

Visual Sociology: Transforming the classroom environment  
by applying project based and active learning

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to explain one way to implement visual sociology in a 3rd year seminar course through the usage of video production. Both Project based learning (PBL) and active learning techniques are used to support this course. The task at hand is specifically that the students create a short documentary over the year on a theme they have chosen. The benefit to the students is to understand what it is like to work on a long-term group project from beginning to end while observing how their work as an individual has or has not assisted in its completion. Working with a group challenges students to create their own identity within the tasks they are presented. During the course, students learn both qualitative and quantitative research techniques as well as how to record their online research findings. The choice to attempt such a class also presents several challenges for the teacher as well. Students are graded throughout the semester with a series of rubrics which are shared with them periodically during the project. While the specialty of the instructor is being taught, in this case, a variety of sociological frameworks applied to themes generated from international cooperation and intercultural communication are needed, the instructor must also have knowledge of video and audio production to assist the students when necessary in a timely fashion. This unique combination allows students to experience a class they feel a part of and can easily visualize their work at the end of the full year course. This paper does not infer a conclusion but rather hopes to start a discussion of the process.

*Keywords:* visual sociology, project based learning (PBL),  
active learning

## Introduction

As time passes, the way university professors conduct their classes evolve. Unfortunately, many courses cannot evolve quick enough to keep up with the fast paced changes of modern society after entering the digital stage. During the COVID-19 pandemic many teachers were forced into online teaching drastically changing the way students and teachers interact. One of the most valuable skills students gained was the ability to share documents easily with the teacher, their group or even the whole class. I think it would be beneficial for students to utilize these newly found skills efficiently and effectively to enhance their classroom experience. I have started implementing these new skills in my junior seminar class to help create an efficient workflow for the courses project based learning (PBL) style. While various forms of research are performed, how that research is handled can give an extra boost to motivate students to rise to new levels of learning. In recent years some teachers prefer presentations over reports due to the active component of speaking in front of others. This paper proposes a new style of teaching which is formed from a collaboration of several pedagogical techniques and various forms of research. The reason I am experimenting with this technique is I hope to introduce students to an experience of what level of effort is required to complete a long term project. Hopefully once this is achieved they will be able to apply what they have learned to a narrative. This requires a refining of planning skills to meet deadlines and create various goals. They need to schedule their year long plan so they can meet their deadlines while working together alongside the whole class as a team. The goal being to research, write and produce a short form documentary on a current sociological topic within international cooperation and/or intercultural communication frameworks of the student's choice. While that is the simple explanation, the goal of this paper is to reveal the complexity of challenges both the students and the instructor need to face within an allotted time frame of one year while maintaining a level of continuity necessary to finish a comprehensive short documentary. I hope this paper will act as an introduction to how this course is operated. While this paper does not offer a conclusion, I hope to be a part of the ongoing discussion as well as adding to it.

## Methods

This paper will apply several pedagogical frameworks supplemented with data gathered from students in the program. Understanding the applications of these various frameworks gives the whole course its value. It is not good enough just to make a short documentary. Students need to see how the production is planned out in stages. The emergence of structure from the initial chaos of information they gather is only something that can be witnessed. This is a crucial step when working with these types of techniques. Long-term project focus is almost unheard of outside of graduate school, but to receive this kind of experience in their junior year gives them a window into the effort needed to fulfill long-term plans after they graduate. Performing this with a group of students, lessens the burden on the individual while promoting partnership and maintaining their ability to learn the system needed to achieve their goal. The details such projects require is often not recognized by the individual at the beginner stage, but it is more likely to be recognized when participating in a collaborative environment. Some of the best attributes of PBL are that it not only promotes the collection and analysis of information and data, but it also supports students to socialize, and plan out what needs to be done for the project. These are all self-regulated skills which once learned are invaluable to all students for their whole life (Orakçı and Dilekli 2022). This all keeps the project moving towards the common goal rewarding the individual with the motivation to push through the more difficult stages of the project. Students are able to react to real world experience in the classroom (Boss and Krauss 2018), and see their work unfold before them. While there are always a few stragglers, these stragglers often eventually realize they need to motivate themselves to keep up with other students working on the project. This would not happen in the traditional passive learning environment in classrooms of the past. Students can be trapped in university life with rare connections to the real world and never rub up against real life experience until they have graduated. This is why internships and various programs were created. The quality of such programs can be hit or miss. This course attempts at giving the students a consistent experience. If they can experience this while they are still in school, they are gaining a major advantage when they start to enter the job market.

