 2 which would be already written on the schedule.

Once the students had formed groups, they worked outside of class as well as in class (when they had an extra few minutes at the end of class) to prepare the original stories and to rehearse the skits. During the three weeks, I answered student questions and explained and clarified any confusing points. Since students were asked to rehearse outside of class, I found most groups did not know what the other groups were preparing until the day of the festival; all of them were secretive and succeeded in surprising everyone. Not even I knew what the students were preparing until the day of the skit festival, and many students prepared creative skits beyond my expectations.

During the semester, I introduced the thirteen themes (to be covered in class), and when the groups created their own stories and dialogs for the skits (see Appendix 2), they were required to use four or more of these best-fitting functional themes and to include some phrasal and idiomatic expressions that they had learned in the class. The functional themes that the students chose from were:

- Introduction
- Small talk
- Telephone conversations
- Giving directions
- Giving instructions on how to do something
- Describing people, objects, and defining words
- Invitations
- Making requests, asking for requests for permission, and making offers
- Asking for and giving recommendations and suggestions
- Asking for and giving advice
- Making complaints
- Narrating events and explaining situations in order
- Expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing with the opinions, explaining opinions with reasons and examples

However, there were two problems with the student preparation, which involved "time". One problem that students commented on was not having enough time to prepare

and practice for their skits because the preparations and the skit rehearsals had to be done outside of class. Sometimes, groups had scheduling conflicts that interfered with or prevented out-of-class rehearsals. Also, students commented that it was challenging to find the time to study for their exams of other courses and also rehearse their English skits. I am still searching for ways to make skit preparation less stressful. Providing one class period for students to practice might help alleviate this stress.

5. Emphasis on creativity

Until the day of the skit festival, the students prepared outside of class. They tried to create stories that would be fun and simple to perform, would be entertaining for the audience, would send a message about what they wanted the audience to understand, and would demonstrate what they had learned in the course. They prepared name cards for their characters, wore costumes, arranged the desks in appropriate positions, used whatever was accessible in the classroom, and brought props that would help set the scenes for their skits (see Appendices 1, 4, and 5). They selected story lines, themes, and expressions that their classmates could understand, enjoy, and find useful.

During the semester, I always asked the students to try to step into the listener's shoes in order to make themselves understood to the listener. In doing this, they learned the importance of listening and understanding, and they applied this concept to the skit festivals as well. Not only did they use voice inflection and various non-verbal paralinguistic communication techniques, they also prepared handouts (see Appendices 1-D and 1-E), props and other forms of realià such as: using actual objects, mascot

figures, food, silverware, wearing costumes, and making signs and maps (see Appendix 4).

Throughout the semester, I also encouraged creativity in content, idea, style, and manner, and many students were indeed imaginative. For example, some of the male students dressed up as women while the female students dressed as men or children. They created love, murder, detective, or *samurai* stories; set the classroom as a café, a boxing gym, or fishing pond; reenacted a traffic accident or a TV infomercial; and some groups even invited audience members to participate in the skits. For example:

- The audience members would be witnesses at a crime scene. Some members in the audience had to stand as a group and point at the performers.
- The audience members were asked to act as famous athletes or actors. The performers would act as fans and would scream and wave at the selected audience member(s) who impersonated as a celebrity.
- The audience members acted as criminal suspects. The performers would describe one student in the classroom who was asked to be a suspect.
- The audience members answered any questions the performers asked.

6. On the day of the festival

When the students arrived on the day of the festival, there would be music playing in the background, and the classroom would be set up to look like an "arena". All of the desks would be pushed to the back with the exception of the desks for the students taking part in the skit festival, and two extra desks and three extra chairs set on the "stage" in case the group needed them. The desks not on the stage were arranged in a semi-circle facing the board. For example, if there were six groups of pairs for the festival, there would be twelve chairs and desks in a semi-circle surrounding the stage area, and two extra desks and three extra chairs on the stage. On top of the spectator desks (in the

semi-circle), I placed a schedule-pamphlet listing the groups and their members in order of performance.

There was a board at the front, and on the sides of the classroom, and there were a door and windows. This open area between the board and the semi-circle of desks would become the "stage", and I always made sure there was enough space for every group to perform in (see Appendices 1, 4, and 5). The space was large enough for students to roll or jump around in without running into the audience. The performing students used the two extra desks and three extra chairs set on the stage as well as the door, windows, and the board. They also brought props. The semi-circle of desks that surrounded the stage became the seats for the audience members. The performers used the stage, and the remaining groups were the audience in the semi-circle. While the performing group was setting up, the audience members might be talking with their own group members or reading the performers' handouts.

When it was a group's turn to perform[5], the group members would make whatever preparations were necessary (i.e. arrange desks, give out handouts to the audience, put up signs, arrange props, and wear costumes), and when they were ready, the group representative would give me a "thumbs up", and the background music would stop.

Before each scene, the group faced the audience with their signs and explained the situation of each scene. For example, one of the performers might say, "Scene 1: I am Tom, and my partner is Tom's father. We are in the living room. We will start," and

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[5] By this time, all performing groups had turned in their scripts to me, and on the audience members' desks, audience members had only writing utensils, paper to take notes on, dictionaries, props for their own skits, or whatever the performers handed them. If the props were too big, they would put them near their desks. The reason for this was for the audience members to give their full attention to the performers' skits.

then they would start the dialog (see Appendix 1-A). Sometimes, the audience members

clapped before and after the situations were explained. This eased the tension and

motivated the performers because the students understood that the skits were part of a

Skit Festival "show". On-stage, the performers would act out their skits, and they helped

and supported each other when one person forgot his or her lines. They usually spoke in

loud voices, moved around, and used gestures and the props while they were acting.

While the skits were in progress, the audience members listened, watched, took

notes, nodded, laughed at humorous parts, and reacted in other ways. If the performers

asked questions, the audience members responded. I never saw students sleeping, being

disinterested, or being rude to the performers. I noticed that rather than laughing or

snickering at a group's failures, the audience encouraged the group to go on. When the

group was finished, the audience members clapped, and sometimes the performers joined

in the applause. When one group finished, the next group moved in a similar fashion (i.e.

setting the scene, explaining each situation, acting) until all the groups who had signed up

for that day had finished performing.

7. An example skit

To give the reader an idea of what a group skit would be like and how the

students in a skit group organized the themes and used props, I will describe one skit. Let

us say that a group of two people decided to use the following five functional themes:

small talk, giving directions, making complaints, phone conversations, and giving advice.

The people might start off with "Scene 1", using "small talk" and "giving

directions". First, they would briefly explain the situation, by showing their name cards

and saying who they were, and by pointing to the sign on the board which read "On campus" (see Appendix 1-A). Next, they would say, "Conversation for Scene 1 starts," and start acting.

Two people would be walking on campus, and they would suddenly run into each other. One student (Student A) might be coming through the door on one side, carrying a backpack and listening to a _Discman_. This would be the time they used "small talk".

Student A: "Oh hi, Hitoshi! I haven't seen you for a long time! How have you been?"

Student B: "Hi Keiko, I'm doing great. How are your classes going?"

In this short conversation, the students used several expressions introduced in class.

The two students continue to talk, and Student A "invites" Student B to a new restaurant. However, Student B does not know how to get there, so Student A gives him/her "directions". Both students have prepared a map of which the audience members also have a copy. The performers use this map while they talk, and the audience members follow the conversation using their maps (see Appendix 4-B).

The next scene is the day of their date. Student A has been waiting in front of the restaurant for thirty minutes. A sign is displayed reading, "Thirty minutes have passed." Student A seems irritable because Student A keeps sighing, pacing up and down, and constantly looking at a watch. Finally, Student A "calls" Student B, and "complains" of being stood up. Perhaps Student B has a reason and so begins to explain. During this time, a cartoon might be displayed for the audience narrating and explaining the reasons for the delay. When Student B finally arrives and apologizes, they enter the restaurant.

The classroom is then set up as a restaurant with a waiter, table, menu, plates, photos of dishes, and other props. Since there are only two students in the group, one

student (Student B) would remain at the table while the other (Student A) alternates between playing the waiter and friend. A stuffed toy representing him/her replaces him/her when s/he is playing the waiter's role. The student playing dual roles changes name cards as the roles change. When the food arrives, both act as if they are eating, and one might ask the other for "advice" about something. The story might have a surprising ending.

8. Discussion time after the skits

    At the end of each group skit, there were two activities during which the performers either sat in the extra chairs set on the stage or stood and faced the audience.

    (1) Each performing group asked the audience two listening comprehension questions about the story (see Appendix 1-B).

        e.g.:   Question- "What did Hitoshi have for lunch at the restaurant?"
                 Answer- "He had the 800 yen seafood pasta."

    (2) The audience members gave each performing group feedback by mentioning positive points and making suggestions, and the students would discuss these comments.

        e.g.:   Audience Member A- "I really enjoyed the skit. I especially liked the part when Mary sees her boyfriend with another woman. It seemed so real!"

                 Audience Member B- "Me too, and I think the signs of the park and the maps were very helpful in making the situation easy to understand."
                 Performer- "Thanks, I am happy. Actually Performer A (Sachiko) made the maps on her computer. And that scene really happened to a friend of mine! Was there anything you didn't like?"

In activity (1), the performers asked the audience listening comprehension questions to see if the audience had been able to understand the story. Students in the audience were usually able to answer these questions, but when there was a problem (i.e. when students were not responding or were quiet for more than fifteen seconds), the audience would either guess the answer or ask the performers questions, or the performers gave hints. The performers might restate the question, re-explain the situation, turn the question into a multiple-choice quiz, or change the question. Both the performers and the audience would read the atmosphere to keep the energy flowing. During the years 2000~2002, I experimented with having students asking listening comprehension questions and with having no questions at all, and the majority of the students have told me that they preferred having questions because as performers, they could judge whether the audience had understood or not. Some performers asked questions during their skits, so the audience had to participate. The audience members also liked the fact they were involved in other groups' skits.

In activity (2), I provided time for sharing opinions because it was important for students to give each other immediate feedback so the performers could see what was understood, liked, or lacking instead of wondering or worrying about the audience's reaction. The audience members usually mentioned positive points, such as things they liked or found interesting, rather than giving suggestions. I hardly ever heard any negative or insulting remarks. The comments tended to focus not only on the skit content but also on the presentation style. Their suggestions usually concerned voice volume and speed, or about the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary and expressions. Basically, they were points that students could easily change, improve, or easily fix. The performers also

told me that they liked this time for discussions because they felt "closer" to the audience, sharing the audience's perspective. They also said that it was better when I sat away from the students to allow them more personal space.

During the festivals and both post-festival activities, there was rarely any teacher interference since I usually stayed outside of the students' "circle". The students were able to perform their skits and give and receive immediate feedback from their peers without my help. If there were problems, the students solved them. If it seemed that some students needed help, others volunteered that help, so I rarely interrupted their discussions.[6] After all skits and discussions had ended, I took the last ten minutes of class to give the students oral feedback. Students responded positively to this style because they appreciated my praise and comments, and they found my explanations of phrasal expressions and ways to restate them to be useful.

9. Reflection

For homework (response paper), each person evaluated all the skits including their own (see Appendix 3). Depending on the writer, students covered as many of the points as their ability allowed (see Appendix 3):

- Content and the storyline
- The message or the main idea
- Impressions of the skits
- Presentation styles
- The use of expressions and language
- Understandability and clarity
- Originality
- Preparation

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[6]   This is how my class was run during the entire semester as well. When students had a question, I gave an indirect answer such as, "What do you think you should do for activity #1? They were accustomed to thinking for themselves.

- Good points
- Points for improvement
- The meaning of "communication"
- Advice on what a speaker should do and what a listener should do

The students evaluated and wrote about their own group as well as those of their classmates on the same skit festival day. After writing their evaluations and giving their opinions and explaining their reasons, they selected what they considered "best" performing group(s) and gave reasons for their choice(s).

I have noticed that student evaluations tended to mirror mine, and my personal choices for "best" performances were usually the same as the students', so the group(s) receiving the most votes from the other students usually was the same as the group(s) I had selected. The winning group(s) received ten extra points on their grade; the second place group(s) received seven points, and the third place group(s) received three points each. Usually all groups received at least one point because the students voted someone's groups. Very seldom did the students choose their own group as the best one.

What Did Students Learn From The Skit Festival Project?

1. Language: structure, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency

The students themselves were responsible for producing and using English. They told me that they did this by creating their own stories and dialogs, which enabled them to review basic English grammatical and sentence structures that they had been taught. They also learned to make fewer mistakes, or they noticed their mistakes beforehand. Outside of class, the students produced the language output, so they had to rely on each other since I was not there to answer questions for them. Students told me that this was

actually good for their language learning because they had to solve problems on their own. In addition, both the performers and audience members learned new vocabulary and phrasal expressions from each other's performances. Students produced, created, recycled, and re-learned the language.

When the audience had trouble understanding a mispronounced word, the performing group learned the importance of pronunciation. When students saw the audience members looking uncomprehending, or when the audience members commented on that fact that there were some parts that were difficult to understand during their discussion-time, they learned the importance of voice volume, pronunciation, clarity, and the use of visuals aids such as vocabulary lists, signs, and gestures. They also learned how the speaker could help the audience or listener to understand what s/he was expressing by enunciating words carefully and incorporating non-verbal skills.

