

The Web Page Design Project: A classroom activity

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In this paper, I introduce a practical classroom activity called the "Web Page Design Project" which is used with college students majoring in Graphic Design. The students engaged in this project created their own Home Page (HP) on the web and presented their work and diaries accompanied by an English translation. During the semester, the students were requested to implement their English on the Internet and receive feedback from viewers.

本発表では、"Web Page Design Project"と呼ばれるクラスルームアクティビティを紹介する。対象として、日本大学生（デザイン科）の学生を用い、教養英語の時間にオンラインのコンピュータを使って、ホームページの作成を試みた。学生の専攻であるグラフィック・デザインを題材にし、学生は、各々の作品をホームページ上に載せ、英語の解説をつけた。学生側の授業の目標として、作品についての広く国内外からの質問や感想に英語で回答する事が望まれた。当該学期中は、主にインターネット英語を中心に学習し、実際にホームページ作成に役立つように講義内容を精選した。講義最終日には、学生側からの当該授業に対する意見・感想を自由記述法により集めた。学生からの反応は、総じて、当該授業に積極的に参加したという回答が得られた。

The integration of computers into the learning process has become a standard procedure in most academic formats. Especially, the Internet has played a role, not only as unlimited research resource, but also as communication media in practical educational settings. By using online computers, students can access any information related to their classroom assignments and exchange ideas with people from all over the world. In language learning, both teachers and students have had many chances to use the target language as a communication tool in a classroom through the Internet. This pedagogical change does not always free us from boring textbook-based lessons, but in a sense of motivating those who want communicative language class, the change will be welcomed. This paper reports both the benefits and problems of students' web page designing in a language class, evaluations from students, and comments from participants at the *PAC3 at JALT 2001* conference in Kitakyushu, Japan.

Web Page Design Project

Teaching English in an institute in Tokyo, I have introduced a practical classroom activity called the "Web Page Design Project" which is used with college students majoring in Graphic Design. The students engaged in this project created their own Home Page (HP) on the web and presented their works and diaries accompanied by an English translation (See Appendix A). During

the semester, the students were requested to implement their English on the Internet and receive feedback from viewers.

Students

My students were majoring in graphic design, including computer graphics (CG). There were four fourth grade students ranging in age from 22 to 23. They had failed the English course, which is a required course, in the previous year, and they had to reregister in my English class to make up for the unit. In a sense, they had a strong motivation to pass the course in order to graduate. While the students' English proficiency was at the elementary level, they had special skills in building web sites and computer graphics.

Procedures and Context of Situation

Since we were not allowed to use on-line computers regularly, I usually conducted textbook-based lessons. They learned English on the Internet, net abbreviations, netiquette, and any kind of topic on the Internet. When we could use on-line computers, they updated their web sites and did classroom tasks. For example, they were requested to explore other web sites to find sites on computer graphics and design arts, or to answer the questions (e.g., *When did the Internet start? What does www mean?*). No matter whether we could use on-line computers or not, the students were requested to

write their diaries in English for around 15 minutes at the end of the class period. When they could not use on-line computers in class, the students updated their web sites after school at home. Those who did not have on-line computers at home updated their web sites in the school library. I visited their web pages at night and corrected their English on-line. If they had questions about my corrections, they could ask me by e-mail or by using a *Bulletin Board System* (BBS). Because of on-line computers, I could give them feedback immediately at a distance.

Problems

During the course, we encountered countless problems in conducting this project. In this section, I shall discuss the problems tackled in order to make this project much more feasible in class.

Students' Computer Media Literacy

Some students are quite familiar with web design, while others are not. The problems with students' computer media literacy can be understood as their individual differences, which depends on their interests or preferences toward multimedia. Since web-designing skill is professional and needs detailed knowledge of computer language, students' computer media literacy is one of the main concerns in my project. Fortunately, my students had a thorough knowledge of web page design,

and I did not have to worry about teaching *Hyper Text Markup Language* (HTML) or how to use software to build a home page. In the institutions where few student know HTML, both teachers and students would be requested to learn basic knowledge on computer languages and HTML before starting this project, but it is a time consuming task, and this project must be feasible in an English class. Therefore, this project might be limited to the schools of information technology or arts, including computer graphics, because the diffusion of online computers is relatively high and students have more chances to be familiar with web page design.