Both Active and Project Based Learning (PBL) are focused on real life

applications experienced in the classroom. Active learning has developed into various forms and has been known to be combined with other techniques such as deep learning creating deep active learning. Deep active learning combines the content data focus of deep learning and the application of this through active learning (Ren et al 2021). Active learning focuses on shorter activities which can be done in one or two class sessions. This can be both group or individual work. Active learning encourages students to apply knowledge learned in the past to the task they are given. It also promotes students' ability to analyze a situation and then execute ways to solve problems that arise within the task. This experience is a form of outputting knowledge they have inputted in previous classes or even through life experience. Experiencing in real life versus other mediums cannot be compared. There is a difference between reading about how a calf is born than seeing and hearing a video of it. But a video doesn't compare to seeing and even smelling it up close and personal. The use of active learning in higher education is not just becoming normalized but more and more necessary to sharpen students skills in understanding the fast paced digital world. As this paper explains the implementation of visual sociology, the use of images in active learning are being used in various subjects (Roberts 2019).

Active learning, in many ways, is not new at all. Experiential learning has been around in schools since the 70's, but in reality it has been around since man became civilized and craftsmen, scholars and philosophers have taken on apprentices who carry on what they learned. The slight difference is that currently active learning hopes to promote abstract thinking, problem solving and creativity meant to enhance current ideas and systems rather than just replicate them.

PBL has very similar goals as active learning, but the immensity of the project is where the difference is found. PBL has students follow various steps to follow to complete their project. The process starts out with a question. Then the students research this question in groups or as a class. They begin to build knowledge within the field of a specific question(s). They learn to record their path of research over time with the goal of them even feeling engaged outside of the classroom. They learn to consciously challenge themselves to find the best answers to the questions they are attempting to answer. The challenge lies in the length of time needed to complete the project. Students need to learn to document what they have done so they do not fall into research looping. This occurs when they

research the same information over and over without always realizing it. PBL labels this as the period of sustained inquiry.

Next, students find themselves using real world skills to communicate their message to whomever will be viewing it. This is done through understanding what they want to say while understanding the details needed to allow others who may be not as familiar with the topic at hand to understand the final produced information. This creates, as stated in PBL guidelines, authenticity. A complex period of confirming and reconfirming the information they have gathered in the first stages of the process. This is also a time when students have the ability to voice their opinions and choose the direction of the project. There should always be a plan, but with the understanding that the plan may change according to necessity or even efficiency. The only part of the plan that cannot change is the deadline.

In recent years the faces and the environment of the student body have changed due to the influx of foreign exchange students. The way these students affect a PBL based classroom shouldn't be overlooked. When exchange students enter the classroom, cultural and linguistic differences need to be adjusted for them. This adjustment must take into mind there should be a balance between cultures. While Japanese represent the host culture they should understand the hurdles exchange students deal with, but at the same time the exchange students should not be coddled or protected from differences but rather commit themselves to finding an acceptable middle for themselves that prompts their own confidence while maintain the ever important Japanese *wa* (和)<sup>1</sup>. For example, Nepalese students are often dealing in two foreign languages at once, which can be the cause of various linguistic and cultural miscommunications. A study has been done on how Chinese students perform in PBL environments performed within a different host culture (Barak and Yuan 2021). This sort of study would be interesting for Nepalese students in the Japanese university system as well.

As new data is delivered to the students from their self-produced questionnaires and interviews. Students reflect on what they have collected and start to code the material. Questionnaire data is broken down into similar categorical groups, so they can be implemented, in this case a

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<sup>1</sup> *wa* (和): Harmony within a group or community is often referenced to as *wa* in Japan. A foreign visitor may have trouble maintaining the *wa* due to various differences in communicative techniques that are often not consistent with the Japanese *wa*.

documentary, into the project. Interviews are coded as often seen with qualitative research gathered through grounded theory methods (GTM). The coded material should be linked to answers received from the questionnaire to help strengthen the narrative the students plan to create. This is the longest part of the process for the seminar class, but also very satisfying. In these final stages, students begin to see the fruit of their labor. This all cumulates into the final documentary. While this creates what PBL calls the public product, it is also a reminder to all the students how long term goals are complex yet rewarding. They and they alone will understand what it took to make the final film. They will see successes and flaws everytime they see it on the screen.