2. Presentation skills and the "physical" components: voice volume, speaking speed, posture, facial and bodily expressions, gestures, eye contact, attitude, and humor

A successful skit depended not only on "what" the speakers/performers expressed, but "how" they expressed it. Students saw that speaking in a loud and clear voice got the audience's attention, and gave the speakers energy. They learned when and how to speak slowly or quickly, and they learned that enunciation and inflection gave more impact, feeling, and emotion to what they were saying. When they were performing, students did not stand stiffly but tried to move around the "stage" using gestures as much as they could. They saw how facial expressions and body language were effective in transmitting the message to the listeners/audience. The performers

could predict that a word or phrase might cause difficulty, and they learned to communicate the meaning of the word with every device at their disposal (e.g. in the face with facial expressions, voice with inflection, in the body with gestures, or with realià, props, handouts, and various types of visual aids). If the audience looked puzzled, the performers adjusted and adapted the performance to facilitate comprehension (e.g. repeat, add things like facial expressions, gestures, voice inflection, or exaggerate and point to the actual object or the word on the handout or sign). Students also learned the importance of eye contact and often made eye contact with each other on monitoring the members to see if they knew what to say or do next. The performing groups also made eye contact with the audience during the discussions to make sure the audience understood the listening comprehensions questions and to listen to the audience comments.

The majority of students looked as if they were enjoying themselves while they were performing and watching, and they saw that having a positive attitude could help relieve the tension and give them more energy and confidence to use English and to make presentations in public. Students brought in Japanese cartoon _anime_ figures; they acted and moved in comical ways; they included jokes and sarcasm; or they ended their skits with a punch line. The performers saw that when they included humor in their skits, the audience reacted or laughed at the humorous parts in their skits. They were very happy when the audience reacted as they had expected, and they were excited to joke successfully in English. Audience members saw that if they reacted positively to the skits, the performers looked happy, and the time passed quickly and enjoyably for everyone.

3. Communication and discussion skills: expressing oneself, listening, giving opinions, responding, asking questions, reacting, giving details, and clarifying

During the skits, the performers communicated with each other on-stage and the audience members listened and followed the content carefully. During the question-answer session after the skits, the students interacted with each other through the listening comprehension questions. They applauded when someone answered correctly, and they groaned when an answer was incorrect or close.

Both the performers and the audience were generally satisfied with the skits and a feeling of success was possible because of the immediate feedback afterward. They gave and received comments "on-the-spot". There was active communication between the two groups with the performers facing the audience during the discussions. The comments from the audience were mostly positive, and again, everyone felt a glow of achievement and satisfaction. In addition, I sat in the back, away from the students' "circle". Since I had encouraged autonomy from the teacher and interdependence with each other throughout the semester, students performed the skits and conducted discussions with ease. They also saw that it was highly possible to have skits and discussions in English. The skit festival enabled students to see the value in expressing oneself as well as the importance of listening and understanding. Even difficult questions were resolved through hints or suggestions and with little help from the teacher.

4. Making things easier to understand and clarity

I think that "understanding" is one of the keys to communication. During the whole semester, I emphasized the importance of understanding through active-listening

activities. Speakers had to find ways to clearly convey their messages while checking their listeners' comprehension. Listeners had to find ways to show the speakers that the message was clear and that they understood what they were hearing.   During the skit festivals, the performing students made their stories easier for the audience to understand by explaining the situation, clarifying, and giving information and examples. They also used handouts and incorporated other audiovisual aids and props or realià. They used facial and bodily expressions, speaking speed, voice volume, inflection, and enunciation. They used simpler language and repeated key words or main points. During the discussion-time, audience members asked questions and restated what was understood. Also, when the audience members were able to answer the listening comprehension questions, the performing students knew that they had been successful in communicating their messages.

5. Evaluating and reflecting

As I mentioned earlier, students learned to evaluate themselves as well as their classmates. They evaluated themselves and others and reflected on the skits during the discussion time and in their response papers (evaluation homework). They were fair to others and to themselves, and they usually found ways of improving themselves. Not only did students point out the weaknesses of their skits, but they also looked for positive qualities in each group's performance as well as their own. The response papers and the skit festivals were a chance for them to think about the way they "communicate" in their daily lives and about the very definition of "communication". Many students have

commented that they now pay more attention to and have improved their communication styles.

6. Teamwork, cooperation, peer support, interaction, and participation

Students experienced the benefits of teamwork, cooperation, support, and interaction in the skit group communities, through discussing and preparing for their own skits, and from performing on-stage. On-stage, students helped and supported each other when someone forgot his/her lines. As for the skit festival community, no one laughed at the failures of others; rather they encouraged them to continue and not to worry about mistakes. In addition, they discovered new facets to their classmates and friends. They saw "that everybody is talented, original and has something important" (Ueland 1987) and that, I would add, has something interesting to say. Every student had an opportunity to act, ask questions, listen, and give comments. There was always a role for every student to play; every student participated, and every student was included.

7. Importance of self-expression and using creativity, originality, and imagination

Students learned to express themselves in various ways during the skits as well as during discussions. I encouraged creative freedom and self-expression and I tried to limit structuralization and teacher-interference. Consequently, students were able to express themselves by utilizing their inner resources, hidden talents, and experiences. Self-expression involved expressing themselves not only vocally but also physically. In the skits, students saw that by drawing on their creativity and imagination, they could produce unique and interesting results. Different groups might include common

functional themes or base their skits on similar situations or use similar phrasal

expressions in their stories, every skit; however, was uniquely presented. Also, every skit

had a message whether intentional or unintentional, and sometimes there were multiple

messages. The students learned that original output was rewarding and could not be

duplicated. Skits also broke the barriers of stereotypes. Students who were usually seen

as quiet and reserved showed others that they were fully capable of expressing

themselves despite any preconceived notions their classmates may have had. Students

learned that people should learn to get to know and accept each other for who they really

are, before drawing any hasty conclusions. In the discussions, the students saw that it

was important to share opinions and give each other feedback because this helped them

understand what kind of story worked or did not work. They came to understand that

feedback was not simply criticism, but a way to share their inner thoughts, and to help,

support, and understand each other and the differences.

8. Joy of learning, having fun, relaxing, and building confidence

      Not only during the skit festival, but also throughout the entire semester, students

built a "community" which helped them to feel secure, knowing that their classmates

supported them. Students befriended each other through class activities and learned to

feel comfortable with each other, secure in the knowledge that if there were going to be a

problem, their group members would support them. Also during the skit festival, the

audiences were understanding and respectful; they avoided causing any embarrassment to

themselves or others. In this atmosphere, students were able to relax and perform. They

realized that they had accomplished something on their own, and this gave them

confidence. When they saw the audiences reacting to their skits, this too increased their self-esteem and motivation. Learning was actually fun, and skits were an entertaining and effective way to study English.

9. Progress and closure to learning

Students improved their language usage and their communication skills. Compared to the beginning of the semester, they saw that they were able to communicate and comprehend for a longer time with more fluency and accuracy during the skit festivals. They commented on how much everyone had learned, was able to produce, and had improved through the skit festivals, which led to closure of their learning and accomplishment. They saw how important it was to be able to see this and then close the semester.

Student Feedback About The Skit Festival Project

After the skit festivals, I gave the students questionnaires so that I could gather data about the Skit Festival project. Nine out of ten students' comments were partially or completely positive. In this section, I have divided their feedback in three parts: (1) feedback concerning the skits, (2) discussion activities, and (3) negative points about the Skit Festival project. The following two sections are excerpts from the students' written feedback, the grammar of which has been partially corrected by me.

1. Student feedback about doing and watching the skits:

- It was a good opportunity to practice using what I learned in class.

- It was a good review and summary because I prepared many expressions, and looked back on and reviewed the lessons. It was something I never had done before.
- Skits were useful and brought everything together. I was able to re-learn things, clearly see what we had learned, and applied what I learned.
- I felt accomplishment and satisfaction, and this provided a chance to learn more.
- I learned to enjoy studying English and have a positive attitude. Skits gave me a new outlook on English.
- I learned the importance of attitude: the attitude to enjoy the skits, to help others, to comment, react, praise, and take part in something with everyone.
- I was able to be someone else because I could come up with new characters, could be different people, and could be at different places. I was able to be in real-life and fictitious situations. I could portray my fantasy, dream, and reality.
- Although I was nervous at first, I enjoyed performing and watching, and it was obvious that everyone else was too. It is nice be in a class where you can see this happening.
- I was able to make more friends and see different sides to people.
- I learned the importance of teamwork, cooperation, and support, and the value of learning about other people and their ideas. I learn better in this kind of atmosphere.
- I learned what to do and to speak in actual (or real-life) situations. I learned more expressions and communicative strategies.
- This style enabled me to learn more from the heart.
- I experienced the power of kinesthetic intelligence and learning by doing.
- I learned how to explain and describe things, and I discovered new ways to learn English: through art, music, acting, and improvisation (ad-lib).
- I am not afraid anymore, and I have confidence. I feel motivated to challenge new things.
- I learned the importance of understanding each other and the importance of listening and expressing myself.
- I discovered more about listening. Listening is not just listening to words but also the message, gist, intent, and feelings.
- Everyone is better when it is done by the heart; thus, effort is important.
- I confirmed my progress, and I see that my English ability has gone up. I see big improvement in myself as well as in everyone else.
- Everyone was enjoying him/herself, and the festival was successful, and is unique, creative, and interesting. There are not many chances when I see this in a class.
- I learned natural conversation flow.
- It was fun making up original stories, using English, and non-verbal communication (gestures, feelings, emotions, eye contact, tempo, voice).
- It was fun creating things by ourselves, and it was a chance for each person to show his/her hidden talents.

- Some groups used the same themes, but every skit was unique and different, and incorporated various ideas. No skit was the same. Every skit surprised me, and every skit had a clear message.
- Many people included costumes, props, jokes, surprising story plots, punch lines, and included lots of creativity. I never laughed in a classroom until this class.
- It was great to see the audience reacting.
- It was another good chance to reflect, "What is communication?"
- Not only did I learn English, but I also learned about life skills, communication, people, cultural differences, and cultural harmony (blending the various "cultures" together).
- Communication brings people closer and makes them happier. It brings various "cultures" together, and it's active.
- I am more aware on making things as understandable as possible.
- I learned nothing is impossible; it is challenging but if I put effort, everything will be all right. I CAN actually think, speak, and listen to English!
- I now do not translate from Japanese to English each time, but I am able to think automatically in English.
- It was a comfortable (non-threatening) atmosphere, so it made it easier to participate. Everyone is supporting and listening to each other.
- I learned pronunciation and intonation in various scenes and used various feelings

2. Student feedback about doing the discussion activities:

- I was glad to hear the audience giving my group comments.
- I got to know the points that I would have never noticed, so there are so many discoveries.
- Positive feedback is certainly important, but actually, any kind of feedback is helpful because it shows that people care and take you seriously.
- It is important to think and discuss what I can improve and exchange knowledge.
- Through discussions, I learned the "catch-ball" conversation, and it became clear that everyone understood my group skit.
- I learned to explain and support my opinions. It is better to go into more detail.
- I learned that if you have a good idea in your heart, you should just release it.
- It was a good practice for spontaneity
- What you learned or experienced are your treasure.

3. Student feedback about problems with the skits

However, there were two negative points pertaining to the skits. One student

commented that s/he did not feel that skits were "real communication" because in this

student's opinion, skits were composed of memorized and rehearsed lines, and real-life

situations are neither memorized nor rehearsed. As for this point, I always emphasized to

the students that there was no need for complete memorization, and I encouraged students to improvise and to be spontaneous. While the students were performing in their group skits, I saw many of them in fact improvising their dialogs as they went along, keeping the big picture of their group story in mind.

Secondly, some students in larger classes who held the skit festival over several days wanted to watch the skits on days other than their own. In this case, I did two things: invited students to visit other festival days, or lent videotapes of the entire skit festival to the students who were interested.[7]

Concluding Observations

Through the skit activities, students became more motivated to learn more about English and about communication in general. Constantly working in groups, they also came to realize that learning English is not only about language, but also about relationships and teamwork. Also by using intonation, pronunciation, and repetition, they learned how to be better speakers. Students were also able to understand the benefits of paralinguistic and non-verbal communication through the use of gestures and realià. They learned that attitude, humor, and creativity could energize the learning process, and increase the motivation to learn. They prepared, created, organized, performed, and discussed, the skit entirely by themselves. Expressing opinions became easier for them,

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[7] However, in one of my recent classes in the second semester of 2004, we fortunately had an extra day after the skit festivals. I showed the students videotapes of their skits, and they really seemed to enjoy this. A student commented that having this video-showing was a good idea because he could see how he performed and he also saw many things that he could improve about his performance. I am considering establishing a "video-showing day" in some of my classes to show students the entire festival. I hope to learn digital video editing in order to do this.

saying, for example that something in another group's skit was something that s/he would have never thought of for his/her own performance. Also, since I emphasized student autonomy, I was outside of the students' circle which eased the tension as well. In conclusion, I feel that the Skit Festival project was successful, not only because the students learned English, but also because they acquired a sense of responsibility, became motivated and aware of their own progress, and came to understand the value and meaning of "closure".

