

Figure 8

Dropdown Example

Student ID	Workshop	Writing Journal (20%)	1	2	3
	Done	20	o	o	o
	Done	20	o	o	x
	Done	20	o	o	x
	Done	20	o	o	o
	Not Yet	20	o	o	o
	Done	20	o	o	o
	Not Yet	0	o	o	o

## Conclusion

Based on a year's use of Google Sheets, the result of this shared grading policy and spreadsheet application has been overall positive to both the teacher and the students. Some students asked to resubmit low-scored assignments and take more responsibilities during class activities, potentially leading to higher overall grades. As a teacher, the ease of customizability and automation has influenced me to consider different ways of making grading more transparent, efficient, and interesting for the class. As such, I encourage teachers to try out this application, either as a viable replacement or as a supplement to their assessment needs.

## [JALT PRAXIS] YOUNGER LEARNERS



### Martin Sedaghat & Emily MacFarlane

The Younger Learners column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

Email: [jaltpubs.tlt.yl@jalt.org](mailto:jaltpubs.tlt.yl@jalt.org)

## Enhancing Creativity with Canva

Susan Bremner

Kwansei Gakuin University

Learning activities that incorporate creative processes can be a valuable tool for language teachers. This process can develop vital skills such as, “the ability to imagine new ways of solving problems, approaching challenges, making connections, or creating products” (Gallup, 2019, p. 6). In addition, an approach where creativity is “not based on a formula, but on thinking that relates to discovery and inquiry” (*ibid*) can greatly support this process. How can we, as language teachers, develop these skills in learners? Furthermore, as overcoming mistakes is an intrinsic part of the creative process (Robinson, 2006), how can we encourage a mindset that embraces taking risks and is open to making mistakes?

I believe the answers, in some part, can lie in using information and communication technology (ICT) in project-based activities. It is such a familiar presence in our lives, and I was especially interested in the implications on learning for a gener-

ation of ‘screenagers’. That is, young learners who have grown up with smart screens and have been exposed to interactive and complex visual content in everyday life. Another motivation for trialing ICT came through observing that the standard of work and engagement with paper-based projects varied greatly. This was not only influenced by English ability, but also interest and skill in creating graphic content.

I wanted to find out if using ICT would enhance creative freedom and skills, and how this would affect students’ engagement, their willingness to experiment with English, and if it could extend students’ capacity to use English in new ways. This article compares the use of the graphic design platform, Canva (<https://www.canva.com>) with a paper-based approach.

### What is Canva?

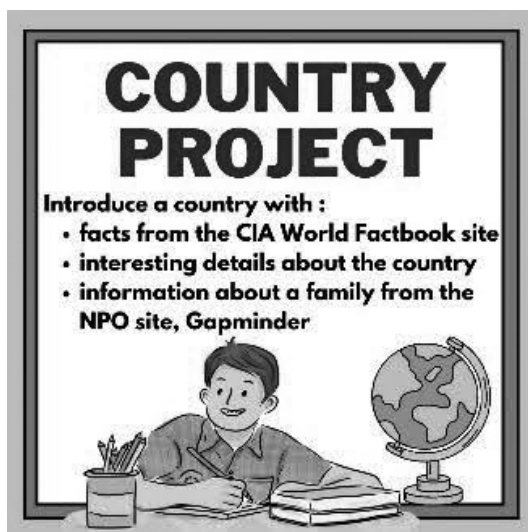
Canva is an online design platform that can be used to create visual content. It has a large range of templates and graphics that users choose from to produce documents, posters, social media posts, and presentation slides to name a few of the services offered. The templates are the ideal starting point for users to add personalised content and create unique designs. Canva is simple to use as the graphical user

interface contains a lot of familiar and drop-down menu-driven content. Most importantly, designs and changes are automatically saved, and work can be downloaded to a device and easily printed out.

In addition, Canva can be integrated with existing platforms such as PowerPoint and LMS such as LoLoNote. No signup is necessary if you want to explore the site as a one-time, free, with limited services user but I recommend you create a Teacher account. This is also free but has a wider range of features and allows you to organise your students into Class Folders. Students join your class and can create and keep working on their documents with an almost full range of features. Additionally, you are able to view, add comments and edit work which is extremely helpful for ongoing feedback. The quality of finished work is very professional, and I hoped students would be interested in using Canva as an alternative to paper when making visuals for their major project. However, as I was interested in the students' approach to the project, I wanted to give them the freedom to choose.