### Visual Sociology

One more technique applied to this project is visual sociology. This is a rather specific topic so I think it is prudent to add a section explaining the complexities of this visual method. Active learning has also been seen as a natural fit for sociological research projects (Adkins 2021). Books such as *Engaging Ideas* lay out a complete guide to using active learning in critical thinking based writing activities (Bean and Melzer 2021). According to the International Sociological Association (ISA) “Visual Sociology is a diverse field of study which gathers sociologists involved in visual studies and studies of the visual.” The definition is broad, but is often defined in ways to customize methods to the researcher (Cambre 2021). The images studied can be collected from pre-existing images or taken by the researcher. “The visual researcher must play multiple roles as producer, facilitator and communicator” (Pauwels 2015). One example may be observations of religious images including paintings and photographs of certain ceremonies (Williams 2015).

Visual sociology can also qualitatively incorporate video clips and fully edited documentaries that show “methodological and epistemological issues, by raising the question of the relation between the observer and the observed” in a wide variety of perspectives which would be impossible to accomplish within the written word (Cipriani and Del Re 2012). Past research has noted “an increasingly visually-dominated social world, on the one hand, and, on the other, a social scientific world which, at least until recently, has been primarily oriented towards text”(Hughes 2012). These limitations, plus the availability of digital media, are the driving forces

behind the rise of this relatively newer form of research. With this in mind, researchers must establish solid context when performing image based research (Becker 2005) to create the closest to an objective view of the images as possible. There is also a struggle with “the problem of relevance” (Sormani 2016). The images shown need to create a new understanding of the topic at hand and add to the dialectic of whatever theme has been chosen. Due to the flexible nature of visual sociology, it can be seen as a good match within higher education courses designed by qualified instructors (Metcalf 2012). This especially goes for teachers using active and PBL pedagogical techniques.

From the mundane to the actions of specialists, visual sociology attempts to explain that “without the competence of social actors in accomplishing these mundane, routine understandings and practices, it is argued, there would in fact be no social order” (Hockey and Collinson 2006). This can represent visual sociology’s strong connection to functionalist frameworks of the past. It also has ties with earlier ethnographic work from the 1900’s when it was common to publish photography within published work, but it soon lost popularity. Mostly due to excess printing costs. Printing photos requires a more sensitive approach to coloring within the greyscale offered by printing during that time. It became popular again in the 1960s (Harper 1989). Currently, the methods of visual sociology are becoming the modern and more effective form for ethnography (Harper 2012). “In an intensely hyper-visual age, images and visual artifacts shape our understanding of the world and influence how we interact, present and perform within it” (Zuev and Bratchford 2021: 11).

In the case of this project, research is performed and recorded in video format making it easier for end viewers to digest complex ideas in a short amount of time. The goal being to spark an interest in others to motivate them to perform further research into a certain topic, while the students become knowledgeable about the topic they have chosen. The students in my 2022 3rd year seminar class have chosen to do their research on mask effectiveness versus the socio-psychological cost of covering one’s face during the Covid-19 pandemic. Masks have become a part of their lives, so for them it seemed like a natural choice. When all 15 of the students gave their proposals, 3 out of the 15 suggested doing it on masks. 5 out of the 15 wanted to do something related to Covid-19. Other researchers have also attempted to tackle the experiences of many people during the pandemic through visual sociological work. Ward (2020) explained complex feelings



through his own paintings at the beginning of the pandemic.

## Grading

Throughout history apprenticeships and experiential learning have been a part of education within society, but schools and even teachers have shied away from it for many years. This is primarily because of the subjectivity found in grading such projects. This inability to objectively grade the progress students make has kept it off the curriculum for many years until recently. The importance of measuring students' results needs to be taken into consideration when implementing PBL in a university course (Guo et al 2020). The value of both PBL and active learning is in the subjectivity itself which is basically generated from the autonomy given to students through such programs. This conundrum has been solved through the use of rubrics to assist in a standardization of the process.