CHAPTER 3
STUDENT-GENERATED TEXTBOOKS AND THE EFFECT ON
STUDENT LEARNING

Brief Explanation

I used the Textbook project in my conversation-based classes. I began this project to see if students were capable of making "textbooks" of their own learning. I also wanted to see if students would be able to teach others from their experiences in the class, and if they could bring meaning to their own learning. The answer was yes.

There were two types of Textbook projects: group textbooks and individual textbooks. During the time when I had my students do these projects, I taught two types of classes, a year-long course and a semester course, and the subject matter for both courses was the same. In the case of the year-course, the students made group textbooks because they had twice as much time to work in class as the semester-course students. In the case of the semester-long courses, I had my students work individually to make their own books. I wanted to see how working in groups or individually would affect my students' learning. The students from the year-course did this project toward the end of the second semester, and later students from the semester-course did at the end of the first semester. For both classes, whether it was a semester or a year course, I introduced thirteen themes that we covered in class. When the students created their own textbooks,

they were required to choose from the five functional themes to be included in their textbook[8] and to include the expressions they learned for each theme. In addition, I wanted the student to include any additional information that would be helpful for themselves and for other English learners.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were two types of textbooks: group and individual. The group textbook was done in a year-long class while the individual textbook was done in a semester class. In either case, when groups or individuals finished making their textbooks, they then shared them with their classmates. In Chapter 3, I will first focus on the Group Textbook project, and later on the Individual Textbook project.

Guidelines For The Group Textbook Project

1. Announcement

I notified the students four weeks in advance that they would be having a Group Textbook project. The reasons for this four-week advance notice were similar to those given for the Skit Festival project. Students would be finishing up the functional themes

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[8] The functional themes that they chose from were:
- Introduction
- Small talk
- Telephone conversations
- Giving directions
- Giving instructions on how to do something
- Describing people, objects, and defining words
- Invitations
- Asking for permission and making requests and offers
- Asking for and giving recommendations and suggestions
- Asking for and giving advice
- Making complaints
- Narrating stories and explaining situations
- Expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, and explaining and supporting opinions

by this time, and I wanted to give them enough time to look through their handouts, notes, and returned homework assignments and response papers so they could ask questions or make suggestions.

For the group textbooks, students were asked to form groups of three to five people. I found that students tended to work better in groups of threes, fours, or fives rather than in pairs; the more people there were, the more ideas arose. Also, I noticed that during the semester, students chose people or groups that they felt comfortable with or who brought out the best in them, a form of building their own "communities".[9]

When I announced the Group Textbook project, I handed out the guidelines. Unfortunately when I first introduced the project to the classes, I did not have examples of past student textbooks because during the years 2000~2002, it was my first time to organize such a project. After giving the guidelines to the students, I gave an abstract explanation and drew illustrations on the board of what I was expecting. The guidelines for the Group Textbook project consisted of the following five points:

(1) Themes

Each group of three to five people was required to choose five functional themes from the thirteen (see Footnote 8) introduced during the year and include the expressions learned from the classes. Each theme would be represented by a chapter in their group textbook, each textbook having five chapters, a front cover with a title page, and a comment section at the end. The textbooks would serve as a review of the themes they had chosen, recycling the information learned from the year.

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[9] When I planned this project, there were a total of ten groups in two classes. Perhaps due to the fact that they were small-sized classes, the students were very friendly with each other.

(2) Time and deadline

Each group had to make its textbook within three to four weeks, and it was

responsible for making its own group schedule. It could use all of the class time

during the three weeks and as well as the time after class for homework.

(3) Contribution and participation

Every group member was required to contribute to the discussions concerning the

preparation for, the making of, and the presentation of the group textbook. Each

person had to provide opinions, ideas, and suggestions, both in oral and in written

forms.

(4) Content

Each group had to incorporate the information and expressions learned and used

in class into its textbook. Additionally, the group had to provide any necessary

explanations of the themes and the expressions used in its group textbook. Not

only should it make the textbook content clear and helpful, but also visually

attractive by using illustrations, designs, and color (see Appendix 6 for an

example of a group textbook cover and one chapter).

(5) Presentation

Each group was required to present its group textbook to the class on the final

(fourth) week of the project. The presentation would be followed by a class

discussion.

2. Discussion and preparation: the creation process of the group textbook

For the three remaining weeks of the second semester, each group decided which five functional themes would be included in its group textbook. I noticed that each group chose its theme and textbook content based on:

- Interest: the most interesting themes
- Impression: the themes or class activities that left the strongest impressions on them
- Memory: the themes that they could still remember
- Usefulness: the themes that they thought were the most useful
- Ability: the themes that they were able to understand best, or the themes that they were able to produce (ability-wise) during class
- Importance: the themes that they thought were the most important or significant in a real-life communicative situation

I also saw that students preferred broad themes (e.g. going abroad) or broad concepts (e.g. basic but useful communication). These were not points I included in my guidelines, but rather ideas that originated with the students.

All groups had three weeks to prepare for and discuss their projects, during and outside of class. Since they did this project toward the end of the year in the second semester, the students all knew each other well by then and had already formed their own groups. I observed that the majority of the students used English during the discussions because they felt at ease using English and took initiative and risks. I do not know exactly why my student tended to use English rather than Japanese, but it might have been because this was their "final" project. They may have thought that it would be meaningful to use as much English as possible.

However there was a case of one very quiet group. When I came to their table, they explained that they did not feel comfortable using English and said that if they were allowed to speak Japanese, their discussions might work better. When they wrote, it was all in English, but their discussions were at first 100% Japanese and later to 60% English

and 40% Japanese. The results were the same as the groups who discussed everything in English. The textbook quality was as high as that of the groups who had conducted their discussions entirely in English.

Each group created and designed the sections or chapters of its group textbook during and outside of class. Depending on the group, students assigned themselves roles or tasks, preparing drafts outside class and showing them to their group members for feedback in class. Sometimes, during class, they worked together on particular themes or sections of the book, generating feedback and comments. Although some group strategies were similar, such as using past handouts and past response papers from class[10], it basically seemed that each group had its own particular style of working together.

I noticed that some groups revised and modified their already-made dialogs and recycled material from their past response papers, while others created new dialogs, explanations, and ideas. Not one group copied its past dialogs or explanations verbatim. This meant that they all produced original materials by themselves and from their own ideas while also improving their English and broadening their knowledge of the functional themes they had selected (see Appendix 6-B). Students learned to become independent learners.

3. Example of one section of a group textbook

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[10]   During the course, students had to turn in weekly reflection or response papers every week that helped them to think about their learning in class. In these response papers, each student would also include dialogs that they created and role-played during class. The students used the information and dialogs they had written in their past response papers to this Textbook project.

One group of three women chose the theme "giving someone instructions on how to use something" as one of its five functional themes for it group textbook. Appendix 6-B shows this chapter in their group textbook in which they first briefly explain how to give such instructions. They then showed how to record a video on a VCR, as an example, something which could help the reader or English learner understand the steps and language involved in giving instructions in English. They explained each step of recording a video, underlining key expressions and including illustrations. After that, they added alternative expressions for the underlines phrases. If they had underlined the word "First…", they added an alternative phrase such as "First of all..." Finally, they ended the chapter with important pointers for better communication such as, "Speak in a clear voice", "Be kind when instructing something to someone", and "Write down key words or draw pictures when explaining each step".

4. My involvement as the teacher in the Group Textbook project

Other than giving guidelines for the project, I tried to keep teacher interference and involvement at a minimum since the students were actively doing their group work during the preparation process. The students formed their own groups and discussed their group textbooks independently. During class, when the students had a question that they thought only I could answer, they would ask me the question, but this was rare. I walked around to each group to see what they were doing, but I tried not to disturb them. The only times I would interrupt the groups were at the beginning of class, and at the end of class, when I asked them what they planned on doing on the following week as well as

for next week. With the groups reporting their agendas and progress, I would know

where each group stood, and I rarely interfered their preparation.

5. Preparation for group textbook presentation

As I mentioned earlier in the guidelines, each group was required to present their

textbooks to the other members of the class on the final fourth week of this project.

Before the day of their group presentations, the students had already decided the order in

which they would be presenting.[11] What and how they presented and explained was left

up to each group because I did not give any specific instructions on how to do the

presentations, but I noticed that students focused on the following points in their

presentations:

- Content of the textbook: good, main, and useful points
- Explanation of the textbook style, concept, and objectives
- Explanation of each chapter or section in the textbook
- Explanation of what the textbook authors learned through the textbook-making process
- Explanation of how, why, and in what ways other English learners might find the textbook useful
- Description of the textbook creation process
- Description of the unique points of the textbook
- Textbook authors' reactions toward their own textbook

I found for the most part that the groups did not know what the other class members were

preparing until the day of the presentations because each group was busy with its own

work. As a result, they were all interested in and curious about each other's textbooks.

As for rehearsing for the presentations, the groups practiced outside the class. It seemed

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[11]   Since there were fifteen students in this particular class, all groups were able to present on one day.
While one group was presenting, the other groups functioned as the audience.

that before the end of the previous week's class, they had decided which person would present each section of the textbook.

6. On the day of the group textbook presentation

The groups presented their textbooks on a single presentation day. When the students entered the classroom, all the desks had been arranged in a big circle, and group members had to sit next to each other. The presenters stood by and spoke from their desks, and if the other students (audience members) had trouble seeing, they could move to vacant seats to get a better view. I sat outside of the students' circle in the back, and for each presentation, I would move to a place where I could see, both the audience members and the presenters. The presentations were not given a specific time limit, but I noticed that the average time for a presentation was about ten minutes.

While the presentations were in progress, the audience members listened, watched, took notes, nodded, laughed at humorous parts, and reacted in other ways. If the presenters asked questions, the audience members responded. I never saw any students sleeping, being disinterested in the presentations, or being rude to the presenters. The students who were not presenting continued to be active participants in the learning process by being curious about and interested in their peers' creations.

The presenters for the most part, explained their textbooks and their intentions, and gave examples to clarify their main points in their textbooks. Some students brought additional visual aids, but most students found their textbooks sufficient to be a visual aid. There were however in some groups, a few members who read verbatim from their chapters rather than summarizing the information in their own words. Some of these

students later told me that they had not made a copy of or prepared for the sections for which they were responsible for, which meant that their presentations were completely unrehearsed. One person said that he was too nervous to look at the audience, so he decided to face the book instead of the audience. These students regretted what they had done, and one group requested another chance to present their textbook. For this group, I listened to their improved presentation outside of class, and I noticed that they tried to make more eye contact and summarize the information in their own words. They said that they felt more satisfied after the second try.

What particularly pleased me about this Group Textbook project was that everyone learned, and the information and images they created were all unique. Although the students felt that the textbooks were difficult to make within the allotted time, the end result helped them feel that all the time and effort they invested in the project had been worthwhile.

7. Discussions

After each presentation, the presenting groups would sit down, and there would be a discussion time consisting of the following three activities:

(1) The audience members asked each presenting group questions to give more information.

(2) The audience members commented on the good points of each textbook.

(3) The audience members offered suggestions or gave the reader's point-of-view on how to improve the textbook.

With activity (1), the other groups (audience members) asked the presenting group about the reasons for its display and layout style, or about points that the presenters might have forgotten to include. I included activity (2) because all the presenting groups worked hard for three to four weeks to create something that demonstrated their learning, and I thought everyone deserved praise. Also, I noticed that students were eager to give positive points for effort, design, and the content. Students commented that the content of the group textbooks differed from one another, and that the illustrations and the layout of each helped clarify the content. With activity (3), the presenters took the suggestions very seriously, and the following week, they incorporated these suggestions into their group textbooks. Although my classes ended with these group textbook presentations and discussions, the students submitted their group textbooks during the exam period. Some suggestions included:

- Textbook display: making the book more visually attractive by adding color or designs
- Chapter layout: making each chapter easier to read by adding frames, organizing, and dividing into sections
- Adding examples into their explanations: making their explanations clearer by adding more examples, dialogs, illustrations, and/or charts

Others were very simple involving minor points such as color, frames, or capitalization. As I mentioned earlier, the students had to turn in their final textbooks during the exam period. When they had revised their textbooks, they commented that their revised books looked better and were easier to understand.

A few students also made suggestions about the group presentations. These suggestions concerned such things as voice volume, eye contact, and not being able to see the visuals or the sections of the textbook. For example, a student would say, "Please talk more loudly. You are saying good things, so I want to hear you." Or, "You should

look at the audience when speaking, and you should not keep your back to everyone. I

want to see your face when you are talking to me." Or, "Your hand covered the chapter

while you were explaining it, you did not open the chapter wide enough. Of course, I

need to take care about this point, too." Although these were suggestions I had intended

to give, the students preempted me by making similar comments during the discussion

time. Finally, all groups turned in their revised group textbooks outside of class during

the exam period. I made photocopies of each group textbook so that group members

would have a copy, as I did not return the original textbooks to the students.