### The Country Project

Figure 1  
Information for the Project

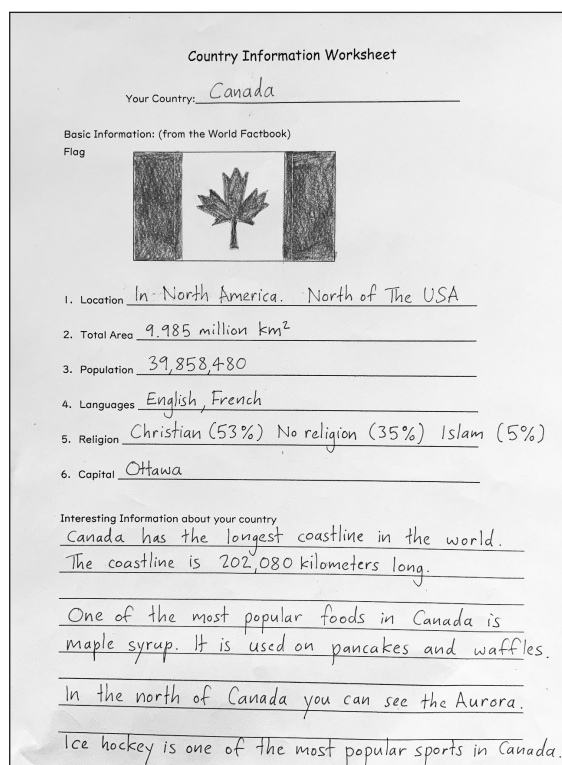


This project (see Figure 1) was conducted in a junior high third-year English class with a mix of mid-level beginner/intermediate English users (CEFR A2-B1). It followed a content-integrated language learning and student-centred approach which also drew on critical thinking and self-guided learning principles. The goal was for students to use English to introduce a country of their choice,

but one they may have limited knowledge of. For this, they could only choose a country represented on the NPO site, Gapminder (<https://www.gapminder.org/dollar-street>). This site was chosen as it introduces families from different backgrounds. Data collection and making posters to introduce their country were scaffolded over four fifty-minute lessons. The posters were then used for an in-class presentation, so they were integral to the overall project. Making the poster would test problem-solving skills as students must decide how to present the required information and to some degree, what to present as it was individual work with each student introducing a different country.

### Collecting Data

Figure 2  
Worksheet for Country Data



JALT2024 – Opportunity, Diversity, and Excellence  
Granship, Shizuoka  
November 15~18, 2024  
<https://jalt.org/conference/>

**Figure 3**  
Worksheet for Family Data

**Country Project – Family**

Find information about families living in the country you are researching.

Go to this link: <https://www.gapminder.org/dollar-street>

Choose a family to introduce and answer these questions.

- Who are the family members?  
*There is a husband and wife.*
- What kind of house do they live in?  
*They live in a big house with a garden. The house has three bedrooms.*
- What do they like/ What is their favorite thing?  
*They like the central location of their house. Their favorite items are photos of their grandchildren.*
- What is their next big plan?  
*Their next big plan is to buy a car.*
- What is their dream?  
*Their dream is to fly to Vietnam in a first-class flight.*
- What is their monthly income?  
*\$ 3,360*
- What were you surprised by?  
*I was surprised because they have many fridge magnets.*

Class    Number    Name

Students started by researching some basic information about the country such as population, capital city, and location (see Figure 2). For this they were restricted to using the CIA site, The World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook>) as it was a way of ensuring consistency. They also presented some interesting details of their choice about the country such as sports, food, or famous places. For this part of the research they could use any source as long as it was referenced. Finally, using Gapminder, they introduced a family from the country with details such as members, occupations, and homes (see Figure 3). As each student had access to an iPad this information was collected through individual internet-based research in lesson times. Except for the World Factbook and Gapminder sites, students could search online, and guidance was provided by teachers on which sites to look at and how to navigate these. Students were also shown how to include sources for the information they found.

