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論文

Collaborative Stop Motion Project for Academic Writing

Rosa Suen

Abstract

Producing a stop motion animation by using smartphones and free application software in class can produce a number of positive learning outcomes. This paper explains how teachers can set up and use this kind of project in university classes to foster both academic writing and collaborative learning, taking into consideration the challenges and outcomes of such project described. This qualitative study found that such type of project can motivate students as they become more engaged and responsible for their learning. It was evident that the process essays, which students produced as a final product of this project, were written enthusiastically, at greater length and with greater care for accurate expression, when compared to other essays written by the same students. Overall, this project allowed students to require a richer vocabulary and gain a sense of achievement, which is assumed to have a positive influence on how students approach academic writing in their future endeavours at school and beyond.

Keywords : cooperative learning, task-based approach, motivation, ICT, technology, SLA, stop-motion, process writing, mobile learning

Introduction

Stop motion is a technique in which everyday objects are photographed with minute changes to position, so that when the series of photographs are run

together, there appears to be movement. Numerous stop motion animations that have been created with various mediums can be found on the Internet. Because the examples provided in academic writing texts are often dry and difficult for students to understand, the stop motion project was designed for the purpose of encouraging better understanding of the writing process involved in planning and writing a process essay. In three classes of 90-minutes, students planned, created, and photographed stop motion projects, as well as wrote up their experiences in a stop motion process essay. This paper is a summary of the steps involved in carrying out such a project in a university writing classroom and its learning outcomes.

Literature Review

It is increasingly evident that technology in the classroom is virtually unavoidable. For example, many published English language textbooks now have audio, video, and other online resources that come as a set package. However, with more and more technologically enhanced materials becoming available to teachers, teachers themselves are nevertheless the gatekeepers for the use of technology in the classroom. Within these basic units of technology, with teachers as the gatekeepers, and students as consumers, learners can be deprived of the potential benefits of foreign language learning. One of the advantages of the stop motion project used in this study is that students are no longer passive consumers of technology, but active and creative users in their own right. For the purpose of this project, it is important to remember that academic digital literacy is not the central goal; it is only utilized as a means to an end for students to develop their English language and academic writing.

With the use of stop motion, it can also be a means of sharing expertise for students and teachers alike on top of developing students' digital literacy.

Although students often appear quite confident with mobile technology, there are many university students in Japan who need to develop their basic academic digital literacy skills. According to Taynton (2012), Japanese students' PC use at home is minimal, and that internet skills possessed by Japanese students are largely mobile based, with 77% preferring to use their mobile phones to access the Internet. On the other hand, in the case of students with more advanced digital literacy skills, there is an unfortunate danger that English teachers can become out of touch with their tech-savvy students (Blake, 2013). Regarding this concern, the stop motion project enables both teachers and students to become learners and teachers, sharing their areas of expertise with one another.

A third important point related to the use of stop motion for academic writing is the level of motivation it generates. Research suggests that authentic materials are directly related to an increase in student motivational levels, and that motivation itself is indeed an important factor in the EFL/ESL classroom (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, 2011; Murray, Gao & Lamb, 2011). In fact, Lockley (2013) in his study found that 82.4% of the Japanese university students he surveyed would like to use mobile phones or smartphones to help them study English. Since many students have their own smartphones, utilizing their own medium of communication would be a relevant choice as the source for creating authentic materials. Students are asked to download, explore, and create with an app--a task approach that utilizes the very technology with which they are most comfortable. As technology becomes more accessible, we are seeing research that shows a connection between technology and increased levels of student motivation (Genc Ilter, 2009). In other words, there is a very good reason to welcome technology for language teaching because as smartphone uses become more reflective of the non-digital world, the applications of these devices would mirror and enhance normal social behavior of the students rather than

significantly modify it.

Most importantly, using stop-motion provided students with an opportunity for creativity. As Bloom's revised taxonomy of learning suggests (Krathwohl, 2002), the highest level of learning is creating; thus, the need for student-focused learning that encourages creativity is required if students are to experience this type of learning. Furthermore, since creativity is important, it has implications for how teachers design their academic programs and structure educational experiences in the classroom. The problem lies in finding and designing activities that are accessible and can be made relevant to the students' levels of expertise and English language proficiency. Although technology as a pedagogical tool might seem time-wasting to some teachers, when it is used with a creative element, it can be effective for language development and academic writing.