<u>Guidelines For The Individual Textbook Project</u>[12]

1. Preparation and the making of the textbooks

Unlike the group textbooks, the entire Individual Textbook project was done

outside of class because it was a semester-long course. During the students' winter

vacation (about four weeks), they created their textbooks choosing four functional themes

from a total of thirteen (see Footnote 8). The reason I assigned this project during their

winter vacation was because after winter vacation, the students would only have two

more weeks of class left before the exam period, and they would have covered all the

functional themes before winter vacation.

For the Individual Textbook project, I also notified the students about the project

four weeks in advance. I advised them to think back over the themes they had studied

and consider which would be most appropriate (or interesting, impressive, memorable,

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[12]   Students who made the group textbooks commented that it would have been more convenient for them to create the textbooks on their own rather than in a group, and this is how the Individual Textbook project evolved.

useful, necessary, or important) for their textbooks. In their individual textbooks, the

students included:

- Conversation dialogs: in some conversation dialogs, students included key phrases, provided alternative phrases and expressions, and included the dos and don'ts of communicating
- Explanations of various situations: some students explained when to use or not use each functional theme in a situation
- Stories: some students introduced each functional theme with a story or personal experience
- Advice, conclusions, or information: some students provided tips on what to do for the functional themes, how and when to use the functional themes, and the reasons for their conclusions
- Comparing effective and ineffective or appropriate and inappropriate communication styles
- Illustrations and various styles of visuals[13]

I was surprised to notice that the majority of the information in the individual textbooks

was new and not copied or revised from the students' past response papers, class

activities, or handouts. Unlike the group textbooks, the individual textbooks included

new expressions that were not covered in class. Students said that they understood in

more depth the themes they had chosen for their textbooks because they took the time to

include the parts they learned in class, to review the material, and to correct any parts that

needed change.

At the end of their textbooks, they included a section in which they wrote their

reflections on the Textbook project (see Appendix 7-C)[14], and the following are examples

of student comments. The students wrote that:

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[13]   A few textbooks included more visuals than information, and a few had more information than visuals, but most had a good balance of both. A few looked as if they had been put together in less than thirty minutes, but the majority were well-thought out and executed. Students also put considerable effort into explaining the information in their own words. They indicated that the textbooks-making process required anywhere from one day to a week to make.

[14]   Students have said that in their past English classes, they tended to forget everything they had learned after each class and did not bother to review anything. Their learning was "wasted" after every class.

- These textbooks helped them to review what they had learned and understood in class
- They were able to better understand points which they had only understood vaguely before making the textbooks
- The textbook-making process functioned as a summary and review of the class
- The textbook creation process became a chance for them to look back on the semester
- It was fun to think about how to display and explain each theme in their own ways

2. Example of one section in an individual textbook

The reader should refer to Appendix 7 D-1, the bottom half. This student chose "invitations" as one of the four themes to include in her textbook. To teach the reader and English learner on what to do in the case of invitations, she divided the chapter into two sections: conversation dialogs and guidelines

In the first section ("Situation 1" and "Situation 2"), she wrote two sample dialogs, one accepting an invitation, and the other declining or refusing. In the second section ("Important"), she listed four main points as the guidelines for communicating in a situation involving invitations. For each point, she gave an explanation, a sample phrase, and at times, an illustration. For example, she explained one point by saying, "When you refuse or decline (an invitation), you should give your reasons." Her sample phrase was, "I'm sorry I can't because I have class next." She also included this particular phrase in a conversation dialog in the first section.

She told me later that when we had practiced declining or refusing invitations in class, she forgot to give reasons to her partner when they were doing role-plays. Then, later in class, she learned that giving reasons would help explain why one has to decline or refuse an invitation and would help the person who is doing the inviting understand and not feel bad. That was why she chose this particular theme for her textbook.

3. Individual textbook presentations and discussions

Unlike the group presentations, the students were given two chances to present their individual textbooks; first to a partner and later in front of small groups. When the students returned to classes, they presented their books to a partner. They mainly focused on "actively-listening" to confirm comprehension, and then made suggestions which were later incorporated into their textbooks (by the next class). This process required an average about thirty minutes per student: to explain his/her textbook, to answer questions, and to receive suggestions.

The following week, students gave final presentations of their revised textbooks in groups of five to ten students. The classroom was divided into eight to ten mini-circles. Most students gave their presentations in groups, which did not include their partners from the previous week. This surprised me because I had assumed that they would pair with their previous partners to show how their textbooks had improved. The students commented that they preferred to group with new people because they wanted to see how the others would respond to their revised books. The groups presented simultaneously, and each circle proceeded at its own pace. The speakers in each circle either stood up or sat in their seats. Unlike the group textbook presentations, the students often used various types of visuals to aid them in their presenting and to help the audience members follow their presentations. For example, students might make some copies of the chapters they were going to focus on, show a big poster of the contents of the book, or use a sketchbook to explain the book content in a picture-book style. Presenters spoke for five to ten minutes, during which they summarized the contents and

talked about what they had learned from making the books. Students often looked

nervous before speaking, but as they spoke, they became calmer, and by the end of their

presentations, they usually looked satisfied. If the presentation seemed short, the

audience would ask questions, and this helped the presenter realize what other points s/he

should have included.

After each presentation, the audiences applauded, commented on the good points,

and gave advice. The presenting students and the audience in each circle listened to each

other. Rather than merely making suggestions for change, the audience members offered

the presenters many favorable comments concerning what they liked about the textbooks.

They usually found something they liked about each book, whether it was the content,

layout, organization, information, visuals, or ideas. The audiences supported the

presenters, taking care not to make them feel embarrassed or inferior, and they also made

sure that each presenter had the opportunity to say all that s/he wanted to. This

discussion activity took about five minutes per presentation. All the students in each

circle were able to contribute to the presentations and discussions.

4. Post-presentation self-evaluation

As post-presentation homework (response paper), students evaluated their own

textbooks and reflected on what they had learned from the Textbook project. Most of

them wrote that they were glad to have done the Textbook project, pointing out what they

could have improved in their textbooks and presentations. They also wrote that learning

is a constantly evolving cycle, and that finishing the project did not mean that the

learning was finished. The learning is recycled and there is always room for

improvement. The students were also glad to share their textbooks because they realized

that they could learn much from their peers. Most commented that people always had

something interesting and something new to add to the learning and understanding of the

functional themes, the creative display of the textbooks, and the presentation styles.

What Did Students Learn From The Individual And Group Textbook Projects?

In this section, I have listed eleven things that students learned from the two

textbook projects, and I have given the outcomes. The eleven points are as follows:

1. A better understanding of the class material
2. Explaining their learning in more detail (with own theories, reasons, examples, information, and conclusions)
3. Teaching others what they learned
4. Making things easier to understand
5. Presentation skills, layout, display, and design
6. Teamwork, contribution, participation, interaction, and cooperation
7. Responsibility for one's own work, sharing with others, and the sense of achievement
8. Seeing concretely what or how each person learned
9. Applying creativity, originality, and imagination
10. Understanding the importance of a good discussion and working together toward the same goal
11. Expressing oneself, listening, giving opinions, discussing and coming to a group decision, responding to and asking questions, providing more information, and clarification

The students reviewed the class material to make the textbooks and then restated and

recreated the information, and this helped them understand the course in more detail.

They were able to explain what they had learned in a way that other English learners

could understand. Students said that they became "experts" in the functional themes they

had chosen for the textbooks. They also commented that since they decided and did everything on their own, they learned the best-fitting vocabulary, phrasal expressions, or usage of a particular function.   They also discovered the most effective ways of explaining their learning, and how to make things easier to understand, helpful, interesting, or flow well.   They also acquired the power to think and develop their own ideas. They commented that they found new ways to present their learned information, making it visually appealing as well as informative, supplementing their presentations with details, examples, and explanations. One student made the interesting comment that, "One can teach what one learned", which led another student to the insight that, "To teach is to study, so teaching helps learning. To teach one needs to understand, and then one can teach what one understands."

Another student said, "A good book is made by one person, but a great book is made and shaped by many people's ideas." The students also noted that this project helped them to realize that everyone is unique, and that there are always new perspectives and possibilities. People express themselves in different ways, and there are many ways to express the same thought. Everyone has his/her own way of learning, and everyone has different viewpoints. The students realized that people needed to cooperate in order to have "good" discussions, which in turn led to good teamwork. As one student put it, "Discussion is like setting the heart to one." In other words, the students saw how interesting and meaningful an activity could be when a group worked together toward the same goal. They became more motivated, and put more effort into and contributed more to the project. They learned that English was fun and learning was fun. They also saw what they learned from the semester and how to express what they learned into a

textbook-form. They saw that this project was one way to study English and give closure

to their learning.

<u>Student Feedback About The Individual And Group Textbook Projects</u>

Eight out of ten students' comments were partially or completely positive. I have

listed some student comments about the two Textbook projects as follows:

- The textbook project was a great review.
- I was able to reconfirm various expressions and communication strategies. I can remember the whole semester.
- By my textbook, I can instantly remember the information at one glance.
- It was fun thinking, arranging, and making the textbook because I got to choose four topics and design in ways to make it easy for me and for others. I did it all on my own.
- It was a good opportunity to practice presenting what I have done and experienced.
- I wanted to show others how fun it is to communicate.
- I added drawings and photos, which made this textbook visually attractive and more informative.
- Everyone's textbooks were different, with different purposes, different styles, and everyone has innovative ideas.
- When I teach or explain, I can also learn from what I teach and explain.
- I wanted to make the textbook reflect on my experiences with the lessons.
- While I was making the textbook, I tried to continue to remember back the lessons and keep in mind, "What is communication?" I was affected not only by the experiences of the lessons, but also by experiences of my life.
- I am satisfied with my textbook because it included all my thoughts.
- I learned how to organize: introduction, body, and conclusion. When reading the introduction in my textbook, learners will understand what is important. And, in the body section, they will then read some examples and expressions and understand how to use and whey the points are important. Finally in the conclusion, they will read m memo and remember the important points.
- I was able to think in English more directly, more quickly, and smoothly.
- This textbook is my original encyclopedia, biography, and dictionary. This is one of my favorite books.
- It gave me encouragement because it showed me that I can do it!
- It deepened my knowledge in English and communication.
- I clearly see improvement in my English ability.

- It was also fun presenting books to other people because I get to see various personalities, and discover things that I would have never noticed before.
- This project makes the information, the learning, and the semester more meaningful to me.
- When I present the information, I am able to narrow down to the main points.

Problems With The Two Textbook Projects

After analyzing the student feedback, one common problem I noticed with the Group Textbook project was that students did not have enough time to prepare due to conflicts in schedules. A few students wrote that some group members did not contribute ideas to the making of the textbooks, or that some could not come to a decision on what to include in the group textbook. Students in the year-long course also told me that they wished they had done the Textbook project at the end of each semester instead of waiting until the end of the second semester.

Common problems with the individual textbooks were: (1) some students needed more time to do the Individual Textbook project because they had plans during the winter vacation, and (2) some said that they would have preferred making a book with other people and not alone. They felt that although the Individual Textbook project was a good experience, it became tiresome and a burden because they had to do the it on their own. Because of these points, I later came up with the idea of the Poster Presentation project, which I will explain in Chapter 4.

Concluding Observations

Students were perfectly capable of teaching others based on their own learning experience. They learned to appreciate and accept differences and individuality because all the textbooks they saw and all the textbooks that they and their classmates made were different, in content and in appearance. They discovered new ways of thinking and became more open to learning from others. Learning became more meaningful. They gained confidence in themselves, and English was "closer" to their lives and not just a foreign language they were forced to study. They realized that writing and listening were forms of communication, and they were able to think for themselves because they were given the freedom to be decision-makers and information-finders. They then took risks by trying out new things, and they gained a deeper understanding of the learning process. They were able to apply their experiences and learning to other courses as well. Again, the Textbook project was successful because students acquired more than just language skills.

CHAPTER 4

POSTER PRESENTATIONS AND THE EFFECT ON STUDENT

LEARNING

Brief Explanation

I used this Poster Presentation project in four types of classes: conversation, speech, debating, and writing. In all of these classes, this project was done at the end of each semester. I conceived the idea for the Poster Presentation project after doing the Textbook projects. Since some students commented that it took a long time to make the textbooks, I tried to design another project that would similarly allow the students to make use of what they had learned in class but which would take less time.

Guidelines For The Poster Presentation Project

1. Announcement

I notified the students three weeks in advance of the Poster Presentation project. The reasons for this three-week advance notice were similar to those for the Skit Festival and Textbook projects. Students would be finishing up the semester, which would mean that they would have to balance this project with their other classes and exams. I wanted to give students enough time to think about the project and to look through their

handouts, notes, and returned homework assignments and response papers from the semester.

This was also the time I handed out the guidelines. When I first introduced this project to the first group of students, I did not have any examples of posters; however, I drew some posters on the board and gave an oral explanation of what I expected. In subsequent classes; however, I used posters made by students in the previous classes as examples.

2. Four guidelines for the students

(1) Time

Each student had three weeks outside of class to prepare. After the third week, the students had to give a presentation and show their posters to other students in the class.

