Putting Projects into Practice

Joseph Heilman
Kanto International High School
Michael Stout
Kanto International High School

JALT 2004 NARA
Language Learning for Life

Teachers feel straight jacketed by textbooks and time constraints. Therefore, they believe incorporating project work into their classes is impractical. This is not true. This paper will demonstrate how projects can be put into practice. It will show a model by Heilman that will provide teachers with a step-by-step process for planning a project to supplement a course in a Japanese high school.

　教師は教科書や時間の制約があり、プロジェクト作業をクラスに組み入れられないと思っているが、実は実行可能である　。本論文ではプロジェクトをどう実行に移したらよいかを述べる。日本の高校の授業内で使えるプロジェクトの組み立て方をハイルマンモデルによって例示する。

Thapter is an extension of a workshop we conducted at JALT 2004. It is intended for teachers who believe in project work but have not been able to do it. The impetus behind the workshop was a feeling that many teachers working in Japanese high schools wanted to incorporate projects into their classes but felt that this was impractical. Furthermore, we felt that some teachers who did utilise project work were doing so without maximising their full potential. Some of the workshop participants were amazed by the amount of input and autonomy students can have in doing projects. During the workshop we offered participants the opportunity to plan either a project to complement a textbook, or a project supplementing a course they were currently teaching. For the complementary project we provided them with a model proposed by Stoller (2002). For the supplementary project we provided them with a model proposed by Heilman. In this paper we will focus on the Heilman model. We will also provide examples of projects that we have done at our school. We are confident that this paper will be useful to both Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) and native English speaking teachers (NETs) who are keen to put projects into their practice.

Types of Projects

Stoller (2002) suggests the following types of projects: research, survey, production, performance, encounter, correspondence, and organisational. Research projects necessitate the gathering of information through research at a library, or via the Internet. In survey projects students create a survey in order to gather information about the various interests of members of their school community. Following that

they may create a guide for new students based on the survey data, or they may collate the data and present it using graphs or charts. Production projects may include student newspapers, bulletin boards, collages, poster sessions, and videos. Performance projects may include skits, oral presentations, and fashion shows. In encounter projects, students are required to find native English speakers outside of school and interview them on a particular subject. Based on the numerous encounter projects we have participated in while commuting in Tokyo, it appears as if many teachers are setting these projects without adequately preparing their students. We also wonder how the students conducting these encounter projects are using and reflecting on the information that they gather. Correspondence projects might involve contacting a school from another country and writing letters back and forth between classes. Finally, organisational projects might involve the planning and formation of a club.

It is important to note that projects may combine the types listed above. Many of the projects done at our school are examples of this. This year our students researched an ancient civilisation of their choice, produced a poster, and finally orally presented their work in a poster session format. A similar project that required students to develop projects based on themes found in *Oliver Twist* can be viewed on: <home.att.ne.jp/omega/worldschool/childlabor/childlabormain.htm>. Other projects have included students surveying their classmates, producing graphs illustrating their findings, and then making an oral presentation. Other survey projects have involved the students encountering international students visiting the school.

Implementing projects

According to Haines (1989), the implementation of projects will depend on how you view them. If you see projects as extensions of more traditionally based language work (i.e. as an extension of PPP) then projects may be undertaken after completing a unit of study from your syllabus. This type of project work would likely be short and intensive, possibly spanning over a week of lessons. However, if you view projects as interrelated to the other activities designated by the syllabus, then you may carry project work over a term, taking a lesson or two a week to focus on the project. Stoller (2002) cites models for implementing project work proposed by Fried-Booth (1986), Haines (1989), and Sheppard and Stoller (1995). The problem with much of the literature on project work is that it assumes a great deal of time. The reality in Japan is that many oral communication classes are held just once or twice a week. Even JTEs, who often have more contact hours than NETs, may find that curriculum demands leave little time for developing projects.

A mini-project implemented by Stout was successfully carried out in three fifty-minute lessons. The textbook for the course was *Get real 3* by Buckingham and Craven (2002). The mini-project was based on a suggestion in Willis (1996). Stout changed the order of the PPP approach by starting with the production stage. In the first lesson students were instructed to create a restaurant skit using the textbook, the accompanying CD, and a handout listing various formal and informal conversation gambits. A portable stereo was set up in the classroom and students utilised the CD freely while writing their skits. In the second lesson students performed their skits. The performances were structured so that two

groups were performing and two groups were watching and evaluating. The groups were rotated so that each group had an opportunity to perform in front of all their classmates. Each group performed their skit three times. During the performance Stout noted areas where the students were successful and areas where they needed improvement. In the final lesson Stout asked the students to reflect on their skits. Following this he presented the notes he had made during the performances.

Before we outline the Heilman model we would like to emphasise the importance of collaboration between teachers and administrative staff. Involving colleagues in projects increases the amount of time that can be spent on them. NETs teaching an oral communication class once a week can increase the amount of time spent on projects by involving grammar and reading teachers. Administrative staff members are invaluable for locating materials and space when needed. Furthermore, collaboration increases the knowledge that teachers have of what their colleagues are doing, knowledge that is often lacking despite the fact that these teachers are members of the same department. Collaboration has been an essential part of the success we have had in implementing project work at our school.