Rubrics can be created for various presentations and class-work scenarios, so as to create a fair, but challenging grading style. In particular, this course has two rubrics which score students periodically in both the spring and fall semester. In the spring semester, students perform their topic proposal and self report presentations. They are also graded on their research performance as well as the amount and quality of articles they collect for the first stage of the project. In the fall semester, students are graded on a self-report and and group performance. They are also graded on the quality of their input within the group work.

The rubrics used in this course have been split into two types: overall performance and presentation results. The overall performance rubric is broken into 5 categories: *quality, creativity, consistency, attitude, participation*. The 5 categories for the presentation rubric are as follows: *content, style, grammar/word choice, attitude, preparation*. All of these categories are rated from 1 through 10 rather than the standard 1 through 5 used on many standard rubrics. The reason is to allow for more variance in results for individual students.

The overall performance rubric is active from the start of the semester. All students start with 100 points. They are told what they need to do to maintain their rubric points through participation in the group activities. Students who lose points have the opportunity to regain points as they progress through the class. The importance of the 5 categories starts from the basic category found at the bottom of the rubric to the

more challenging ones at the top. The most basic category is *participation*. This can be easily filled through attendance. The next step is *attitude* which is similar to the EIKEN<sup>2</sup> test. While simply showing up is participation, their actions in the classroom are also important. This is followed by *consistency* of work. Students show they are reliable by keeping to the schedule and following along with the program. The 4th category is where it gets challenging. Students show their *creativity* and problem solving skills when approaching various situations. Creativity can be observed in solving logistical problems or adding new ideas to the project. Finally, the *quality* of the work put out by the students is observed overall. These categories are guidelines rather than definite rules and can be adjusted by this or other teachers according to the needs of the project.

The 5 categories for the presentation rubric focus on the individual's or group's presentation result which takes place mid-term and at the end of each semester. Similar to the overall performance rubric, the level of importance rises from the bottom to the top. *Attitude* is at the bottom and follows the same guidelines as previously mentioned. The 2nd category is *preparation*. Students need to be prepared for their presentation. Points are subtracted for forgetting their usb drive, being late for class, and/or not being ready on the day of the presentation. The next on the list is *word choice/grammar*. This can cover anything from grammar to spelling errors, but more importantly to score high they must use language that clearly states what they are trying to say. This can be as easy as introducing certain vocabulary that enhances or specifies their intended point. The 4th category, *style*, is a culmination of the work and practice they have done in their previous years presenting in other classes. Their presentation style is important to display confidence in what they wish to explain to the instructor and the rest of the class. Finally, *content* is the overall view of the value of the information they have presented. Transparency of the grading process is promoted throughout the semester by sending the students their results through email.

## Technical knowledge

“What has been done in project-based language teaching in general

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<sup>2</sup> EIKEN is an abbreviation of Jitsuyo Eigo Gino Kentei (Test in Practical English Proficiency), one of the most widely used English-language testing programs in Japan. (<https://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/eiken-tests/overview/>)

and in projects that focus on technology use suggests that participating in projects can build decision-making skills, foster independence while also enhancing cooperative work skills, challenge students' creativity, cultivate creative thinking skills, and improve problem-solving skills." (Beckett and Slater 2018). Some critics of PBL say that instructors focus too much on technology and less on instruction. This can absolutely be a challenging part of implementing PBL. Time is a huge factor when trying to implement systems like PBL. While homework can be given, the amount of that homework needs to be at a reasonable level. If implemented correctly, student engagement is raised to a very noticeable level (Almulla 2020), if not, some students can become detached from the meaning of the project.

In the case of this course, the high technological barrier needed to produce such a documentary has to be understood by the students and the instructor. This is why it is necessary to have an instructor who can support the students while they move through the stages of the project. I have personally produced several short documentaries which allows me to understand the necessary beginning-to-end workflow needed to complete such a long-term project. While I will personally be assisting the students along the way, the students are completely in charge of the narrative and how they wish to present it. Students are welcome to assist with camera work and the technical side of the production process, but it is not what their grade is based on. This project uses various kinds of cameras, software and recording equipment which require a dedicated amount of time to learn how to use. This is why it is decided that the students are not responsible for the technical part of the production, but are always welcome to learn it if they like.