(2) Design and content

I told the students that their posters should summarize, describe, or represent their learning experience as an "image". The students included the following examples as images for their posters (see Appendices 8 and 9 for examples of images on a poster):

- Impressions: their feelings about what they had learned and accomplished
     e.g. a student might design a "smiley face" to show how s/he felt after taking the class or after studying English

- Tips: pointers and advice that they learned from the semester
     e.g. a student might design a chart or a mind-map that explains the dos and the don'ts of communicating

- Discovery

e.g. a student might display what s/he had learned from the semester as a story

- What is important in "communication"
  e.g. a student might list ten tips or strategies for effective communication

- Conclusions
  e.g. a student might explain his/her interpretations or definitions of "communication" or "learning"

- Key words
  e.g. a student might make a collage that lists the keywords that came to his/her mind when s/he reflected on the thirteen functional themes or the course content

(3) Layout

When the students had an idea of the image, they made their posters in a wide variety of styles such as (see Appendices 8 and 9): abstract designs, icons, picture stories, sketchbooks, maps, key words, charts, mind-maps, collages, representations, or symbols. The posters could be of any size and could be in color or black-and-white. They ranged from A-4 sized to poster-size, and the majority of them were very colorful and very visually attractive. I emphasized to the students that although the appearance of the poster was important, it was the content that was vital. I also made sure the students understood that artistic ability was not required, and that what mattered most was that each student demonstrate and express what s/he had learned.

(4) Poster presentation and conversation café

On the fourth week of the project, five to seven minute presentations were made in a conversation café-style. The students' posters served as visual aids during the presentations explaining the posters. In addition to the poster presentations, students had to write a summary of his/her speech (see Appendices 8-G and 8-H) and submit it along with the poster.

3. One example of a poster

As the reader can see in Appendix 8-C, one student compared her process of learning English to a bridge over a river. As her poster, she created a short picture book, dividing the book into three parts. In the first part ("Before"), she drew a picture that represented her feelings before taking this class. She drew two people separated from each other by a river. She was standing on the left side while her friend was on the right side, and the river flowing between them kept them at a distance. They were both silent and crying. In the second part of the book (which is not shown in Appendix 8-C), there were nine small pages of illustrations suggesting nine ways to "connect" the two people:

- Using facial expressions
- Using gestures
- Describing something when one is stuck on an English word
- Using the expressions introduced in the class
- The importance in listening to and understanding the other person
- "Heart (sincerity)" and the respect for others
- Asking questions
- Smiling
- The importance in making effort and not giving up

These were the communication methods she learned from this class, and she saw how they helped her to communicate in class when practicing conversations with her classmates. Finally, in the last part of her poster ("After"), she drew a rainbow bridge

across the river. The two people were finally able to meet at the center of the bridge, and the picture showed them smiling, shaking hands, and having a conversation.

4. Poster presentations and conversation café

      After three weeks, students gave presentations in small groups of three to five people in a conversation café-style.[15] I had students bring food and drinks to the classroom, which the room was arranged with four to eleven small tables. There was a tablecloth on each table, and there was music playing softly in the background. Groups of four people sat at the tables. Although I had suggested that each presenter speak for five to seven minutes, most were able to speak for a longer time, for ten to fifteen minutes. During the semester, the students had already experienced three or four conversation cafés, so everyone knew the steps. Students, who experienced this form of discussions, told me that they enjoyed it. Following are the four steps of a poster presentation in a conversation café-style:

      (1) Host's poster presentation

      A group of four sitting at a table formed one "café", and the group members sat in a circle. In each group, there was the "host (presenter)". They could drink and eat during the entire conversation café. The host first welcomed the group members to his/her café and then presented his/her poster. While the host was speaking, the other members could not interrupt the presentation. Each group had a "talking piece", something represented by a pencil, eraser, key chain, or anything else that was available, and only the person holding the talking piece

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[15]   I first learned this new style of discussion from my professor Paul LeVasseur, and I later adapted the discussion format which I found in the following two websites: www.conversationcafe.org and http://www.cbc2.org/sserve/mentors/conversation_café.htm.

was allowed to speak. Basically, Step (1) was the time for the host to explain

his/her poster and a time for the others to be silent but be active listeners. Since

the listeners could not interrupt the host's presentation, they took notes, and

although they had to remain silent, they made eye contact with the host and

nodded while s/he was speaking.

(2) Active-listening by the group members

After the host finished his/her presentation, the other group members (listeners)

either asked questions or restated what they had heard and understood from what

the host said.[16] They did this by passing the talking piece around, and if the

person was not ready to speak, s/he passed the talking piece to the next person.

Usually, the talking piece went around the circle two or three times so that

everyone had more than one chance to contribute. In Step (2), neither the host nor

the other group members were allowed to respond to any of the comments and

questions, and instead took notes in order to ask questions and comment later in

Step (3), giving the "listeners" of the host's café a chance to speak.

(3) Opening the conversation

Next, the host opened the conversation, responding to the listeners' comments and

questions from Step (2). This was also the time for everyone in the group to

discuss the host's presentation and poster in detail, and for the students to interact

with each other. They learned to clarify their points, summarize the information,

and understand what everyone wanted to express. They also learned to build a

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[16] The questions might involve asking the host (presenter) to repeat certain parts of the explanation, or re-explain and clarify the content of the poster with more details. When the students talked about what they understood, they actively-listened, meaning they repeated and briefly summarized the main points of the host's presentation. Usually, each person gave one main point each.

discussion around a topic. Again, students talked by passing the talking piece

around. Step (3) was the most active part of the conversation café because the

students had the most interaction.

(4) Closing the conversation and café

The host closed the conversation by having each person (including him/herself)

say what s/he "took away" or gained from the host's presentation and café.

Finally, the host closed the café and said good-bye to everyone, and a new host

opened a café following Steps (1)~(4).

When everyone in the group had had a chance to act as a host, they collaborated to create

a group poster summarizing their learning from the four conversation cafés. In this

Poster Presentation project, students were able to spend more time discussing each poster,

and they were able to concentrate for a longer period of time. As each group finished, I

hung or displayed their posters, both the individual posters and group posters, in the

classroom, making the classroom look like an "art gallery". Students walked around and

looked at other groups' posters, and during this activity, most of them looked curious and

interested.

<u>Student Feedback About The Poster Presentation Project</u>

Nine out of ten of the student comments concerning the Poster Presentation

project were partially or entirely positive. I have divided the student opinions into four

types: (1) opinions about the posters, (2) opinions about the presentations, (3) opinions

about the conversation cafés, and (4) opinions about how the Poster Presentation project

related to the class content. I also have included the outcomes of this project at the end of

the student feedback.

1. Student opinions about the posters and their meanings:

- Making a poster and giving a presentation was for my own sake, for my own learning, and for my own self-achievement.
- It was useful because I could review again.
- It helped me sum up the class. It was a great way to summarize the semester.
- It reconfirmed my learning.
- It was a good activity because I would have never looked back on the semester, and would have never known what I actually learned from the class, so it was meaningful. I see how important it is to put closure to the course.
- It was instructive and informative. It was a chance to pass on knowledge.
- From making my poster, I realized that it was important to stop and think back when I study; it was important to reflect and to process the information.
- It clearly showed what and how much I learned from the classes.
- I was able to look back on my learning by reading through all the handouts and response papers again, and I realized how much information was learned. I was amazed.
- I learned that I could obtain knowledge through experiences. Experience is like a "harvest".
- I discovered the importance of "learning" from doing this project.
- Learning is not just studying for a class, but it is for myself.
- This project helped me to understand on what exactly is important for "communication"
- The poster was the center of my opinion, and it organized (put together all) my thoughts.
- Since the posters were images, I could clearly and instantly understand the information. It is also helpful for those who are audio and visual learners.
- Arranging and designing the posters was fun. It gave me opportunity to be creative.
- Poster was a "master-piece" of me.

2. Student opinions about doing poster presentations:

- I did my best. And, everyone did his/her best.
- It was enjoyable doing the presentation, showing my poster, and seeing their reactions.
- It was exciting sharing and explaining.
- Presentation helped me learn to speak English. It gave me structure.
- It was another way to communicate, and it was a simple way to express myself.
- I reviewed various expressions.

- This was a chance to try out speaking, listening, reading, writing, and thinking, all in one project.
- I was able to mold the ideas into English easily.
- The poster helped me to express what all I wanted to say, what was all in my mind, so my presentation was very smooth.
- It was another way to learn English, and another way to express myself in English.
- I tried to think what topic would be helpful for others. I imagined the topic to be like a "gift" to someone. I asked myself what kind of a "birthday present" my friends would really appreciate and would keep it forever.
- Now I can use different communication styles and use accordingly to any situation.
- People asked me a lot of questions, so that gave me the chance to explain in more detail.

3. Student opinions about listening to other poster presentations in the conversation

cafés:

- It was interesting to see how each person devised because there are so many ways! And, everyone is so creative.
- Everyone presented in detail, so I wanted to listen in detail.
- I could relate to everyone. I understand how everyone felt.
- I knew how other people felt about the semester, what impressions they had, and what they took away form the class. There were so many things.
- It helped me to appreciate diversity.
- Although we all took the same class, everyone had different feelings and conclusions.
- I could see each person's meaning to "English", "communication", and to one's own "learning". That was neat.
- Each person was able to express his/her opinions because other people were really listening to what each person wanted to say. Everyone understood exactly what I wanted to say, and they praised me. I was very happy.
- It was fun to hear about other people's opinions because I could learn more things and could revise my opinions.
- I was really interested to hear other opinions, so the conversation cafés were never one-sided or boring.
- Everyone had something interesting to say.
- Each person gave his/her own opinions, and it was obvious how each person really enjoyed the semester. Poster presentation was something like a "class reunion".
- Everyone had his/her way of getting interested in learning English.
- It provided me the chance to re-examine what the important factors were in "communication".

- The relaxing atmosphere helped, and the food and drinks eased the tension; it seemed as if more people talked. I had never eaten or drunk in a classroom like this. Although we were doing work, it felt more like a "party".
- It was a great opportunity to get to know each better.
- I could see how others learned.

4. Student opinions on how the posters related to the class and the content:

- I learned that the speaker (or writer) should: (1) attract audience's (reader's) attention and interest, and be considerate, (2) make sure everyone understands, and make the information clear, (3) select words that are easier to imagine, (4) speak and express from the heart, (5) prepare beforehand, have a clear idea of the topic, and practice, and (6) use various visual-aid techniques such as realiá, board, and handouts.
- I learned that the listener (or reader) should: (1) understand what the speaker (or writer) wants to say, (2) ask questions, (3) participate in the presentation by making eye contact, have good posture and attitude, and react, and (4) put oneself into the topic, and be interested in the topic.
- I can speak simply but in detail. I made it easier for others to understand. I made it interesting for myself as well as for others.
- I was able to say what I wanted to say. I tried not to be so perfect.
- Best presentation supports each main point because the supports, evidence, and data will persuade the audience (or reader).
- I should never give up conveying my feelings. There are many ways, so I should try some of them. I will eventually find my way.
- Atmosphere and positive attitude are important.
- We should just enjoy.
- By designing the poster, I was able to understand more about the elements for debate and speech, so it became like a summary.
- It was interesting to put ideas into an image. Some images were of a baseball field, apple tree, and flower.
- To think and to look for important points made my understanding deeper.
- I could remember the points I learned by forming what I learned into shape.
- I saw what I lacked, or what I could change.
- If I never had to do this project, I would have never thought about what I learned from the entire semester. I am very happy to do this project. I discovered that I learned a lot, and I have changed into a positive-thinking person.
- Expression is important.
- I now know that I can debate and give speeches in English. I am motivated to do more.
- I can speak and write English more smoothly.
- I learned how to use the computer, Word Document, and Power Point.
- Everyone learned something common, different, and new.
- Everyone is unique in various ways.

<u>Compilation And Summary Of Student Insights</u>

From the student feedback, I also noticed that many students used the key words such as "Communication", "English", and "Learning" to discuss the Poster Presentation project. In this section, I compiled and summarized student insights as the following.

1. What role did "communication" play in the Poster Presentation project?

- Communication is fun because it is a way for us to understand each other, and there are many communicative styles, so it gives me hope and confidence.
- Communication is like air and food because without it, people cannot survive. The same applies to languages.
- Communication breaks barriers and builds bridges.
- Communication requires us to act and challenge ourselves. It needs emotions. When feelings are added, it is even better.
- Communication is not only words, but also thinking and giving opinions. Then we can understand each other better. It also gives a peace of mind.
- Communication consists of six skills: thinking, feeling, speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- Communication helps people to find fun in life, in people, and in oneself.
- Communication solves problems.
- Communication will never be boring because there are various styles, meanings, and situations.
- Communication is similar to making songs; it is free, one can do anything.

2. What did this project teach the students about "English"?

- English is like a friend. It is a tool that helps connect people. It helps us to get to know each other better. It helps us to appreciate various "cultures".
- English is like a passport; it opens doors and windows.
- English helps a person become more assertive, have a supple mind, and sometimes helps a person to say things that one might have trouble saying in his/her own language. English is "soul".
- English gives us courage and opportunities to meet new people.
- English is full of surprises; it is very active.
- English is a part of my "identity"; the way I am.
- English broadens my horizons and increases my field of vision.

