Implementing Presentations in University Classrooms

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This paper is based on a demonstration of materials given at PAC3 at JALT 2001. It presents three main benefits derived from the introduction of presentation courses at the university level. The authors argue that presentation courses develop learner autonomy and interdependence, encourage critical thinking, and build skills through reinforcement, integration, guidance, and practice. Explanations of how students learn and examples of two of the materials presented in the demonstration are also included.

本稿は２００１年度JALTPAC3に於いて発表された教材に基づいて著述されたものであり、実際に大学レベルでプレゼンテーションコースを導入した結果得られた三つの利点を紹介している。プレゼンテーションコースでは、学生は自主性、学生間の相互援助精神を身に付け、クリティカル・シンキングを促進し、補強、統合、指導、実習によってスキルを築き上げていく、と著者は論ずる。本稿には学習方法の解説とデモンストレーションで発表された教材の二例も含まれている。

A challenge often faced by language teachers and curriculum designers in Japan is the reluctance of students to actively engage in their own

language learning (Azuma et al., 1980; Doi, 1974). Students' active language learning is also inhibited by a reluctance to criticize their peers (Clancy, 1986; Barnlund, 1975). In a demonstration at PAC3 at JALT 2001, the authors suggested that university courses in oral presentation can help to overcome both these challenges. This paper outlines key areas of presentation courses and discusses three potential benefits. The authors have developed and taught two presentation courses in an integrated skills program at a medium-sized private university. Based on this experience, and with the guidance of student feedback, surveys, observations, and other inquiry, the authors believe that most Japanese university students would benefit from concerted effort on presentations. We believe that presentation courses develop learner autonomy and interdependence, encourage critical thinking, and build skills through reinforcement, integration, guidance, and practice.

Peer and self-evaluation in presentation courses encourages learners to depend less on their teacher and more on themselves and each other. This autonomy not only encourages them to concentrate effectively on their learning (as advocated by Brajchich, 2000; Bronner, 2000; Cummins, 1986; and Freire, 1970, 1985, 1998) but also reduces the work load for the teacher. To make autonomous evaluation effective, it must start early. From the very beginning of a course, students should be required to engage in peer and self evaluation, but this initial evaluation should be based on a limited number of simplified and concrete criteria. Even at this point though, the evaluation criteria should be established before the presentations, understood clearly by the students, and clearly stated on the feedback devices. Later, as their comfort with the process and their ability to honestly evaluate their peers improve, students become capable of more complex feedback using a wider variety of criteria. Our inquiry has shown that students are most satisfied with written feedback completed outside of class. Students also value and benefit from sharing their evaluations orally in subsequent class meetings. Although giving and receiving such evaluation can be radically different from students' previous experience, they respond well, quickly learning to analyze their own performance and give constructive feedback to peers. Some of the following criteria are commonly elicited, agreed upon, and then responded to, in all forms of feedback (teacher, self, and peer):

- performance skills (eye contact, volume, intonation, clarity, body language)
- content (organization, depth, interest, relevance, support)
- question and answer (clarification, quality of response, engagement)
- audience involvement (variety, consistency, effectiveness)

- audio-visual aids (language accuracy, clarity, interest, implementation)

Students report that they find it much easier to write critical comments when they are focused on fixed criteria. The authors have found that such criteria reduce tendencies to evaluate peers subjectively. To facilitate objectivity, presentations are videotaped for students to review later. Finally, we have found the self and peer evaluations to be effective in encouraging weaker students to improve their grade with careful, detailed evaluations. Appendix 1 is an example of a student's evaluation.

Development in critical thinking is another main benefit of presentation courses. First, students commit themselves to the ongoing and maturing use of peer evaluation, as mentioned above. By observing the "live" and taped presentations, by reflecting on their peers' performance, and through sharing their evaluations in class, students invest themselves in their classmates' progress. They develop from a "She was a wonderful speaker—it was so fast, I understood nothing," attitude, to a much more critical and constructive approach. As ensuring teammates' success becomes more important, students begin to analyze performances more carefully and write feedback more constructively, realizing that this is the best way to improve their partners' skills and abilities. The second way in which we demand

critical thinking skills is through research. We require students to incorporate a variety of outside support in their presentations. Like the peer evaluation skills, these research skills are developed gradually, with appropriate scaffolding. Requirements start from a single newspaper article in the first presentation to a final project which requires a "variety of secondary and primary outside sources, including appropriate facts and statistics from scholarly journals." Students move from regarding, "the internet," as a suitable answer to "What are your sources?" to a much more enquiring, critical stance. They go from a passive acceptance that juvenile crime is spiraling out of control, to the realization that youth crime figures are, in fact, dropping. They may at first believe Health Ministry figures about HIV infection rates in Japan until they discover much more alarming and reliable statistics from non-governmental groups. In this way, students begin to develop an awareness of positions adopted by government, media, and other groups, the reasons for these positions, and a more critical attitude towards them. They come to trust their own abilities to distinguish fact from hearsay, searching for reliable alternative sources of information to inform their presentations. The final benefit of critical thinking arises later in students' academic careers. Students become not only more effective presenters in other courses, but also much more willing and able to criticize the content and teaching styles of other university

courses.