Technical Aspect of the Stop Motion Project

Rapid changes in technology mean that innovative ways to teach academic writing are within both the teachers and students' grasp. For this project, all that was required was one student in the group to have access to a smartphone. Although free apps are available for both iPhones and Android-based smart phones, students in this study only used the iPhone app called Stop Motion Studio (Cateater, LLC, 2013). This app is free and provides the necessary functions to create a successful stop motion video. In addition, it is easy to use with language support in both Japanese and English. In fact, students who participated in this study were able to manipulate various settings with little explanation from the teacher. By taking carefully arranged shots with minute changes in position, students were able to create a stop motion clip easily by playing the sequence of photos through the app itself. To provide some reference,

a 1-minute stop motion clip can require as few as 180 photos or as many as 450, depending on the effect one is trying to achieve. Students can also add voiceover and music. The finished video can be uploaded to a YouTube, Dropbox, or Line account, sent by email, or downloaded to a computer via USB, giving teachers an array of choices as to how they wish to receive or present the material for class viewing.

The Study

The experiment had a pretest-treatment-posttest design and was conducted in class. The tests were of the same type: a process essay writing task. For the pre-test, students were instructed in class on how to write a process essay and were given two sample essays to read and analyze to check for understanding. Then they were asked to write a process essay on a topic of their own choice. After taking the pre-test, students made small groups of four to make a stop-motion video together. It was hypothesized that such a project as the treatment in this study would foster motivation and improvement in English writing within the students. Students attended all three class meetings allocated for the project and were told to use extra time outside class if needed to complete their project on time. Like the pretest, students also wrote a process essay as the posttest, but this time they were told that they had to write about their stop-motion project. A self-reflective survey on the project with the inclusion of a section asking about the students' English learning background was administered after the posttest.

Participants

The participants were 27 native speakers of Japanese learning English as a foreign language (EFL). They were recruited from two junior English

classes at a private university in Japan. Students at this university were English majors. Based on class observations and the participants' information collected from the survey distributed, these participants' English proficiency ranged from intermediate to advanced and their motivation for learning English writing was found to be overwhelmingly extrinsic.

Background and Self Reflection Survey

Immediately after the posttest, participants completed a self-reflection survey about their experience and thoughts on the stop-motion group project as well as their English learning background. The self-reflective section of the survey in particular asked participants to reflect on their experience and thoughts both prior to and after doing the project. Appendix C contains the actual survey.

Procedure for Implementing the Stop Motion Project

The project took up a total class time of three 90-minute lessons. By gradually building up the complexity of the task, from a structured lesson on how to describe a process, to having students write from their own experience, the essay-writing became transparent and manageable for all students across the ability range within the class.

The first lesson included a warm-up session in which the students learned about the project. At this stage, the course instructor clarified the timeline for the project and emphasized the necessity of getting organized. Then, the students were shown a few examples of stop motion animations on the Internet. YouTube offers many examples of stop motion animations, some professional and some amateur; both types can be informative, as well as inspiring for students, especially to those who are not familiar with stop motion. For homework, students were encouraged to watch further examples

and thereby get an idea about what the stop-motion project requires them to do. Once the students had an idea of what was expected, they formed groups, started discussing their ideas with their group members, and decided on a theme for their own stop motion animation. For the purpose of this study, the theme for the stop motion was left entirely with the students to encourage motivation and to allow for maximum creativity. During the preliminary discussion period, at least one student in each group downloaded the stop motion app. The next stage was to have the students storyboard their ideas. This means drawing rough sketches to create a storyboard which shows how the theme or story of the stop motion animation would develop (see Appendix A for a sample worksheet). The first homework assignment was to complete the planning and prepare to begin production of the animation in the next class. This also included the decision of what materials were needed to bring to the next class, and which group member was responsible for which task in making their stop motion animation.

In the second class the students produced their stop motion together in groups, which was the most collaborative aspect of the project; the students needed to have planned together, decided tasks, and assigned responsibilities for materials, and then they needed to actually work cooperatively during the production process. While the stop motion production was underway, the course instructor circulated from group to group and asked the students to explain what they were doing. The teacher helped or guided the groups as necessary, but the students were solely responsible for doing everything required in order to produce their stop motion animation. All students in the group were responsible for making their own brief notes about the steps in the production process as the work progressed, which were to be used after the completion of the project in helping them write the posttest process essay.