3. What did this project teach the students about "learning"?

- Learning helps me make more friends with my classmates.
- Learning is positive.
- Learning is fun.
- Learning: I see that it is not important in entertaining everyone, but expressing in a way that others can feel and learn something, even if it is a small point. That is more meaningful. I also hope you will feel something in your heart.

<u>What Students Learned From The Poster Presentation Project</u>

1. Visual aids

Students learned how to explain their opinions using the posters which acted as visual aids. They saw that if some parts of their presentation were difficult to understand, the posters could help make it easier to understand, enabling them to explain their opinions in their own words and to continue their presentations without pausing too often. They also relied less on their notes or manuscripts because their posters functioned as their notes. One student commented, "I did not read from my manuscripts the way I used to, but instead, words just came out of my mouth. I was very happy."

2. Relaxing atmosphere

Students were able to explain their ideas smoothly in English, and they said that they were less nervous giving presentations than they were performing in skits. The conversation café made the atmosphere less threatening and more relaxing. Students

pointed out that the food and drinks eased the tension and helped many students "forget" that they were in an English class. They also said that the talking piece was a good idea because it gave the person holding the talking piece the chance to talk while others listened.

3. Clarity

Students were able to explain their ideas as simply as they could, but they also included descriptions, details, reasons, and examples. They also learned to check for audience comprehension by pausing and making eye contact after making a point. They practiced asking questions, receiving more details, and restating the information to confirm. A student commented, "I could explain in English for the first time (since taking any English class) from the beginning of my speech to the end."

4. Variety of expressions

Students learned the power of expression and of making oneself understood as well as the importance in understanding what others were trying to say. They also learned about facial expressions, body language, eye contact, and listening. Because there were many types of posters, the images portrayed expressed in various ways the students' feelings and learning.

5. Progress

By the end of the semester, the students were able to see how much their English had improved. They realized that they could speak at length and in more depth, and that they could understand more of what was being said. They wanted to use English more.

One student commented, "This project helped me to see what I can do and what I can do better. It gave me advice to correct my bad habits and acquire new learning styles."

6. Individuality

The students saw that their fellow classmates' posters and the speeches were interesting, easy to understand, clear, and intelligible. The posters, presentations, and ideas of the students were unique. Each student considered "English" and "Communication" differently; no one had the same idea or made the same poster. A student wrote in a response paper, "That is why I admire this about everyone, and everyone succeeded." Another student wrote that s/he learned new things from others because "there was always something I would have never thought of." Also, a student wrote, "I learned that each person experience something, and we can learn through our experiences. We can learn by doing."

Concluding Observations

Unlike student-generated textbooks, posters took less time and were easier to prepare and make. The information they contained was more succinct and easier for the students to explain during the presentations. The students were able to work alone and did not get tired of doing the Poster Presentation project. Poster presentations and the conversation cafés were good closure activities for students of all levels of proficiency. The students used artwork and creativity and learned how to give a speech and have a discussion. Throughout the entire semester and especially after the presentations,

students became more positive, confident, active, friendly, enthusiastic, motivated, expressive, and aware. They were happy using English and proud of what they had accomplished. They learned to pay attention to their progress during the semester, but they became clearly aware of how they learned and improved during the Poster Presentation project. A student commented that the class improved his/her grammar and vocabulary, and helped him/her learn how to express ideas and mind. S/he commented that if one takes one moment to think about one's own learning, to enjoy oneself, and to make an attempt to understand what one is learning and what other people are saying, anything is possible. Many students wrote that the poster presentations were a good closure activity because they said that in their past English classes, they simply forgot everything after each class and did not bother to review or think about what they had learned during the semester. Their learned information was discarded or "thrown away" after every class. The students found that the poster presentations; however, brought everything together. At the universities where I teach, I sometimes meet some of my former students who tell me how beneficial they found the Poster Presentation project. They tell me that they wish other teachers in other classes would adopt this project idea because they saw how it is important to bring all the learned information together and discuss it with others. Again, this project was successful because students gained more than just language skills.

CHAPTER 5

CLASS VISUALS AND THEIR EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING

Brief Explanation

I used the Class Visual project in all of my conversation-centered classes (including debating and speech classes) as well as in my writing classes. This Class Visual project differed from the previous projects in as much as it was done often in the semester, either in class every week (before, during, or after the class activities) or several times in a semester. I wanted to test the hypothesis that this project might bring closure to the students' learning, not only at the end of the semester, but also following individual class sessions. Through the class visuals, not only did students learned how to take notes, but they also learned to write briefly about a subject, summarizing the main points as they worked in groups. In addition, these class visuals became their weekly "records" of what occurred in the class, how they felt, and what they had learned. In groups of two to four people, they tried to show how they profited from each class by making and using these class visuals (as their notes, records, and summaries) to document what the class meant to them. These visuals also helped the students understand particular class activities, subject matter, or reading assignments. The visuals took about eight to fifteen minutes to make, and if some groups needed more time, they were allowed to complete them for homework. This chapter is divided into two main

sections, one concerning the Class Visual project in a conversation-based class, and the

other concerning the Class Visual project in a writing class.

<u>How Did The Class Visual Project Work In A Conversation Class?</u>

In conversation, speech, and debating classes, students in groups of two to four

made group class visuals in one of the following formats, and each group decided on its

own style and the material to be included. The groups were required to write on A-4

sized loose-leaf paper, sign their names, and write the date. The class visuals consisted

of:

- Charts
- Lists
- Poems
- Cartoons
- Explanation with illustrations
- Images
- Mind-maps
- Key words
- Short paragraphs

Each group included one or more of the following in its group visuals:

- New vocabulary
- Useful phrasal expressions
- Dialogs
- Key grammar points
- Useful communication pointers and advice
- Discoveries
- Confusions
- Explanations and information restated or concluded in their own words
- Summary of what happened in the class
- Students' impressions of their learning and understanding for that particular class

Students held discussions within their groups and made these class visuals every week. As the reader examines the various examples of student-made class visuals in Appendices 10 (see Examples A~M) and 11, I hope that s/he will see what kind of role the class visuals played, and how the students designed them. As I mentioned earlier, the class visuals functioned as "records" and "summaries" of the student learning on a particular day. For example, what the students learned from the class, what they took away from the class, what they gained from the class, what they understood from the class, what they did and experienced in the class, and what kind of conversations they had in the class. I designed this project to be open, and I did not provide any specific guidelines other than that each group had to make visual representation of their learning on A-4 sized paper.

Each group exchanged its visual with another group either toward the end of a class or at the beginning of the following class. They read each other's visuals and wrote comments on the back, usually what they liked about them. They also wrote what they had learned from the visual and what they might have never noticed. Upon return of the class visuals they read the comments and submitted them at the end of class. As the teacher, I was able to see what each group learned and felt about the class. For one class, the Class Visual project included a class discussion time, which I will later mention in the Student Feedback section.

Example Of A Class Visual In A Conversation Class

Perhaps the reader is unsure as to what exactly a class visual looks like, or how it helped bring closure to a class. In order to clarify this, I will give an example of the steps taken by a group to make a class visual in class. Let us say that on a particular day the class focused on the theme of "complaints". The students during class practiced complaining and responding to complaints, working in pairs doing role-plays.

Perhaps a pair finished the class activities fifteen minutes before the class ended, and began to make its class visual. First, the two students discussed their class visual and decided to draw a *manga* cartoon of two characters reenacting one of the role-play conversations which had impressed them, and which included expressions learned and used in class. Next, they decided that each person would be in charge of one character, one person drawing the complainer and the other the responder. After drawing the two characters, they would add a dialog based on their role-play earlier in class but improvised as they proceeded. After making their four-frame cartoon, they described how the two characters communicated, adding key points such as:

- "This Person A is angry and suddenly yells at the friend (Person B) for being late for the appointment. So, to improve this situation, one should not get angry and shout suddenly, but one should make small talk first. One should give the other person a chance to explain the reasons for his/her being late."

- "This Person B only says sorry, but it is hard to see if the person is truly feeling sorry. To improve this point, please remember that when one apologizes to someone, look and show that you are really sorry. Then, hopefully the other person will be understanding and forgiving."

In this class visual, the two students focused on a role-play using complaints, changed certain parts of the original dialog to make the conversation sound better and flow more smoothly, and added the dos and don'ts in "complaints".

<u>Student Feedback About The Conversation Class Visuals</u>

Several times during the semester, I gave the students questionnaires concerning the Class Visual project. Nine out of ten of the student comments concerning this project were partially or completely positive. In this section, I have summarized their comments and divided the students' feedback into four types: (1) overall impressions of the visuals, (2) students deciding the content for the visuals, (3) the timing of making visuals, and (4) the sharing of visual information with the class.

1. Overall impressions of the class visuals:

Students said that overall, these visuals were important and useful. These class visuals promoted teamwork by giving the students chance to think and work together. They provided the opportunity for each group to set goals, aided memory, and assisted students in reviewing the material and improving upon their learning. The students also mentioned that they were able to make friends with their classmates, making the class atmosphere more active but at the same time more relaxed. They were able to perform different roles, which benefited various types of learners. Also, "free-floating" information was put down on paper, giving the class visuals importance and providing closure for every class.

2. Having the freedom to decide class visual contents independently (as opposed to being told what to write by the teacher):[17]

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[17] I experimented in two ways:
(1) First, I instructed the students what to write in their visuals.

- The class visuals suited all kinds of learners at all levels of proficiency, and thus, student motivation and understanding increased.
- English made more sense, and it was "closer" to them and not just a forced language.
- Students worked better when they were allowed to decide things on their own. They could focus on the points they thought were important, and could thus control their learning.
- They used the class time more efficiently, and they took each activity more seriously and did not rush through the material quickly.
- There was more interaction between the students since all of the members in a group had to think of something to contribute to and write in the visual. Some groups also chose to work with different people every week instead of always grouping with the same people.
- The students could immediately see what they had gained from a particular activity and how they had learned it.
- As they continued to make visuals, they became more creative, including illustrations and creating their own summaries and conclusions. Thus, visuals became more meaningful and more interesting for them.

3(a). When students wrote class visuals before a class activity started:[18]

- The students realized what they already knew and what they needed to learn in order to understand a particular activity or the subject matter.
- Writing a class visual at the beginning of class was a good way to initiate class activity, because students could compare the information they wrote before and with what they did after the class activity. They could see their improvement as well as what they still needed to work on.

3(b). When students wrote class visuals during or after a class activity: [18]

- When students made class visuals during or after the class activity, the students did not forget what they learned or what they did in class. They collected their thoughts together and organized their ideas better.

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(2) The next time, I allowed the students to choose the style and content of their visuals. Students said that they preferred the latter option because they could express their learning more easily.

[18] I experimented in two ways:
 (1) I had students make visuals before the class activity as a warm-up activity because some students requested to have time to create visuals before class.
 (2) Alternatively, I had students make visuals during or at the end of each activity in class. I wanted to see if there were any differences between having students make visuals during the activity or afterwards. The results of during and after the class activities were the same.

- They were engaged in the class activity, and felt a sense of participation.
- The students commented that it was like another style of note taking for them because while they were doing an activity, they could take notes on what they had just said, done, or felt. It was also a way to organize their ideas, details, and information so that they would be able to summarize.
- Everyone in the group was working on the visual at the same time, which meant that one person was not doing all the work.

4. When students wrote the class visuals on the board (as opposed to each group writing on their own):[19]

Normally, I would have had each group make their visuals on paper, but in one particular class, the Group Visual project was not working as well as I had thought it would. Some students were slacking off and not contributing any ideas to the class visuals when they worked in groups, so the same groups completed the task. They also had trouble getting interested at the beginning of class, and these two situations inspired the idea for writing class visuals on the blackboard. I had all twelve students go to the board and write their group visuals on the board so that everyone had to contribute something, and we could see what everyone had done. When students created their visuals on the board, they became more organized because the information they wrote on the board displayed their objectives for the class. I continued to have them write on the board every week, at the beginning and at the end of class. The class ran more smoothly because all of the students were required to write something, and if they had nothing to contribute, their group looked bad.

In addition to writing visuals on the board, I had the same twelve students conduct a whole-class discussion. I wanted to see if they could have a class discussion with each

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[19]   The students generally worked among themselves and designed their group visuals on paper. Then, they shared their visuals with another group. I wanted to see what would happen if students wrote their visuals on the board so that everyone could see all the group visuals. This style worked well in smaller-sized classes of five to twenty students.

other about the class visuals on the board. The students commented that the discussion

time was helpful because they worked not only on grammar, but also, on other skills such

as: giving opinions and suggestions, asking questions, clarifying information, and

explaining the class visuals in more detail. Many students improved their ability to

explain to their classmates who might have been confused about an activity, and the

number of students taking more responsibility in this way increased. Furthermore, I did

not need to spoon-feed them the information; the students took the initiative. They began

to find more than one way to express a thought (recasting), and they helped students in

other groups explain their visuals. As students generated ideas, those who did not fully

understand, learned to listen "actively" and restate the parts they understood. As a result,

the class became as "one (or as a whole)" instead of isolated individuals. This class

worked toward the same goal together. They saw all the group visuals on the board, and

they were able to see what they learned and understood from the class.