### Course flow

The focus of this course is on the application of sociological framework in visual format. The majority of the students are not familiar with sociology in general, so in the first several weeks of the course they are given a brief introduction to some commonly found classic sociological concepts. Students are also free to choose concepts outside of those introduced in class if they have proven the necessary understanding and are able to apply it to the overall project at hand. Students are taught three major sociological paradigms: structural functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism. All of these frameworks can be applied to themes

related to international cooperation and intercultural communication. Students are also introduced to the sociologists that developed, added to, or enhanced these theories. It is necessary for students to fully understand these theoretical frameworks so they can choose a theme and apply them properly within the documentary they plan to produce.

### Choosing a topic

After several weeks of studying the three chosen sociological paradigms, students create their own theme proposals. Each of them presents and explains their theme in front of the class. Students must take notes on each presentation so as not to forget the detailed content of each idea. This process can take up to two classes to properly present all the themes. The instructor also comments and clarifies which framework that each student intends to apply. This is a challenge for many students who are unfamiliar with the process of applying sociological framework to their ideas. The students are allowed to think freely about the themes they choose as long as they see the topics as affecting society in general. Due to topic saturation in recent years, it is requested that students refrain from certain topics. i.e. climate change, gender related topics etc. Although if they think there is a fresh angle, of course they are welcome to present whatever they would like.

The students vote on which topic they would like to research. Then the main thesis question(s) evolve from the researched articles in the following step. For the class of 2021, there were various topics such as why is money important in society, the connection between comedy and society, and the rebirth of *sen*<sup>3</sup>. There were many other ideas that would have also been interesting to research. The most popular and the final choice was the social impact of instagram on university students and how it has reconstructed how young people communicate. Several students gave presentations on instagram. These presentations all got the most votes. 2021 was particularly a difficult year to choose topics due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If students planned to do interviews off campus while lockdowns were reoccurring, it could affect the workflow of the project which is already very tight from the start. It was decided to choose a topic which could be approached easily on campus or online. Unfortunately in

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<sup>3</sup> Sento: Japanese style community bathhouse

the end, classes went online again and the whole project was canceled. The class of 2022 who chose the topic of masking and the socio-psychological effects it has had on relationships and personal development is in the process of finishing their documentary as this paper is being written.

## Preliminary Research

Once the theme is determined, the students begin working as a unit. They all research as much as they can over the course of two weeks. The instructor gives guidance about how and where to search for both internet articles as well as academic papers. The students also learn the difference from opinions and evidence based facts. Students are given access to a shared online google document to help them learn to chronicle their research as well as share it with the class and prevent overlapping what other students have already added. During these two weeks students need to provide 2 to 3 articles each. This is one of many activities that is graded in the overall performance rubric.

For the duration of the preliminary research stage, students introduce and give brief explanations about each of the articles or papers they discovered. Students learn to express vocally the importance of what they found and explain those complex ideas in a shortened concise way. This is a critical part of projects like this. The explanation or the output of information which students believe they understand clearly in their head, doesn't always flow easily when they express it out loud. They do this in either English or Japanese. They choose which language they want to use. After the students have finished the preliminary research they decide on a temporary question(s) or thesis for their documentary.

## Groups

The students are then broken into several groups. Two of these groups are specifically for gathering newly created quantitative and qualitative data. While another singular research and support group is in charge of organizing and searching for more media generated data from articles and past academic work as well as supporting the other two groups when necessary. While these groups are designed to work independently from one another they should also be consistently confirming the progress and development of other groups through shared

documents. For example, the qualitative and quantitative data collecting groups should make sure they have the same criteria for the questionnaire and the interview questions while the support group confirms what direction the interview and survey questions are taking, so as to adjust their search for media generated or past academic research. This collaboration shows the power of online shared documents.

Students are often not familiar with creating a survey, interview questions or even how to research academic articles, so they receive a crash course on the very basics of doing all of it. These skills are taught to the whole class, but with specific attention to those who will be performing those roles. For example the interview group is taught to understand how to never lead when they are interviewing. They learn to do neutral responses to answers, so as not to lead those being interviewed into or away from the interviewer's personal opinions. They are also taught grounded theory techniques so they can expand from their original ideas which may lead their original narrative in a slight or even drastically different direction. Although due to time constraints, the interviews performed should always be short format interviews.