The Heilman model

Heilman has developed a model for implementing project work that incorporates aspects of the models previously mentioned and also draws on his experience implementing project work in Japanese high schools. We have generally used Heilman's model for supplementary projects, that is, projects that are not tied to the textbook. Students are free to explore any topic in any way they choose. We have used the model both for projects than span the length of an academic term and also short sequences of lessons, sometimes as few as three. The stages of the model are outlined below.

Stage 1: Students and teacher generate ideas and outline project.

Prior to implementing the project you should decide what groupings will be allowed and how much input students will have in the decision making process. The number of students involved in the project will affect the possible outcomes because some projects require more than 1 person—plays and video projects for example. Also you should make a list of possible themes and types of projects that your students are capable of doing. Materials and resources need to be considered as well. Students often want to attempt projects requiring materials and resources unavailable to them.

Once you are ready to introduce the project, provide students with samples of projects they may want to complete. Show projects that were exceptionally well done in order to set an expectation, spark their interest, and motivate them. Depending on your class you may decide to allow a variety of groupings. You may also decide to allow a variety of project types. This, in fact, is the norm for us when we implement supplementary projects. At this stage, classroom activities generally take the form of brainstorming and listing. Check to ensure that there is no duplication between projects. In projects involving more than one individual, check that roles have been defined and that each student will participate equally. Finally, set criteria for completion and evaluation of projects. Deadlines need to

be set for each stage. Again, these can be either negotiated, or set by you. In a project implemented by Stout students developed their own scoring rubric for an oral presentation. Both Stout and the students used this rubric.

Stage 2: Students develop a visualisation of the project

Typically students storyboard their projects at this stage. Students can make mind maps as well. Here you need to consider how this can be developed into a communicative task. You could do this by having one student explain his conceptual idea and the other creating a visual representation. This gives the exercise a purpose for language use. You might also give each student a different coloured marker to ensure equal participation.

Stage 3: Research and written aspect

At this stage you need to consider the various skills that can be developed. The following is a list of skills that might be appropriate:

- Using an Internet search engine
- Reading skills including skimming and scanning
- Writing skills including summarising
- For surveys: communication strategies including opening and closing a conversation, asking for clarification, and polite interruption

A controversial aspect of this stage is the question of how much class time students should be given to produce their projects. Many teachers believe that students should produce their projects as homework. However, students do not always do homework and teachers that plan lessons based upon the expectation that students will come to class prepared should always have a back-up lesson prepared.

Stage 4: Preparation/rehearsal day(s)

Students utilize this time to refine their projects for presentation. Presentations skills should be addressed during this phase of the projects. At this stage you should make a list of presentations skills you see as important for project work. Again, you may decide to have students contribute here.

Stage 5: Project presentations or performances

This stage may include teacher, peer, and self-evaluation. Peer evaluation can be beneficial in that it ensures students are attentive during all presentations. However, the reliability of the evaluations may be questionable, as some students will tend to score students they are familiar with higher than those they do not know well. Furthermore, there is the question of validity. Students may not accept this type of evaluation. Evaluation is only effective if it is deemed acceptable by both the students and the teacher (Lee 2000). Nevertheless, self-evaluations are an excellent transition into stage six.

Stage 6: Reflection on the project

In this final stage, students reflect in writing on different aspects of the project. This could be done verbally, but it has been our experience that students are more willing to express

their true beliefs in writing, more so than in front of a group. It is also beneficial to ask students to submit their reflections anonymously. In order to facilitate this for the students you need to guide them towards the things you think that they should be considering when reflecting on their projects. Here is a list of possibilities:

- The amount of English they used throughout the project

- The things that they learned while doing the project, in terms of both the content and English itself

- Things they would do differently if they were to do the project again

- Recommendations to the teacher

Conclusion

In this paper we have proposed and outlined a model for putting projects into practice. We have suggested a number of project types and provided examples of projects implemented at our school. This paper and the workshop that we conducted at the 2004 JALT National Conference are our attempts to share our experience with other teachers. While we acknowledge that our teaching and learning environment is unique, we believe that projects can be incorporated into any classroom. This is possible using the model we have provided, along with patience, perseverance, and imagination. In conclusion we cannot emphasise enough the amount of positive feedback we have received from students participating in projects. At the end of every term, students cite project work as their favourite part of the course and they recommend that more project work be incorporated into our classes. We hope that you enjoy success with projects too.

Acknowledgements

References

Buckingham, A., & Craven, M. (2002). *Get real 3* student book. Tokyo: Macmillan Language House.

Haines, S. (1989). *Projects for the EFL classroom*. Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Lee, J. (2000). *Tasks and communicating in language classrooms*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Stoller, F. (2002). Project work: a means to promote language and content. In J.C. Richards & W.A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: an anthology of current practice* (pp. 107-119). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Essex: Pearson Education.