I gave these students a questionnaire, after two months of trying this style. They

commented as follows:

- Writing class visuals on the board gave us a chance to think by and for ourselves.
- I learned to have discussions with my classmates and not just sit in my seat doing nothing. I enjoyed being involved in the class.
- I think my group members took more responsibility, took more action, and reflected on our learning and our behaviors and attitudes.
- We became more engaged in and contributed more to the lesson. We changed into active learners.
- It was a good idea that everyone in the class wrote on the board. The information on the board was more meaningful and more lasting and remained in my mind.

Problems With The Class Visual Project In Speaking-Based Classes

Although nine out of ten student responses to the Class Visual project were positive; however, some students wrote in their feedback that there were some problems with this project, the most prevalent being "time". Students said that they needed more writing time because they forgot what they said or did in class, or because they were sometimes uncertain about what to do and so they wasted time thinking about what they were supposed to do. The other problem involved intra-group dynamics. Some students wanted to work with different people (and not with the same group members), while others felt frustrated when group members did not participate or contribute new ideas.

I mentioned earlier that the Class Visual project differed from the Skit Festival, Textbook, and Poster Presentation projects in that this project was done every week; however, after two semesters of having students making a class visual every week, I adjusted the project in these three ways:

(1) Each group had the choice of whether to do the class visual or not. Those groups, who wanted to continue working on a class activity, were not required to do the class visual; they could spend more time on the activity. Groups who had finished the class activity or had finished the activity early, worked on the class visual. I did not force any groups to make a visual; the groups made their own decisions.

(2) I had students who were confused verbally brainstorm for ideas on what to write in their class visuals. While they verbalized their ideas, I wrote them on the board, framing their responses as a visual to show them a possible format. I also provided examples and asked questions to inspire students to generate

their own ideas. The students liked that the fact that I began with a structure, but then allowed them to continue with original ideas.

(3) I stopped having students create class visuals every week, and instead tried a wait-and-see approach. When the time felt right, when the feeling was mutual, or when I sensed from the class mood the need for a class visual, I would assign one. Students commented that assigning class visuals after every four classes was a good idea, and it helped solve group dynamic problems.

How Did The Class Visual Project Work In A Writing Class?

With the Class Visual project succeeding in my speaking classes, I decided to try to stimulate alternative styles of exposition in my writing classes using class visuals. Because my writing classes in 2002 were thematic-based and included readings from texts, I wanted to combine reading and writing in English in a meaningful way. Through the Class Visual project, the writing students learned how to write informally and to express themselves in alternative fashions. They learned to express themselves in images and short prose and to write short paragraphs. After completing class visuals, students showed them to partners or to small groups, and their classmates commented on them. These comments were either written (through which the students learned "active-reading" by writing their thoughts as they read a text), or oral, as some students preferred speaking to writing.

In the writing classes, each student or group of two to three people made visuals in one of the following formats:

- Charts
- Lists
- Poems
- Explanation with illustrations
- Graphs
- Images
- Mind-maps
- Collages
- Short story paragraphs

As in the Class Visual project in the speaking classes, the students in the writing classes could choose the format and the content of their visuals. The content of the visuals in my writing classes included:

- Pointers or advice about "writing" or "how to improve writing skills"
- Discoveries or confusion after reading the assigned texts
- Explanations of the text, summarized and restated in the students' own words
- Their impressions of their understanding of "writing"
- "Identity issues"[20]

I compiled all of the class visuals into a "Class Collection" booklet, which I handed out to all the students (see Appendix 12, Examples A~E). This enabled them to see all of their classmates' works.

Example Of A Class Visual In A Writing Class

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[20] As I mentioned earlier, the writing class was thematic-based. The theme for the particular semester was "Identity". The students would read various texts on identity issues, and then wrote their opinions. Their class visuals were based and focused on the theme "Identity".

As I mentioned in Footnote 20, the writing class was mainly focused on "identity" issues. In order to give the reader a better idea of how a class visual was used in a thematic-based writing class, I will select and describe how a group of three people designed a class visual, and how the visual helped them understand the sub-theme of "gender".

The three people in the group decided to describe their feelings after reading song lyrics and a poem relating to gender issues. They read about how women and men view themselves in society. After their group discussion about the lyrics and poem and about their feelings, they designed a "chart" showing masculine and feminine characteristics. They chose to make a chart because they had noticed that key adjectives described certain characteristics. They first listed characteristics (adjectives) "traditionally" considered to be "masculine" and "feminine" qualities. After designing the chart, they concluded that they, whether male or female, had both feminine and masculine characteristics. They also learned (from making the chart) what is most important is not a person's gender; rather it is a person's character and identity. Because this group made a class visual, the three people in the group realized a point that they had not considered before; the class visual became a form of self-discovery, enabling them to reach such a conclusion and to express it in their class visual.

Student Feedback About The Writing Class Visual

Seven out of ten student comments concerning the Class Visual project were partially or entirely positive. In this section, I have divided the student feedback into two parts: (1) what the students learned about "writing" and (2) what they learned about "identity".

1. What did the students learn about "writing" through the class visuals?

- I liked this free style! I was able to write whatever I wanted to write, and I could even draw pictures. The visuals have made me less afraid of writing.
- I thought "writing" was just sentences, very boring and difficult. When I added visuals, it not only looked more attractive, but also, easier to read and succinct. Visuals became a new writing method for me to write what I want to say. It is another form of "writing".
- Visuals included authors' opinions. I was able to understand various situations and opinions. Every visual had its own style, so it was interesting to read and write visuals.
- I enjoyed making and reading the visuals. I also enjoyed reading the Visual Collections. I got to learn new things about myself as well as my classmates.
- I got used to writing in a gradual process. I have gained confidence.
- I am able to think through the content more deeply.
- I learned organization, sentence structure, paragraph writing, and layout.
- I learned many ways to express oneself.
- Not only did I learn how to write, but also, how to think and brainstorm, and to use the computer.
- I learned how to describe my emotions and feelings (fear, happiness, sadness, excitement). I learned how to write poems and stories; things I would have never written in Japanese.
- Writing reflects feelings, personalities, and characters of the writer (the "inner part" of the writer). And by reading other people's writings, one can understand the writer better.
- I liked writing with a few words because I felt as if I could show my feelings, ideas, and my thinking better. I could freely imagine what was happening. I feel less pressure and feel more comfortable about writing.
- I have only read and written essays in English, so it was very hard for me, but the writing I did in this class changed my mind about writing and reading in English. It is not so difficult and it is interesting.
- Writing in new styles helped my progress in English.
- My listening and reading skills improved.

- I learned to enjoy.

2. What did the students learn about "identity" through the class visuals?

- I learned that identity is expressed not only by content, but also in form, visuals, and color.
- I was able to conclude each topic and able to look from various angles.
- I learned that identity is affected by many factors: color, hobby, hometown, food, fashion, music, sports, cars, people, gender, goals, future, expression, differences, individuality, childhood, life experiences, viewpoints, appearances, interpretations, stereotypes, feelings, emotion, opposites, strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, languages, and styles in thinking, writing, and communicating.
- I got a new understanding. It did not just mean "me", so "identity" is a deep theme.
- Analyzing the meaning of identity was interesting because it cleared some unknown part of my mind and myself.
- Exploring questions about "Where am I? What can I do? What do I want" were interesting. It was fun searching the answers to various ideas.
- Everyone is unique, and we all have different thinking styles.

Problems With The Class Visual Project In Writing Classes

I received many favorable comments from the students about the Class Visual project in the writing classes; however in the student feedback, some students commented that there were problems. One student said, "I could not write all my thoughts, so I thought speaking would have helped." Also, some students wrote that they were unconvinced that these class visuals would help their writing improve. They acknowledged the fact that there was improvement in their attitudes toward writing, but the level remained the same. The students said that they could see that writing was interrelated with the other four skills such as thinking, speaking, listening, and reading, but they said that that was not included in their writing objectives. I am still searching for ways to show the students that the Class Visual project could play an important role in

helping them to improve their writing. I believe that these visuals helped students to

brainstorm ideas, to think carefully, and to organize their ideas before they wrote

response papers and journals, and before they expressed their opinions. The next time I

use the Class Visual project, I must state clearly what the purposes, objectives, and

benefits at the beginning of the semester.

Concluding Observations

        Writing to communicate was a new concept, and students learned to express

themselves and their ideas briefly and in various styles. They saw that writing is active

and can assist in the other four skills: reading, thinking, speaking, and listening. The

majority of the students commented on the importance of wanting the audience to

continue reading what s/he wrote, and of leaving a "voice" on paper. They also tried to

make their writing easier to understand by explaining the information clearly, or by

making the information more appealing and interesting. As a result, they learned to

consider their readers' (or audience's) feelings. They also realized that the writer should

be interested in the chosen topic and should try to find things that interest the reader and

that relate to the reader and the writer. They also discovered through the Class Visual

project that writing can be simple and that it is not only about writing essays. Students

acquired not only writing skills, but also, the key elements of "communication".

CHAPTER 6

RESPONSE PAPERS AND THEIR EFFECT ON STUDENT LEARNING

Brief Explanation

I used the Response Paper project in all types of conversation and writing classes, and I usually had the students do this project individually as homework.[21] There were several reasons for initiating the Response Paper project. Since the information that the students wrote in their class visuals was too brief, and since students did not have enough time to think and create during class time, they wanted to do something on their own after working in groups during class. The response papers allowed the students time to think and to express themselves in more detail. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, the response papers also helped students take responsibility for their learning and gave them a chance to reflect on their learning, their presence, and their performance in the classroom. Through the response papers, I wanted the students to be objective about their learning in the class, and I wanted the "negative" students to find ways to be more "positive and active participants" in the classroom. As with the class visuals, I wanted to see if the response papers could also bring "closure" to the students' learning after every class as well as after every project. The response papers showed the students how much

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[21] I have experimented with assigning "pair" response papers, which involved having two people write a response paper together. I stopped doing this because students told me that it was too difficult to find the time to write together. They also said that they preferred writing on their own.

they had learned in the class (or project), functioning as an evaluation and assessment of that learning. The response papers also helped students conclude the class and the class content. These were the reasons for initiating the Response Paper project.

<u>The Roles Of The Response Papers</u>

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the response papers played various roles. I would normally have had students respond to questions I asked, but some students preferred to reflect on their learning by writing their feelings and opinions about what they learned from the class and from the subject material. While some students summarized what they had done or what they had gained or "taken away" from the class content, others evaluated their performances in the class activities. Some students rewrote their role-play conversations or activities they had done during class while others used the response papers as journals for recording their "voices" on paper. Some wrote questions asking me about my interests in life, and some wrote about their concerns or things they found confusing in class or in the subject matter, and some made requests or gave suggestions for the class. The response papers were personal to the students, most of whom kept them, re-reading them as a guide to their progress or using them for other projects such as Skit Festivals, Textbooks, and Poster Presentations. The students evaluated and assessed each project they did for class.

The results of the Response Paper project were that students elaborated and went into more detail and depth on what they did in class, what they learned from the class, what they expected from the class or from themselves, and how they felt about the class

or their performance in class. The Response Paper project gave the students a chance to explore their learning, their opinions, and their feelings more deeply (see Appendix 13), and to be more "active and responsible participants" in the learning process.

Guidelines For The Response Paper Project

1. Format and layout

The students could either hand-write the response papers or type them and print them out on A-4 sized paper. As with the class visuals, they could include illustrations or other types of visuals (e.g. mind maps, charts, lists, graphs, tables), could use colored pens to make their response papers visually appealing, and could show what they had learned in a creative but informative manner. Students wrote an average of one page per one response paper, and at the top right-hand corner of the response paper, they wrote their names, the date of class, and the number of the response paper.

2. Questions and content

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the students could choose the topic for their response papers. They usually had two choices, either my questions or their own questions. As for the former, students could answer questions that I asked, some of which are as follows:

- What they learned
- What was accomplished or not accomplished in class
- What they liked or disliked about the class
- What was helpful or not helpful (hindering)
- What they discovered or found significant
- What parts they could relate to

- What they needed to improve and what they were going to do about it
- Conversation dialogs, stories, narratives, and journal entries

The questions were abstract and open-ended because I wanted the students to express themselves freely. The questions usually involved the subject matter, class, class activity, student performance, and learning. The reader is directed to Appendix 13-D to see examples of questions I asked and an example of student responses to each question. As for the latter, students could also choose their own topics; topics that they wanted to write about.

3. Time

The students were asked to submit their response papers at the beginning of class. My original intention was to have them write one response paper a week. If there were fifteen classes, the students wrote a total of fifteen response papers in one semester. During the years 2000~2001, I requested that the students turn in a response paper every (following) week, but in 2002, I adjusted the due dates and the number of response papers I assigned.