The questionnaire group needs to understand how to create items for their survey that follow a few basic rules. This is most likely the first time many of the students will create a questionnaire so the basics are stressed. Students are taught how actual sociological studies are performed through random samples rather than through their own personal networks. Just asking friends or people only a few separations away from those who generated the questionnaire would not be considered a random study. They need to understand that random studies collect subjects usually through research companies or public offices who can gather subjects randomly from a pool of residents of a particular municipality or people who are signed up to take such surveys, but this requires funding. This is to make the students aware that while they are putting a lot of effort into the questionnaires, it would not be considered random and their study is more for discussion rather than hard research. This also helps them evaluate other studies they read in the future.

The questionnaire they create should be one that can be answered in a short time. It should be no more than 10 minutes but no less than 5. Students need to know how they will be using their findings before they create their questionnaire. They are taught some basic statistical analysis and which charts they can use to present them. Students are also taught

the importance of using LIKERT scales. They are also asked to stay away from open and yes/no style questions. All the items they create will be approved by the class and the instructor. Students are also taught about how the criteria of their respondents is a crucial step to keep the discussion as realistic as possible. They often should spend a good amount of time listing up their ideas for the criteria and make sure all the groups know the guidelines to follow. Once this is performed they can be taught more advanced forms of statistical analysis in their following year.

Finally the support group can be the most challenging to manage. The reason for this is because their duties evolve along with the project. They start off researching articles, but may start to assist the instructor with various tasks as well as support the other groups when they need more help. Some of the students who are confident doing work bilingually will also receive various tasks such as creating the translations for the Japanese to English subtitles for the documentary. Other members of the support group may be searching for ways to create interesting graphics for the video while others focus on the audio enhancements. The fluid nature of this group requires a little more direction management than the other two groups. All of these small actions create a very positive growth environment for the students. They seem to become more and more self-motivated as the project progresses.

Overall if the students follow the basic guideline given to them by the instructor and adhere to realistic time constraints, they are given the ability to be very autonomous throughout the project. Autonomy is theoretically the closest any student can get to realistic learning but it is the job of the instructor and the group leaders to keep students on the schedule necessary to complete the project on time.

## Data review and coding

Once the data from the interviews and the questionnaire are collected they must be coded and categorized according to topic. While this should be somewhat of a simplified process if the interview questions and the items from the questionnaire are aligned from the start. The order in which each topic appears in the documentary is decided on the results from the gathered research. Certain questions may have offered more notable results than expected.

I have observed in the 2022 class that after the information was

collected and the students started to review it that their levels of motivation increased. This is most likely to do the fact they are finally seeing the results of their work. The first half of this course has the students walking blindly through a process that won't make sense until they are on the other side of it. If done properly, this should act as an experience that will change the way they look at work in general. This said, I still hope to make it easier for students to understand what they are trying to achieve throughout the whole project.

### Classroom experiences until the present

As mentioned previously in this paper, the 2021 junior seminar class, the topic of instagram was chosen by the students. Unfortunately they were not allowed to finish it due to the strict rules set for the COVID-19 pandemic during this time. Students were not allowed on campus and any reason that would have students gathering outside of the campus was complex, convoluted and too time consuming to navigate. This was the logic behind canceling the project in the first year. This was extremely disappointing to me as a teacher because as mentioned early, the students understand clearly in the second semester after they see the results of the interviews and questionnaire. As an educator, I found this to be a very low point of my experimental endeavor. Until the point of cancellation, the 2021 students had planned to apply two major sociological concepts. They determined that Durkheim's concept of "novelty" found within the state of "anomie" had been transformed from a meaningless endeavor into an income generating activity for the masses. As the availability of online photography advanced and became easy to upload, many social network (SNS) users were sharing pictures of things they did throughout the day. Some examples of this are what they ate for lunch, pictures of their clothing or their pet. This was just a novelty used to fill time with little to no goal of earning income or gaining knowledge. Over time it evolved into a sort of social capital and then into monetary return for those with large groups of followers. Having an account of 10,000 followers on social media groups 10 years ago was more related to social capital, but presently such a number would put the user into a situation to begin earning income. It has even become a point for some employers in the United States to ask potential employees if they have a large following on instagram due to the net positive it would give their company.



