

Virtual Travel Project Matrix for College Students

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Language Learning for Life

The purpose of this paper is to share ideas for creating a virtual travel project for college students in order to promote collaborative learning. Students research various resources, produce virtual travel plans, and give presentations. They are assigned to include necessary conversation performances in various situations. In our classrooms last year, we found that there was a surprising level of student originality and creativity in a multidimensional matrix. The destinations the students chose to visit ranged from real cities and countries to imaginary ones such as Santa Claus' country and Harry Potter's school. We noticed their active involvement in the process of doing the project. A collaborative project using authentic materials stimulates student interests and multiple intelligences. Therefore it accelerates their autonomous learning and cultivates a global perspectives at the same time.

この論文の目的は、大学生が共同学習により仮想旅行計画を設計するアイデアを紹介することです。学生は種々の資料を探し、仮想旅行を計画立案し、発表するのです。いろいろの場面で必要となる英会話を演じることが求められます。昨年度の私の教室では多面的に展開された学生たちの独創性や想像力に驚かされました。学生たちの選んだ訪問地は実在する都市や国々からサンタクロースの国やハリーポッターの魔法学校のような空想の目的地にまで及びました。このプロジェクトをしている課程で学生たちの積極的な没頭ぶりを観察しました。本物の資料を使用しての共同プロジェクトは学生の興味を掻き立て、自分の持っているいろいろの知能を呼び覚まさせます。従って学生の自発的学習を加速させ、同時に地球規模での物の観方も養います。

This paper introduces how a virtual travel project in college EFL classrooms in Japan helps students attain integrated skills in English. Student needs for travel conversation, authentic materials, and collaborative learning are the three pillars of the project. Many students have already experienced overseas travel and most students want to travel overseas in the near future. Authentic materials like Internet resources, brochures from travel agencies, and travel guidebooks are the tools for inducing students to become active and autonomous learners. Students learn from other students in a group and share their knowledge with others. They realize that “four heads are better than one” (Kinsella, 1996, p. 24).

Related Literature

Murphey suggests that working, learning, and living in a group is a central feature of life (2003). Therefore we attempted to show that “working and learning in a group” through this project could be an effective way to learn.

McDonnell (1992) states that one of the aims of education is to assist students to achieve a high degree of language competency so that they may achieve personal

fulfillment, reach their potential, and participate in society in a meaningful way. Here we realize that teacher's role is as an assistant, or a navigator for students to reach that goal. He also explains that "language is learned when it is real, natural, whole, sensible, interesting, relevant, purposeful, part of a real event, accessible to the learner, and allows for learner choice" (McDonell, 1992, p. 55). We think that through the travel project, language could be learned using authentic, purposeful materials that students choose.

As an effective way to attain a high level of achievement, group work or cooperative learning is also advocated by many other language teaching specialists (Kagan & Kagan, 1994; Kluge, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Sharan and Sharan (1992) state that "information is found, examined, discussed, molded, interpreted and summarized by students, albeit with the teacher's help and guidance, but not by the teacher" (p. 13). Here we recognize the teacher's role again as an assistant or a pilot.

Servetler (1999) refers to cooperative learning and learner-centered projects: positive interdependence and individual accountability are crucial. His goal is to increase students' enthusiasm for English and to enable them to activate their English language skills. This statement is also a spur for us to undertake the cooperative and learner-centered project.

Fried-Booth (2002) states that travel projects offer a great deal of potentials. Her detailed explanation for travel projects is a useful resource when teachers plan to apply this project. Examples of procedure introduced are helpful.

Project Procedure

Participants in this project were 170 students of early childhood education at Izumi Junior College in Kanagawa prefecture. About three weeks in advance, students were told to divide themselves into groups of three or four. Each group was assigned to create a tour plan, including a narrative and a dialogue. This might comprise the consolidation and application of a travel conversation in the course book. For a twenty minute presentation, each group could choose any country and period of time for travel, using any medium such as posters, video, pictures, music, art and craft, etc.

Students were informed that their performance in the project would be reflected in the end-of-semester grading. They were also advised to look for resources at libraries, bookstores, embassies, and on the Internet. Each group had to turn in a summary of the tour before the presentation.

