

Poster Presentations and Language Teaching

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Reference Data:

Jost, N. (2005). Poster Presentations and Language Teaching. In K. Bradford-Watts, C. Ikeguchi, & M. Swanson (Eds.) *JALT2004 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

This paper looks at how poster presentations can be used to help university students further develop their communicative skills in the target language and to help them investigate content areas of personal interest.

この論文は、大学生の英語によるコミュニケーション・スキルとプレゼンテーション能力の向上のため、いかに効果的にポスター・プレゼンテーションをすべきかを提示している。

In the past decade, there has been a tremendous shift toward communicative language instruction here in Japan. This is reflected in methodologies practiced in the classroom as well as in the design of course books (see Tonky '96; Templin 97). The obvious aim of communicative language instruction is to help students become adept at using the target language, and, needless to say, there has been a considerable amount of debate on how best to achieve this. In the classroom, communicative language instruction takes on many forms. The most successful communicative classrooms are indeed those that take the students' interest into consideration and those that are more authentic in nature. This paper shows how to integrate student interests with language instruction through poster presentations. It will go through the steps involved in having students make poster presentations.

Aim of poster sessions in the classroom

There are a number of aims for poster sessions. The primary aim is to help students develop better communicative skills using English in a more authentic context. Secondary aims include the understanding of new content areas and developing better group dynamics. Clearly, students who have a real interest in the material being covered will be self-motivated and will work collectively to achieve the goal of successfully presenting their material. The following is a list of primary and secondary aims:

Linguistic aims

1. to develop fluency in English
2. to improve vocabulary in a particular content area
3. to see the value of using English as a vehicle for communication
4. to improve research skills
5. to improve reading skills
6. to improve presentation skills
7. to appreciate the English language

Content aims

1. to understand a certain content area in more detail
2. to investigate something that is of real interest
3. to have a desire to present research findings
4. to have a feeling of accomplishment

Group dynamics

1. to work together
2. to practice brain storming
3. to learn organizational skills
4. to further develop academic interests
5. to learn planning skills
6. to learn the steps involved in project
7. to improve classroom rapport

Step 1: Project overview

For university students, working on tasks in pairs or in groups is not a new concept. In fact, success in communicative language instruction depends on interaction and input (see Hatch 1978). Yet, the idea of using poster presentations for language acquisition is new to most students. Thus, the students need to be able to conceptualize what exactly a poster presentation is and, particularly, what goals the teacher has in mind for language acquisition and use. This would, of course, include the instructor's policy on a number of issues. The teacher will need to articulate the amount of L1 allowed during in-class-presentation time, for instance. Students also need to understand the importance of the content; that it should be of genuine interest and of importance to all students. Additionally, the time schedules, materials needed and all other details need to be articulated at this time as to avoid confusion later on. This can all be explicated in the form a short lecture. The students then will be able to view a demonstration of a poster presentation with clearer understanding in mind.

Step 2: Demonstration

Perhaps the most important aspect of using poster presentations for language instruction is a model demonstration by the instructor. By providing an authentic poster session, the students will be able to create a mental map of what a poster session is, and will be able to understand how ideas are presented in logical way. Additionally, they will be able to see how a poster should be designed; they will be able to see how to use comprehensible language; and, they will be able to see how to introduce of

new lexical items or concepts unique to the poster session. Finally, they will be able to learn indirectly other aspects such as time management, poster design, and audience interaction. In short, a model demonstration sets the foundation for successful posters presentations.

Those who have never attended a poster session at an academic conference or other venue may benefit by doing a Google search on the Internet. This will produce various sites that provide examples on the many issues related to poster sessions. Some of the sites offer insight on to have greater success with a poster sessions and provide on practical information for the beginner. Others provide basic templates of posters with specific aims and rationales detailed.

Step 3: Initial planning and out-of-class research

In order for the students to start working on their posters, they must first be divided into groups of four or five. Once they have decided on their groups, they can start the process of coming up with ideas for their posters. Here, brainstorming techniques can help them decided on what theme best suits their interests. After a consensus has been reached, the students can decide on what initial research needs to be done and who will be responsible for the different areas of research. They also decide on what work can be done inside of class and what work has to be done outside of class. This will allow them to use their time most effectively.

Step 4: In-class preparations

The in-class preparation time allows students and teacher work together to insure that their projects are going according to plan. As poster presentations are new to most students, there is a certain amount of insecurity about how to proceed with the actual design of the poster and how to plan for the presentations. Here the teacher can talk to the individual groups and offer suggestion based on the demonstration given in the previous lesson. During this phase of the project, there is a tendency for students to use the L1. They have become interested in their projects and feel that their L1 helps them use their time most efficiently. The instructor has to make sure that the students work mostly in the target language by encouraging them and offer advice on to use the target language.

Step 5: Poster Presentations

The actual presentation phase of the project is the most rewarding for the students. The poster presentation will run concurrently; that is, four or five presentations will be going on at the same time. Thus, two or three students from each group need to be stationed at their posters and will wait for other students to come up to listen to them give a presentation. The other students from the group will have the chance to view different posters and to listen to the presentations. As there is no time schedule set up, students will feel a little uncertain as what to do. Here the teacher can direct the students to move on to other presentations once it seems they have finished a presentation. They will then have better understanding of how to move about freely to the different sessions. Once the students have viewed a few

presentations, they return to their own poster to change with students who have just finished giving presentations. This is repeated until all students have listened to all presentations and all students have given their presentation at least once or twice. After the presentations are finished, the students will have a sense of accomplishment and have learned the skill of making poster presentations.

Step 6: Evaluation and feedback

Students are required to have a journal in which they keep track of their progress throughout the project. This notebook is used to help evaluate their work. Students are also required to evaluate the other posters, which they included in their journals. Finally, each student receives an evaluation sheet directly from the teacher. Perhaps, more important than that is the immediate feedback the teacher gives the students on the presentation day. The instructor gives each group some feedback on their posters and on their presentations in front of the whole class. The feedback is concerned with the positive aspects and suggests changes for improvement. The aim of the evaluation and feedback is to offer encouragement.

Project summary

The above step-by-step paradigm is designed to provide an overview on how poster sessions can be used to help facilitate foreign language instruction at the university level. It also is designed to help students further their interest in the target as well as in specific content areas. The list of primary and secondary aims does not strive to be conclusive

nor is it designed to be restrictive. Rather, it is general enough to further stimulate the instructor on what his/her own aims should be. Teaching style; teaching context; student motivation; course objectives; and administrative constraints--are all factors that will influence the instructor in deciding what aims are most applicable to a poster session. No one paradigm will work for all.

Conclusion

Communicative language instruction has taken on many forms in Japan. No one form has gained dominance. Yet, the use of poster sessions has provided an element of authenticity and allows for greater learner autonomy. It allows students to further their understanding of content areas and to work with their peers in a non-threatening environment. Most importantly, however, poster presentations help students further their communicative skills and gives them confidence to speak in the target language.

References

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