By the third class students were expected to have completed their stop

motion animations. Each group was also required to have their stop motion video file stored in a USB drive to bring to class so that it was ready for viewing. Each group introduced their stop motion animation to the class and everyone watched together. This, for the students, was the highlight of the project. After the viewing, they presented orally in class their enjoyable and challenging moments while working on the project. Referring to their own notes, the students in their groups generated a list of the steps required to produce a stop motion. Before the posttest, the teacher introduced the writing focus. Students were advised to use transition words to describe the flow of the process and also to create an introduction that shows their specific project as being unique and therefore of interest to the reader. Students then wrote an outline for their process essays; they were allowed to work individually or in groups as they wished. Then, individually they all wrote a stop motion process essay as the posttest of this study.

General Outcomes of the Stop Motion Project

The stop motion project was used with students at the intermediate to advanced level, who have achieved a TOEIC score in the 500 to 700 range. One of the most satisfying outcomes was the students' level of creative engagement. Students not only became highly engaged with the production process itself, but also their written work, resulting in high-quality essays. This outcome was most probably due to the fact that students had experienced an interesting production process firsthand, and this consequently enabled and encouraged them to willingly dedicate time and effort to their writing. Several groups of students were willing to spend hours of extra time out of class on completing their stop motion productions. Their essays showed a richer use of language and demonstrated greater depth than any previous writing, which were not based on

projects like this. A second positive outcome was the cooperative nature of the group work which changed the class dynamics in a positive way. For example, some students who previously had showed a low level of motivation in doing writing tasks in class appeared more highly engaged. The students in each group found that they had to delegate tasks and share responsibilities in order to get the job done on time. Students drew on the particular skills of the individuals in their groups as evident in the data collected with the survey given out to all students in this study.

The process essay for the stop motion project was the second lengthy essay that the students produced during the academic year after the submission of their first process essay written on a topic of their own choice. As the students were generally strong writers, their goals were to focus on styles of introduction, and to create a sense of uniqueness, something that would set their essays apart from all the others (see Appendix B for an example). In many of the posttest essays written by students, it was clear to see that they embraced the idea of uniqueness in their introductions and also they were able to use the appropriate writing techniques, for example, the use of transitional words and phrases, to provide a guide on the steps involved in making a stop motion animation.

Moreover, it was found that many students in their posttest essays described their specific experiences in creating their stop motion videos, which they were not required to do. For example, the stop motion project was introduced to students in class near the end of the first semester when the weather had turned humid. A few groups opted to do their projects outdoors and one project in particular called for a jumping scene that also shows a complete change of outfit of the jumper wearing a horse head mask when his feet touch the ground at the end of the jump. When the whole class viewed their stop motion creations in class, most of the other students were amazed at the quality

of that particular scene. The group explained during class and from different perspectives in their writing how long they had debated and how many times they had tried to create that scene in a stop motion video. In the end, it was decided that one student would jump high and change his outfit for shooting that scene. Unfortunately, this had to be done over twenty times in the heat of midday. The result was a successful transformation scene of a very tired, but good-natured, student who had to endure the heat and humidity, all for the sake of collaboration and negotiation. This, however, led to a very unique experience that the students subsequently articulated through their process essays. Moreover, some of the language used to express the students' ideas showed their level of personal involvement in the stop motion making process. Students wrote comments expressing how easy they had found making a stop motion animation, even though at first it had seemed complicated.

Conclusion

This paper focused on using a stop motion project as a context for developing academic writing, in particular, for writing a process essay. The initial task of making the stop motion was a stimulating incentive for the students to develop their academic literacy and a number of positive outcomes as mentioned earlier are observable in the posttest process essays written by the participating students. Other than teaching writing, stop motion is a flexible resource that can be adapted for numerous language teaching goals. For example, it can also be used as a basis for teaching storytelling in oral presentations in general English classes or for an advanced reading course to introduce to students the fun in using their imagination to create images for what they are reading, preferable regarding a novel story. Even though the technology the students used to produce their final stop motion animations was sophisticated,

the relatively easy and accessible method of producing the animations helped to give students an immense sense of achievement. As an educator, it was intriguing to observe the relationship between the use of technology in the classroom and the level of student engagement and productivity. This relationship between particular uses of technology and learning relevant to study needs and abilities may well prove a useful area for future research.