As well as encouraging autonomy and critical thinking, presentation courses also develop essential academic skills. Throughout the two courses, we introduce a variety of skills that not only help students give effective presentations, but also complement the content of their other courses. The organizational skills demanded in presentations overlap those required in writing courses, for example. For all the skills, students are never just given the guide sheet. Rather, they brainstorm individually, consolidate their suggestions, and practice the skills—all before receiving the guide. Skills that we introduce include rhetorical organization patterns, topic narrowing, paraphrasing, research material synthesis, and question and answer skills. Among the skills we insist upon, "audience involvement" has proven very effective. Like all the other skills, the ultimate goal is clear, informative, and engaging communication. By being engaged, or in some cases neglected, students experience the need for active involvement of the audience. Appendix 2 shows the latest incarnation of this set of skills that students have come up with.

Presentation courses can help students learn independently, think critically, and develop academic skills. These three abilities are all fundamental to the students' linguistic and academic development, complementing those learned in their other courses. Teaching this course, therefore, is very satisfying. As they evaluate and help their peers, students enhance their own understanding of presentations. When they develop research and critical thinking skills as well as the ability to present well, they are gaining confidence for the rest of their university life and beyond. And as we teach the course, we too are learning more about our own cultural and educational contexts and the value of our work. The multiplicity of learning levels makes for a rich and rewarding experience for all involved.

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Appendix 1

Peer Evaluation written by Maki Hokkaido
For Taro Kanto's Facts and Statistics Presentation, May 11, 2001
My team member's facts/statistics topic: divorce and marriage rates.

Section 1: Plusses
Taro did a good job in many ways. His voice was very clear, but maybe a little soft. I still think that most of us in the class understood him very well. When he did the audience involvement, I could tell that people were really interested in what he was talking about. Some people were confused but I think that is because they were not paying attention.

I know that Taro really wanted to improve his eye contact. He wrote that down as a big goal that he wants to accomplish in this class and I think he was able to have very good eye contact. He could also use his notes very well. I mean he did not use them very much at all.

The organization was very good. It was easy to see what Taro was going to talk about and understand his main points. Especially his conclusion was very strong. I think that everyone in the audience understood exactly what he wanted to say at that point.

Some students just used Japan Times articles but Taro had official Japan facts and statistics which was very good. I think that another goal that Taro did well was using the AV well. He used power point very smoothly and effectively.

Section 2: Minuses
First of all I want to say that I think Taro did a very good job with this speech. I think that he is going to be a very professional speaker in the future. Still though, there were some things that I think he should try to improve. The biggest problem was posture and body language. Taro was very hard and frozen during his speech. This was a big problem, I think. I know that when he was practicing he was much more relaxed but during this speech on May 11, he was not natural at all.

I think his voice was clear but not loud enough. I was sitting in front of the class so I could hear him clearly but I think that anyone sitting in the back could not hear him clearly at all. I think that he did not speak loudly at all.

I think that he did connect his facts to the previous speaker but I don't know what connection he had to the other speakers. It seems that the group did not really work together very smoothly.

Section 3: Remedies
The group needs to practice more to cooperate more smoothly.
I should practice with Taro to make him speak more loudly. I will keep helping him until he can speak very loudly.

I will say to Taro that his AI should not involve me. I am very busy to write notes so I do not want to do AI during his speech.

I think that he will be a great speaker if he practices more, speaks more loudly, and continues to improve other things.

Appendix 2
Fall 2000 Audience Involvement (AI) Skills EC2 Presentation

Technique	How to Do It	Works in	Examples
survey	• done by most of the audience earlier • report answers clearly	any speech	"Last week, I interviewed each of you about New Religions. Here is a short summary of what you reported . . . "
voting	• keep it short and easy to understand • say the answer out loud after counting	any speech	"OK, how many of you think that Shinki bus service is good? Please raise your hand . . . I see . . . only two people."
quiz	• hand out questions before speech • ask for answers	contro-versial speech	"Please turn the piece of paper over. Now, mark true or false for each of the three statements on the paper."
easy question	• use rarely • wait for answer, repeat to the audience	fun speech	"Ken, what is your favorite food?" "Toshi, which is better for night life, Sanda or Sannomiya?"
demonstration	• practice carefully • keep it short and active	fun, how-to speech	"Taro, please pour the water in the bowl. Then Ai, please stir it. Finally, Gregory, taste the mix."
PowerPoint	• audience can be asked to predict slides • audience must act	medium or long speech	"On the next slide, we will have three reasons why studying English is a waste of time. What is one reason?"
role play	• explain task clearly • prepare participants before the speech	medium or long speech	"I have been talking about how to ask directions. Now, Kimiko, please come up and ask directions to the nearest store—In English."
pair work	• keep task simple • ask for responses	medium speech 4-6 min	"Now, with the person sitting next to you, please discuss why drugs are so common in the Olympics."
group work	• keep groups small (3 or 4 people) • organize quickly	serious, long speech	"Throughout this speech, I have been discussing the Olympics. Now, review how the Olympics are changing."