Maximum Class Size

When I think of managing class, small number of the students is much better. The same thing can be said in this project as a language classroom activity. In my case, I had only four students during the semesters (2001 spring and autumn), and I could give them detailed instructions and comments on their web pages. Though not all my students had the same level of web-designing knowledge, both my students and I could talk about layouts and details and complete our project because of small class size. However, this does not deny the possibility to do this project in a bigger class. Although my project is designed as an individual task at first, now I am thinking of doing this project as a group work.

Feedback from Viewers

Regarding feedback from viewers, there are two points to be noted. One is the number of the visitors and the other is students' privacy. First of all, the number of the viewers to the web page defines how much feedback the students get from the viewers and also defines the chances to communicate with the viewers in English. Concretely, feedback from viewers consists of not only the technical comments on web designing but also the corrections of the English the students used on their web page. This can be solved when they register at the famous search engines. Second, student's privacy means that their personal e-mail address can be disclosed. Recently, with the increasing diffusion of online personal computers, junk-mail such as commercial, indecent, and libelous e-mails have been sent to all of the users frequently, and the students have received these e-mails too.

Evaluations from Students

At the end of every semester, I gave the students a questionnaire to investigate what they thought about this classroom activity, the web page design project. As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, I have introduced this project since 2000. In this section, I shall report the students' responses to the questionnaire for those two years. I took charge of 12 students in 2000. Therefore, the total number of the students who answered the

questionnaire is 16. The questionnaire is as follows:

1. Do you think you need to learn English composition skills?
2. Do you think that it is much better to make a web site in English?
3. What do you think you require to make your own web site in English?

Results and Discussions

Regarding question 1: "*Do you think you need to learn English composition skills?*" twelve students responded, "yes" for the question and four students did not answer it. After studying English on the Internet, the students felt that not only spoken English but also written English is needed for real communication in this modern society. Regarding question 2: "*Do you think that it is much better to a make web site in English?*" eleven students responded, "yes" for the question and three students answered, "no". While most of the students agreed with the idea above, students who disagreed said that they were interested only in spoken English. A little contradiction can be seen here, but one of my students said to me after school, "It does not make any sense for me to make the web sites because the number of viewers is very small." Regarding question 3: "*What do you think that you need to make your own web site in English?*" the example answers are

as follows, “I was interested in making web pages and wanted to have chance to learn how to make web pages in English,” “Compared to the typical English class assignment, web page design project motive my will to study English and set up my own web page,” “Since the teachers’ age is close to our age, we can understand with each other.” The students’ favorable attitude toward this project might come from the results of three important operations: (a) negotiation, (b) continuation, and (c) a meaningful task in the process of introducing classroom activities (Nakayama, 2001a; van Raay, 1998). By negotiating with the students in class every time, we could share ideas about the target issues of web page design. This project is a continuous task, and the students could make sure how much progress they made immediately online and motivate themselves to complete the task (Nakayama, 2001b). Moreover, the web page designing was a meaningful task for the students majoring in graphic design because they wanted to present their work and get feedback from viewers.

Conclusion

In our activity, both students and the teacher were quite familiar with not only web page designing but also the goals for the project. This meant that this project had a limitation to some extent. The feasibility of this project in a classroom depends on the students’ and teachers’ computer media literacy because the problems discussed above have a close relationship to the media literacy as well as the three contributory factors (negotiation, continuation, and meaningful task). Overcoming these problems is not easy, but this is a challenge for developing new activities in the future.

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- Van Raay, P. (1998). The motivation approach. *The Language Teacher*, 22, 17-18.

Appendix 1

Students' Websites

- <http://www.geocities.co.jp/Playtown-Yoyo/4247/>
- <http://www.geocities.co.jp/CollegeLife-Library/8433/>
- <http://www.geocities.co.jp/Milano-Aoyama/3610/>
- <http://www17.xdsl.ne.jp/~mog/2a/ore/index.html>