4. Examples of response papers

To give the reader an idea of what a response paper would look like, I will describe four examples of student response papers as displayed in Appendix 13. As I mentioned earlier, the students generally wrote in depth in their response papers. Some students preferred writing conversation dialogs, which they created from their role-plays during class (see Appendix 13-A). These students usually changed certain parts of the original dialog, having noticed grammatical mistakes or the need for additional

explanation or illustration to help clarify the dialog. They then commented on what they liked or disliked about the dialog and what they could do to improve it. They described conversations they had in class and analyzed the dialog. Other students preferred writing a summary of their learning from a class (see Appendix 13-B). These students might reflect on what they had done in class, describe the steps they took to carry out the class activity, and describe what they gained from the lesson. They might also write about what did or did not work, what was discovered, what was confusing, or what might have hindered their learning, explaining how they came to their conclusions. Other students preferred writing about communicative strategies and advice they had learned, first summarizing what they had learned and experienced, and then describing effective ways to communicate (see Appendix 13-C). They might also list the strategies for having a successful conversation, explaining how they could improve. Other students preferred writing journals about themselves, their daily lives, and their feelings, attempting to connect the topic to English or to a particular subject content that had been covered in class (see Appendix 13-E).

My Involvement In The Response Paper Project

When the students submitted their response papers to me, I wrote comments at the end of their response papers and returned the papers the following week. For the most part, I rarely checked or corrected their grammar, but instead, I commented more on the content and the message they wanted to express. I emphasized points I liked rather than giving one-word comments such as "good" or "interesting", what I understood, and when

necessary, I wrote encouraging remarks. I sometimes restated the main ideas of the

papers to make sure I understood what each person wanted to say. I also made

suggestions for alternative expressions or phrases s/he could use, or I pointed out areas I

thought could be improved. I also sometimes described to the students about similar

experiences I had had in my language learning. There were also times when I responded

to student questions, and then asked them questions in return, as one might do in a

"dialog journal". If I saw any points for concern from their response papers, I addressed

them individually after class, or as a class at the beginning of the lesson.

Problems With The Response Paper Project

One negative point that a few students mentioned about the Response Paper

project was that it was troublesome to write a response paper every week. In order to

solve this problem, I allowed those students to submit their papers at their convenience. I

noticed that they wrote better than they had before because they had more time to process

their thoughts. However, the majority of the students preferred to write one response

paper every week.

A few students also mentioned that it was "boring" to answer the same questions

every week. To remedy this, I had students create their own questions, or I added a new

question every week, which allowed the students to connect the topic to their experiences

as Japanese. Once I adjusted in these ways, students commented that having choices was

important in writing response papers.

Student Feedback About The Response Paper Project

       Three times during the semester, I had the students answer questionnaires concerning the Response Paper project. Eight out of ten of the student comments concerning this project were partially or completely positive. I have summarized the following student comments because the majority of the students responded in similar ways.

       Many of the students were very impressed that I actually read and commented on every one of their response papers every time. This caused them to want to show me what they could do in class and how they felt about the class and English language learning as well as the daily events in their lives. They also liked writing messages back to me, or answering any questions I had asked during class and that they had been unable to answer in class. As a result, these response papers became a communication tool, a "liaison" between the teacher and student. It was encouraging to see the students reading my comments when I returned their response papers. I was also surprised at the number of students who told me that they enjoyed reflective writing. When I first started this project, I assumed that the project would fail because response papers might seem abstract to the students and might involve too much writing. I think it was interesting for my students to actually reflect upon their learning, something that they had never before thought of doing or been asked to do. It was a new concept for many of them, so it was a "fresh" experience. Students wrote in their feedbacks that in their response papers, they learned to practice writing about their feelings and their thoughts, and they learned to give opinions about their own learning in the class. Many said that they had previously

believed that the "end-product" was all-important, but as they continued to write their

response papers and participate in the class, they realized that the learning "process" was

equally important. Some students changed from being negative to being positive, and

their self-esteem and confidence rose, as the classes became more enjoyable for them.

They were able to realize their strengths, and this helped them view the class and their

learning in a more positive manner. Students also mentioned how the response papers

helped them with speaking and listening, and helped them to do the class activities more

efficiently. The response papers improved their thinking and writing skills as well. In

conclusion, the students said that writing a response paper was another effective way to

learn, to close each class, to capture what was done and how they felt in detail, and to

communicate with the teacher (since some classes had fifty to seventy students). I

believe that this project was successful.

Concluding Observations

For the students, the response paper was a combination of a journal and an

assessment or evaluation of themselves and their learning. The response papers provided

me with feedback and showed me how the students felt about the class. As I read their

papers, I gained valuable insights as to how I could change the class-style and adjust such

things as: the due dates, the number of papers to write, the quantity of writing, and the

contents of the papers for subsequent classes. As the students wrote their response

papers, they learned and experienced how to express their feelings. They transformed

themselves from passive, negative, or fearful learners to active, positive, and open

learners and participants in the learning process. Some of the students' first few response papers were basically compiled of complaints, disinterests, woes, fears, and confusions about my class and English language learning, about having low self-esteem, and about their lack of confidence in themselves. They initially enumerated their negative feelings but never elaborated on them. As the class progressed and as they wrote more response papers, they realized that their skills in all areas were improving, and they wanted to express how much and why they had improved. To express these points, they learned to explain and support their opinions. They began to notice that the more they explained and supported their opinions with examples, reasons, and details, the stronger and clearer their points became. The more they expressed themselves in depth, the more comments they received from me because this "positive" change allowed me to express myself more. The positive points increased. The quality of the student comments improved because the students learned to explain and support their opinions in more detail. Since I wrote comments on each paper, the students realized that I cared about their learning, and this encouraged them to write and express more. They began learning more for themselves and less for the class credits. The response paper content changed from writing for the teacher or for the sake of passing a class, getting the credits, or because they were forced to do the writing, to writing for themselves. The students wrote that they liked the concept of reflecting on and analyzing what they had learned and taking the time to write about it in detail. This Response Paper project was successful.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Summary Of This Paper And The Five Projects

In my classes and through the five projects, my students practiced expressing

themselves in various ways through various techniques: through drama for Skit

Festivals, through information and instruction for Textbooks, through art and discussion

for Poster Presentations, through literature and spontaneous imagery and impressions for

Class Visuals, and through opinions, free-thinking and free-writing, and self-analysis for

Response Papers. Each project provided the students opportunities to study English and

to tap into and utilize their own creativity, originality, and imagination. The skits,

textbooks, posters, class visuals, and response papers flowed from the students' own

ideas and became their actual "texts" for their learning in the course. At the beginning of

the semester, some students did the class work to satisfy the teacher, but gradually, they

came to realize that it benefited them because they were the ones who were actually

learning and gaining knowledge and skills. They were guided to think and take

responsibility for their learning. What impressed me every time was how each project's

output surpassed my expectations, and how each project's output was different. The

skits, textbooks, posters, class visuals, and response papers, which the students designed,

were all different; no one created the same thing because what each student felt, viewed, and learned varied.

Questions About Project-Based Teaching

As I look back at the five projects, there are three things that I need to reconsider: time, group dynamics, and clearer objectives. First, each project was demanding of the students because they had to prepare and produce something within three to four weeks. Most students did their best, and were able to accomplish goals that surpassed my expectations. However, for students who preferred to take more time and work more slowly, the short time limit might have pressured them and caused them to rush. Perhaps, if they had had more time to prepare and practice, they would have created something much better, which might have given them a greater sense of satisfaction. In designing future projects, I should make sure that I am aware of various situations and am able to accommodate each person's needs so that each student will be able to perform well in a project.

Next, since all five projects involved group work, there was always the possibility of problems with intra-group dynamics. For students grouped with people who brought out the best in each other and who were involved and motivated, the project preparation, discussion, creation, and output went smoothly. On the other hand, groups with members who were less involved, who did not contribute ideas, or who had difficulty communicating their opinions, tended to work slowly and exhibited feelings of inadequacy. To solve this problem, I must find ways of having students form groups of varying levels in proficiency, working styles, and attitudes, and I must motivate them to

work together to overcome challenging situations so that they would learn to build trust, security, and flexibility (adaptability).

Finally, my guidelines and the objectives for each project might have been abstract for those students who needed clear structure. I tried to provide examples of what I expected or what former students had done in a project, and this alleviated some confusion, but perhaps I should state the objectives more clearly and give more lucid instructions. These are three points I will consider and work on for future projects.

My Role As A Teacher In Project-Based Teaching, The Outcomes, And My Learning

As a teacher, I gave the students open-ended guidelines for each project. I announced that there would be a project, gave the students a deadline for the project, I explained briefly what I expected from them, and the rest was up to the students. I expected them to find a way to express and reflect on their learning from the classes, use the language acquired from the classes, and be creative. When the students were asked to prepare for the projects outside of class, they organized and decided when to work and to practice. At the deadline, I expected the students to present and share their project outputs with their classmates in class and to discuss what they had learned from the project content and process. At first, I was afraid of and prepared for possible disastrous outcomes such as students not understanding the projects, not preparing for the projects or doing the projects, and not presenting the projects. In the end, I did not need to worry. Most students were capable and surpassed my expectations.

I also watched my students change throughout the semester, and the changes were obvious. Many of them had been accustomed to "passively" following the instructions of their teachers in textbook-centered learning environments, and they had difficulty adjusting to my classes at first. However they learned not to simply regurgitate learned information, but to take learned information and actively create something absolutely original and new, becoming in the process, active, responsible, and positive participants in their own learning. The lack of emphasis on grammatical and syntactical points in these projects also helped the students to build communities, to become less afraid of making mistakes, and to focus on who they were, what they wanted to express, what they felt, and what they had learned. Students, who had been negative and passive, became positive and active. Students, who had been shy, encountered good learning companions and became more outspoken. Students, who were afraid and had no confidence, learned to take some risks and overcome obstacles step-by-step. Students, who had believed themselves to be terrible at English, saw how much they could accomplish, and thus became more willing to take initiative and explore. Silent and tense classes became lively classes. Serious and stern expressions changed to smiles. Students who expected me to be the information-provider and the entertainer, learned to assume responsibility in creating a better class, learning environment, and atmosphere, and they then became the active participants in the learning process. Students began to learn for themselves, to discover the joy in learning, to bring meaning to their learning, and to reflect on their own learning styles. I found that projects were suited to classes (like mine) with varying student numbers, levels, skills, and attitudes.

I also learned to limit my role to giving instructions, scaffolding, and facilitating. I learned to let the students make discoveries and to help them use their inner resources. I should have them take advantage of their schema. I should guide, scaffold, provide as many opportunities as possible for students to become better learners, and expose them to various styles of communication. It was better for me to answer indirectly at times or actively listen with the students (and scaffold back) when students had questions. I should also have the students discuss and create their learning and solutions within their groups. I learned that when students put their heads together, many answers, solutions, and ideas would arise. I should also give the students time to think and explore, to discuss, and to reflect, and not to restrict or contain the students' abilities and creativity. I should stand back for a moment and then come back into the students' "circle", only when it is necessary. I should not rush into talking, not be the first person to open my mouth, and should not change my mind during the course of the project. I should allow students to be the ones to ask questions, be the thinkers, and be the creators and designers (molders) of the project. Silence does not always mean confusion or something negative; it may mean that students are thinking or searching in their formal, content, and culture schema. I also learned that the teacher should provide a class atmosphere in which students can interact and get to know their classmates in order to make the class activities more effective. Once everyone was in a group, the class functioned more smoothly as well as their learning. The students in the class became more motivated, more involved, more willing to contribute, and this helped them to learn more.

Concluding Remarks

The five projects had positive effects on the students academically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively (Fried-Booth 1982, 2002; Kayser 2002; Sheppard and Stoller 1995). Students became more responsible learners and active participants in the learning process. Furthermore, students were able to bring meaning and closure to their own classes and to the semester, and projects led to higher levels of motivation. Through the five projects, not only did students study English, but they also learned to do the following: to engage, to be cooperative, to collaborate, to support, to be willing, to be aware, to learn from their own mistakes, to take risks, to be problem-thinkers and solvers, to reflect, to summarize, to improve their habits, to improve their non-verbal and verbal communication techniques, to enjoy themselves, to encourage others, and to overcome obstacles.

As a teacher and participant in the learning process, I have enjoyed doing the projects with my students. Each was a very rewarding experience. I became more aware of the students' ability to learn and their infinite capabilities. I continued to look for ways to improve my teaching so that the students could learn effectively and efficiently. Students often told me that it was encouraging to see their teacher looking as if she were enjoying teaching as well as participating in the learning process. This helped them to feel excited to learn. In the future, I would like to find ways to incorporate my former students' works into my classes to help my new students learn and enjoy English. I would also like to make a homepage, which English learners and teachers can access to exchange project ideas and outputs.

Finally, I would like to share a quote that I found from the Internet URL website

http://www.randomterrain.com/quotes/teaching.html (Hahn 2004) which will conclude

this paper:

> One of the most exciting developments in modern education goes by the name of cooperative or collaborative (or group project) learning and has children (or students) working in pairs or small groups. An impressive collection of studies has shown that participation in well-functioning cooperative groups leads students to feel more positive about themselves, about each other, and about the subject they are studying. Students also learn more effectively on a variety of measures when they can learn with each other instead of against each other or apart from each other. Cooperative learning works with kindergartners and graduate students, with students who struggle to understand and students who pick up things instantly; it works for math and science, language skills and social studies, fine arts and foreign languages (Kohn 1999).

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