**Making the Poster**

**Figure 4**  
Sample Paper Poster

**CANADA**

- LOCATION: North America, North of the USA
- TOTAL AREA: 9,985 million km<sup>2</sup> • CAPITAL: Ottawa
- POPULATION: 38,858,000 • MAJOR LANGUAGES: English 87%, French 12%
- MAJOR RELIGIONS: Christian 65%, Muslim 5%, No Religion 14.5%

**INTERESTING CANADIAN FACTS!**

One of the most popular foods in Canada is maple syrup. It is used on pancakes and waffles!

Ice hockey is one of the most popular sports in Canada.

Canada has the longest coastline. It is also known as the northern lights.

Canada has the most people in the world. It is 382,000 km<sup>2</sup> long!

**PEOPLE OF CANADA**

Bob is a couple who live in Canada. They are a husband and wife. The husband is 52, and the wife is 56. They live in a big house with a garden. They favorite thing about their house is the central location and their favorite items are photos of their grandchildren. They monthly income is \$3,360 which is below average in Canada.

**Figure 5**  
Sample Canva Poster

**Australia**

LOCATION: Oceania, between the Indian and the South Pacific Oceans

TOTAL AREA: 7,741,220 SQ KM

POPULATION: 26,473,055

CAPITAL CITY: Canberra

LANGUAGES: English 72%

RELIGION: Christian 61.5%, none 38%

**ANIMALS**  
There are many unique animals such as, Koala, Kangaroo, Platypus, Echidna and Wombat.

**INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS**  
Aboriginals have been in Australia for over 60,000 YEARS. This is their flag. Yellow means the Sun, Black means the Aboriginal people and Red means Earth.

**SELFIE**  
"Selfie" was first used in 2002 to describe a self-portrait photograph on an Australian internet page.

**A FAMILY FROM AUSTRALIA**  
This is a family of three. Mother, Father and Son. They live in a rented apartment with a small garden. Their dream is to build their own house in the future.

**Figure 6**  
Assessment Criteria

**ASSESSMENT FOR THE POSTER**

Check you have:

- Country's Name & Flag
- Location
- Total Area
- Population
- Languages
- Religion
- Capital City
- 3 or 4 Interesting Facts about the Country
- a picture of a Family & some information about them

Content:

- ① correct data
- ② appropriate titles, images and text
- ③ correct English

Design:

- ① clearly visible titles, images and text
- ② visually interesting and appealing



A paper poster (see Figure 4) and Canva poster (see Figure 5) samples were shown to introduce making the poster and requirements for assessment. To introduce Canva, I demonstrated how to sign in, choose a template, and how to use design tools. I avoided giving any design advice or detailing all the sites' design tools as I wanted students to explore the platform themselves. The instructions for the paper poster were simpler. I provided poster paper and art materials but also allowed images to be pasted on. In addition, students were encouraged to take their poster home and work on it. This was important for consistency as Canva can be accessed anytime.

Students were told there was no difference in assessment between the two options and were given a checklist of assessment criteria (see Figure 6). This included correct data and English, arranged with appropriate titles, text and images. Design advice was more general, that is, to make the information clearly visible and interesting to look at. I avoided highlighting any preference for either option in my instructions and most importantly, students were free to choose either option.

### Student Posters

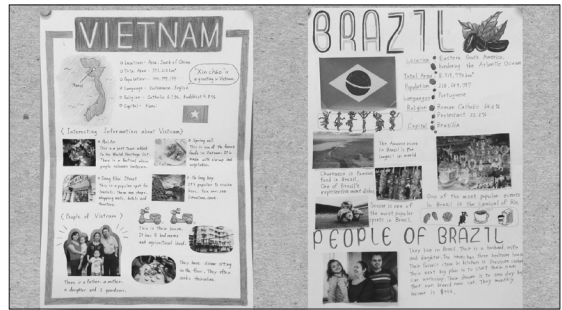
Figure 7  
Paper Posters



The Mexico poster (see Figure 7) was one of the few posters that was entirely hand-drawn. In it, construction and design were not fully thought out as the positioning and text are not clear and only some full sentences are used. However, there was some effort to include images and the required information was presented.