Influencers are individuals who can affect markets through what they show on their social media. This title can be used for anyone on Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube and/or any social network connected with affecting markets, public or even political opinion. Influencers have the ability to affect the way certain fashion trends spread. The popularity of restaurants, travel destinations and food stuffs also receive boosts from social media influencers. They can also sway public opinion easily because they seem more genuine than other advertisements. They “add value” to things that regular users wouldn’t have known about unless they heard it on social media. This brings the discussion to the second concept the students applied to their documentary.

Social interactionism explains the importance of how individuals along with other members of society or the community put value on certain things or interactions. Herbert Blumer (1969) gave three premises in which symbolic interactionism is based on. The first is how people act towards things on the basis of value they have put on them. In short, “individuals construct meaning via the communicative process.” The next is how the meaning of importance of those things is influenced through social interactions with others in society or the community. This creates “self-concept being a motivation for behavior.” Finally, there is an interpretive process that enhances and modifies these meanings through interaction between the individual and the community. “This creates a unique relationship between the individual and whatever community they are a member of.” The three premises can be explained as reactionary, applied and interactionary. The points the students wanted to make in their documentary was how the second and the third premise have been fused together with the role of the influencer. The influencer, as an individual, has a strong effect similar to any given community due to the size of their individual network. This would have been a very interesting approach to explaining the current situation of the influencer community. Unfortunately, this documentary will never be made because classes went online.

The 2022 junior seminar students’ topic on masking during the corona pandemic can also apply many of the concepts of social interactionism as well. Although, on the surface, Japanese society has a strong community driven opinion of masking, there are various opinions of masking that range from person to person. While many want to do their part during the pandemic, there seems to be an ever growing number of people who

question the necessity of it all, but remain silent. Currently their research shows how some students intend to never remove their masks due to personal insecurities more than for disease prevention. The arrested education of young children who have been deprived from seeing facial expressions which are needed to motivate and advance their communication skills are just a few of the examples they have discovered. This documentary will be completed as of the spring of 2023.

## Discission

I hope this paper leads to discussions of enhancing the classroom experience for students by giving them tangible goals bound to the reality of work life they will discover after leaving the university. This said, I currently have several revisions of the workflow I plan to revise for future classes. The first being I had the whole class research the internet as a group first, but this should have been left for the research and support group to do alone. This would have saved over three classes of valuable time and made it easier for students in the support group to comprehend the articles collected much easier. The second would be the way I instructed each group. Each group has a specific set of instructions each week. For this to be done properly I need to spend between 10 to 15 minutes explaining the tasks to each group. This wastes almost half the class for some groups because they are waiting for me to finish with the other groups. Depending on the week of the course, certain groups take priority while others are just continuing a task from the previous week. But more than often this task is finished early, so the possibility of there being dead space arises. I plan to solve this glitch with simple pre-recorded videos, similarly used in previous online lessons. This will allow students to get instruction simultaneously from the instructor and save an immense amount of time in class.

Another major change would be to write the narration first rather than after the information is gathered. This is opposite from the way I have personally performed in the past. I have always preferred a more grounded theory approach which allows the narrative to rise from the data. While challenging students is important, I think writing a narration while incorporating all of their gathered research is beyond challenging. It is very difficult for them to complete this task even in Japanese. Creating the narration first will allow them to use their imagination rather than trying

to compile something from the information gathered. This is a much more realistic approach and while the narration can be changed, it will give them a better idea of what to do for their documentary throughout the whole year. Lastly, I plan to send each student updated rubrics through a more efficient system of email. Previously I sent them pdf copies of their results, but this took time to email 15 individual students. Currently, the IDoceo classroom management software on the iPad allows for a more efficient management of these reports which will save a respectable amount of time on the instructor's end.

I intend to do a follow up paper in the future with student feedback from the 2022 3rd year class. It will be interesting if their progress throughout the year can be qualitatively observed in their own words. I will be giving them the assignment to write 800 characters in Japanese or 500 words in English to report on their experiences in the last year. These reports will act as valuable feedback from the students as well as data to perform various forms of analysis. Word and phrase frequency analysis would be effective in finding the overall mood of the students' thoughts toward the program.

Finally, I think the application of video may not be an option for other teachers but the concept of a year long project may have other forms which could be discussed. If these other forms could motivate the students as a collective with a similar goal in mind, I would conclude they could achieve similar accomplishments. Motivation is the key. Motivated students will always get it done.

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