On the presentation day(s), classmates did peer evaluation. Presenters wrote their reflections and other students commented on the tour. Writing comments is important also in terms of class management because the audience must listen carefully and quietly to other presentations.

Project Evaluation Criteria

Peer-evaluation criteria included the following four points:

- Has sufficient information for the trip been collected as a whole?
- Is the guiding or featured point clear regarding the place, history, traditions, climate, transportation, accommodation, sightseeing spots, local food, entertainment, music, etc.?

- Is English used and well-practiced?
- Is the presentation attractive enough to be used as a virtual tour?

Variety of Student Work

We noticed student work could be classified in three dimensions extended from the matrix.

1. Virtual travel in the real world, like travel to Australia, Canada, China, Italy, Greece, the U.K., the U.S.A., or some real cities in foreign countries. There were guided tours, group tours, and individual tours. One travel group, which led a tour in Britain, brought real home-baked scones to all their classmates.
2. Virtual travel to the world of fiction, like trips to *Harry Potter*'s Hogwarts magic school, Santa Claus' country, Prince Edward Island as per *Anne of Green Gables*, Rome tracing spots that appeared in the film of *Roman Holidays*. A fabulous animal zoo tour and a dream trip to sweets land were totally original creations.
3. Time travel to the past or to the future. One trip to the past world included visits to see the hobgoblins of the *Edo* Period. Their means of transportation was, of course, a time machine. Honeymoon tours dealt with future events.

Questionnaire Results (Quantitative)

A questionnaire was administered to assess student reaction to the project.

N=56

1. Was the virtual trip project interesting?

Yes = 89.3%

Yes a little = 5.4%

No = 1.9%

No answer = 12.5%

2. Was the virtual trip project helpful for reviewing what you have studied in the course book?

Yes = 78.6%

Yes a little = 10.7%

No = 1.9%

No answer = 10.7%

3. What do you think about collaborating in writing a project? (Open-ended question)

*Good points:

Enjoyed = 17.6%

Cooperated = 39.3%

More information collected = 12.5%

Consulted each other = 10.7%

Four heads are better than one.= 10.7%

Shared responsibility = 1.9%

Felt uninhibited at presentation = 3.6%

Good idea = 3.6%

*Bad points:

Hard to find time to do the project outside the classroom = 12.5%

Not enough time in class = 7.1%

Depended on other members = 7.1%

4. Are there any changes in your view toward the country (or the cities) you have researched for?

Students changed their view toward the researched country = 44.6%.

More knowledge made students understand the target country better.

5. What resource did you use for references?

Pamphlet from travel agencies = 35.7%

Internet = 50.0%

Travel guidebooks = 44.6%

Encyclopedia = 5.4%

Other resource = 10.7%

No answer = 10.7%

- There were a lot of students who used two to three resources.
- The most used resource was the Internet.

Students' Reflections from Open-ended Question (Qualitative)

An open-ended question was also asked to assess student interest in the project.

N=170

Most of the students wrote that they enjoyed the project and were impressed by the other groups' creative ideas. Many wrote that through the presentations and the virtual tours, they learned better how to use travel conversation in English. They also wrote that they found there were cultural differences in the world. They seemed to gain a sense of fulfillment and achievement.

Findings

1. As a whole, the travel project induced students' active participation in the class and an autonomous attitude in language learning as well.
2. Students came up with various ideas, making full use of their multiple intelligences. Their imagination and creativity went far beyond our expectations.
3. Student reflections support our concept of using group project work because many students expressed feelings of achievement and fulfillment.
4. This project also helped to stimulate student interest in foreign countries. This could be the first step toward expanding global perspective.

Conclusion

We observed our students' active involvement in the process of doing the project in the classrooms. In the term questionnaire many students state that they became interested in collaborative research and presentation and that the autonomous study gave them a feeling of learner independence. Therefore this virtual travel project could be effective and applicable in any EFL classroom at colleges regardless of class size and level of students.

Implications for Future Research

In future projects some kind of feedback to the students may be needed. One way to do this is to give them an opportunity to read their peer evaluations on the presentation and share them in each group. This will help students reflect on their own presentation and prepare a better one in the future. For this purpose we may have to organize the project schedule with some extra time reserved.

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