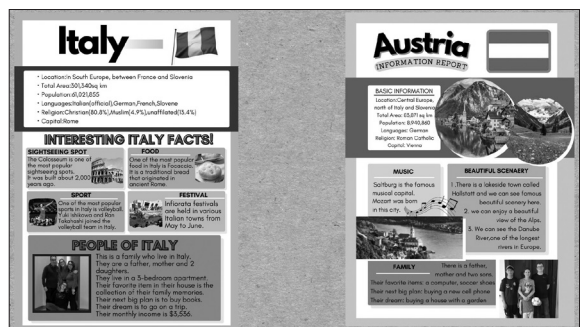
Most paper posters resembled the Spain poster on the right above (see Figure 7). Here, all the required information is included, with full explanations for the pictures which have been pasted on. It is sometimes difficult to read what is written and the design resembles the samples, but the student has produced a poster that can effectively introduce the country they researched.

Figure 8  
Above Average Paper Posters



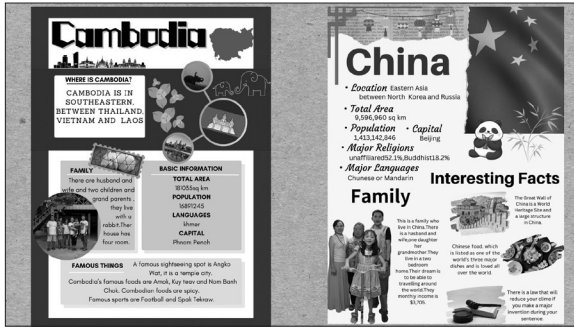
These posters above (see Figure 8) are good examples of how students have moved beyond replicating the samples and have fully engaged with the project. They are visually interesting, have fuller written explanations and hand-drawn embellishments. Although they also rely on pasted images, thought has gone into presenting these. The student's skill in drawing is evident and there are original solutions to arranging data. Overall, the balance between text and pictures is appropriate and information is presented very effectively.

Figure 9  
Canva Posters



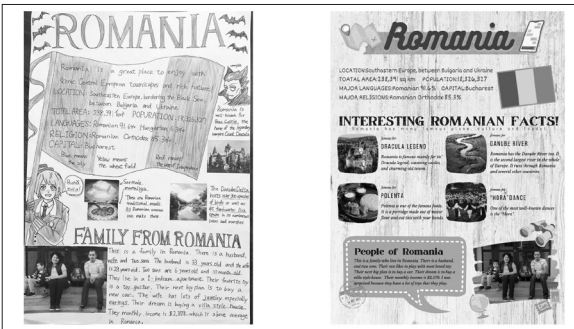
The first thing you will notice about these posters (see Figure 9) is how clear and colorful they are. As a digital image they are much sharper than photographs which makes reproducing them easier. These posters are typical of the posters produced using Canva. The information is precisely arranged with full explanations for the images. While the design and layout do not vary much from the samples, they show some experimentation with the design tools on Canva such as heading styles and additional graphics.

**Figure 10**  
Canva Poster Variations



These examples above (see Figure 10) show the greater range of individual variation that was produced by using Canva. Students took initiative and arranged information and images in their own way, using design tools to enhance individuality. The arrangement has completely changed from the samples with different heading styles and creative ways to insert graphics.

**Figure 11**  
A Comparison of Paper and Canva Posters



These posters (see Figure 11) are examples of how the two methods for poster construction can both produce exceptional results. They introduce the same country but are unique in design and content. Both show a high quality of work and although they introduce the same family, the text has differences. The poster on the left shows exceptional skill in illustration while the one on the right is designed to present information in a clear and engaging way.

**Observations**

I expected many students would choose the digital option as it was a new format and involved ICT. However, across the 240 students involved in this project, the choice was divided equally. Initially, this was a surprise but in subsequent classes I had the opportunity to observe and consult students about

the choices they made. I discovered there are many reasons why this split occurred, but I believe it can be broadly categorised as influenced by motivation, confidence and standard of work.

**Motivation**

The choice of Canva or paper was an important indicator of intrinsic motivation. The paper option appealed to students who are drawn to modes of expression where they can use their artistic skills. Likewise, Canva was chosen by those students who are familiar with ICT as end users or even as creators of digital content. However, there were many other reasons which were not totally based on these two factors. A common reason for choosing paper was simply that some students were not familiar with ICT and so learning to use Canva seemed too complicated. For example, one student started using Canva but became discouraged when they had trouble logging in and changed to paper. Paper was a familiar and time-efficient option.