One salient feature of the stop motion project was the universal enthusiasm of the students. Many students spent much more time than was required to finish the project, but stating that, “It was fun and I improved my writing and communication skills” while some other students expressed their sentiment that, “It has been a long time since I had the opportunity to be creative with my studies at school, which is why I got so into doing the stop motion project.” As evident in students’ comments, all of the students contributed to the projects and gave positive feedback about the collaboration and the stop motion productions. Most importantly, the students successfully wrote personalized essays that reflected the uniqueness of their experiences and of their projects, although further research is necessary to confirm if the same outcomes can be expected when teaching lower level students. Nonetheless, the stop motion project used in this study proved to be effective in motivating students to put in more effort in bettering their academic writing skills.

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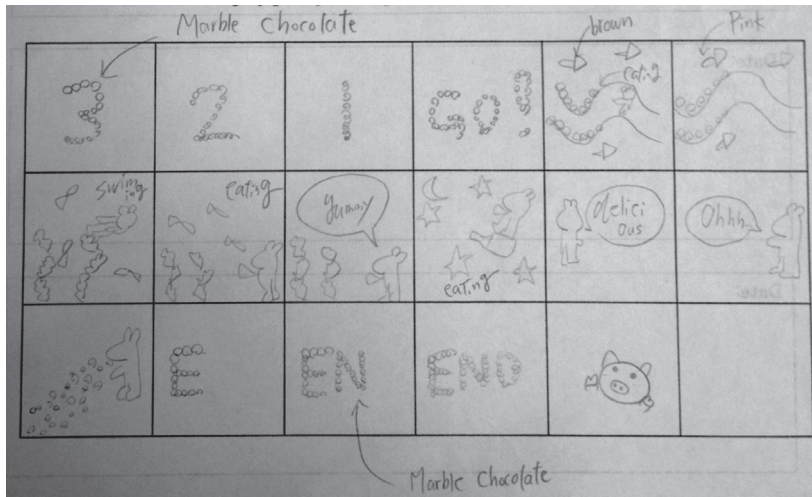
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Appendix A:

Storyboard Worksheet



Appendix B:**Sample Posttest Process Essay Introduction**

How to Make a Stop Motion Movie

Do you know what a “stop motion movie” is? It is a short movie, but it is not a real movie. It is made from connecting pictures together. You can make a stop motion movie by using a phone app. You can make pictures shown in a sequence to look like a real movie. In stop motion movies, you can pretend to do actions that are impossible to do in reality. These days, some people enjoy making stop motion movies and uploading them on the Internet. Our group made one and it took us a long time to make. Although it seemed hard to make, actually we found from our experience that it is not as difficult as one might think if you follow four steps in the making process: story planning, tasks allocation, shooting and editing.

Appendix C:**Background and Self-reflection Survey**

<p>Part I: Background Information</p> <p>Full Name: _____ Age: _____ Major: _____</p> <p>Experience learning English writing at school: _____ years</p> <p>Experience learning English writing outside school: _____ years</p> <p>I learned English writing outside school because</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Part II: Learning Experience</p> <p><u>IN THE PAST (以前)</u></p> <p>このプロジェクトをやる前に、 _____ 英作文の勉強は私にとって</p> <p>Before I did the stop-motion project, I used to think that English writing was</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>私は他の学生と一緒にグループでこのプロジェクトに取り掛かりました。私は他のグループメンバーとグループワークを</p> <p>For this project, I had to work in a group with other students. My group members and I worked</p> <p>よくできた／よくできなかった _____ 何故ならば</p> <p>(well / not so well) together because</p>

グループで私が担当したことは
In my group, I was responsible for

グループでの役割分担の決め方は
We divided the workload for this project by

プロジェクトを取り掛かっていた間、 私は自由に
While working on this project , I had control/freedom over

NOW (現在)

このプロジェクトが終わって、振り返ると、
今私は英作文の学習に対し
After I finished working on the stop-motion project with my group members, now I think that English writing is

私は、前よりもっと簡単に
I find I can more easily

英語の授業でのグループワークは
I think that group work in English class is

何故ならば
because

これから英作文の書き方をもっと上達するのに
I can improve my English writing skills by

私はこのプロジェクトを通して得た学習経験を (楽しめました / 楽しめなかった)
何故ならば
I (enjoy / did not enjoy) this learning experience because