On the other hand, students can view art-based projects as suitable for learners younger than themselves and they resist being asked to participate. Therefore, Canva would have been seen as an appropriate and challenging format. In addition, I noticed greater collaboration to resolve issues or share discoveries of the different tools available. Canva was a compelling and shared challenge.

Overall, regardless of option, students quickly made the initial choice and started work with little input from teachers. They really engaged with the task and focused on completing it well. They also finished their posters in two lessons, half the time it usually takes for similar paper-only projects. A lot more students also worked on posters outside of lessons, although they weren't required to, which further indicates motivation to do well.

**Confidence**

I think having a choice that appealed to individual interests was not only motivational, but it also inspired confidence. When some students are presented with a blank piece of paper, it can be overwhelming. Students can feel they lack the skills to produce something good and worry about work being compared and judged inferior. Also, despite having samples, some students can be at a loss over how to arrange and present content and become confused about outcomes. All these factors can mean students face an art-based project with anxiety. The pressure of knowing that this poster would be seen by classmates and that they would use it in their presentation would have added anxiety too.

Using Canva effectively removed concern over what the poster would look like. Students could be confident in their poster's appearance, and this is very reassuring. Also, the templates provided a starting point to work from. This was key in giving inspiration and guidance to work through the decision-making process of what and how to present data. Although later a common problem was students needed to pay more attention to formatting text, less time initially was spent on design or construction advice.

Another important issue that can affect confidence is mistakes. On paper, it can be difficult to change or erase text and images without affecting quality. One way to compensate for this is for students to pencil in information and ask for it to be checked before they finalise the poster. This is not only time-consuming, but some students cannot proceed without the teacher's input. In contrast, in a digital format, corrections can be made quickly, and changes are reversible. This encourages more experimentation and confidence as students have control over their work and are free to work without worrying about making a mistake.

By using Canva, students worked more independently and could concentrate on language use and content. This was a significant development as it allowed teachers more time to give feedback and advice on language use, not design.

### Standard of Work

The standard of work produced was quite high overall but with some significant differences between the two modes. On paper, there was less experimentation, and the majority replicated the samples. There were also less hand drawn images or embellishments as more students chose to paste on printed pictures. In addition, compared to similar projects where using paper was the only option, there was less exceptional and less poorly executed work. One possible explanation for this is that those that were not confident in creating a poster by hand had used Canva instead. In addition, the possibility of producing a higher quality of work through a different medium could also have attracted those students who wanted to produce their best work.

On Canva, the standard of work was higher and there was more variation and experimentation. There were more posters that went beyond reproducing the samples. English use also had greater variation as there were fuller explanations for images and more original content as opposed to listing information in point form or in formulaic sentences. However, some students tried to include

too much data resulting in text that was too small to read and there was some copying directly from online sources. Another issue was students didn't always notice my feedback comments on Canva and I realised I needed to spend more time in specific instruction in the initial stages to deal with this.

However, I believe Canva also had a positive influence on the students making paper posters. There was an element of competition between the two groups and having access to the templates online inspired design. Students were more conscious of final outcomes and expectations which also resulted in improved English usage than had previously been observed on paper.

### Summary

Using both ICT and a paper-based approach for creative projects can work together to positively influence outcomes. Especially, having the freedom to choose was extremely motivational for junior high students. They were able to follow their personal interests, have a sense of autonomy and control, and demonstrated more competence in produced work. Also, regardless of whichever mode students chose, I saw evidence of creative thinking and risk-taking mindsets. Students were focused on the task and more compelled to acquire the skills they needed to accomplish it. I believe not only design and artistic skills but learning and language skills were also enhanced by this approach. Overall, providing the freedom to choose mediums was a powerful motivating factor which enabled students to engage with the learning process in a self-directed and ultimately rewarding way.

### References

- Gallup. (2019). *Creativity in learning*. <https://www.gallup.com/education>
- Robinson, K. (2006, February). *Do schools kill creativity?* [Video]. TED Conferences. [https://www.ted.com/talks/sir\\_ken\\_robinson\\_do\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity?](https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity?)

**Susan Bremner** is an associate lecturer of English at Kwansai Gakuin University, Hyogo. She has taught in Japan for over 20 years with a diverse background in teaching at junior/senior high schools and universities. Her research interests include content and language integrated learning, technology-enhanced language learning. She also believes in incorporating practical critical thinking strategies and raising cultural awareness in teaching and learning practices.

