Using Final Presentations in the ESP Classroom as a Confidence and English Boost

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Abstract
In the ESP classroom, there is often a mixture of varying levels of students' English which poses a challenge for the instructor in making a course that fits each student's level. In order to provide a practical but interesting course that would appeal to Early Childhood Education majors at St. Margaret's Junior College, a final presentation is assigned that requires students to use English appropriate for day care and preschool teachers. In writing the story for their presentation, scaffolded instruction and ample time allows each student the opportunity to create a project that is one-of-a-kind and reusable. Students create an apron theater or paper prop theater using English that is ultimately accurate and complex and many students have reported feeling a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with their work.

Key words: scaffolded instruction, ESP, EAP, Early Childhood Education, teaching, research

I. Introduction

It is a challenging task to design a course that meets the needs of students with widely varying levels of English and yet manages to hold each student's interest. One advantage of teaching an ESP course is the students have the common goals of their major. At St. Margaret's Junior College, an informal needs analysis conducted among Early Childhood Education professors and students helped to pinpoint the idea to make a theater for a final presentation. Observing students on their last day fluently delivering their final presentations in complex and accurate English is a rewarding experience for the entire class.

II. Description of the Final Presentation
A. Overview

There are two final presentations in the Early Childhood Education English Communication course, one in the spring term and one in the fall. Students may sign up for both terms or either. Oftentimes, the final project is the motivating factor for a student's registration. The project for the spring term is an apron theater and the project for the fall term is a paper prop theater. Both theaters are commonly used in Japanese preschools and are well known to students.

For both the apron and the paper prop theater, the student must prepare a story to tell their audience while managing puppets and props. Some students translate and use stories that have previously only been available in Japanese, or even write their own material.

B. Two theaters

The main part of the apron theater is the apron the preschool teacher wears which is used as a backdrop. Puppets and props are manipulated around the apron to tell a story. Most students custom make all of the items out of fabric to their preference.

In the paper prop theater, paper puppets and props are used to tell the story. There are many books on the Japanese market with patterns and directions to preparing a good theater.

III. Pre-task

The breakdown of the task into deadlines are listed for students on their syllabus. (Table 1) On the first day, each

deadline is explained before the students sign up for the course to allow them to make an informed decision and avoid misunderstanding. Photos are shown to the students of previous student projects which is motivating for many students. Students who are hesitant to try the project because of the English requirement will often overcome their fears because they are confident in their art and handwork skills. The teacher's motivational influence is key at this stage.

Table I

Syllabus: Deadlines pertaining to the final presentation

Week	Due Dates
1	Introduction of course (Syllabus and project explained prior to registration)
4	Story Title Due
7	Submit written story
13	Props Deadline/Rehearsal
14-15	Final Presentations

IV. Creating the Presentation

A. Choosing the story (Weeks 1-4)

A handout is given to students to explain what types of stories preschool directors favor and what works with young children. Guidance is also provided in class discussions and by individual appointment. Japanese folk stories are particularly encouraged as commercially-made products are rare. Giving the student control to choose their story is vital to this course. Kenny (1993) states, "Autonomy is not just a matter of permitting choice in learning situations, or making pupils responsible for the activities they undertake, but of allowing and encouraging learners, through processes deliberately set up for the purpose to begin to express who they are, what they think, and what they would like to do, in terms of work they initiate and define for themselves. This is holistic learning…" (p. 440). The story the student selects and the theater she creates becomes a reflection of herself.

B. Submitting the story (Week 7)

The students are required to submit their stories in both English and Japanese to assure the instructor can properly understand what the student is trying to say in English. Scaffolded instruction at this point enables students to produce a script that satisfies them, as they are allowed to rewrite their script until they receive the grade they want. This task-based type of scaffolding is in contrast to traditional methods solely focused on producing correct sentences without a larger context (Ellis, 2003). Students are also encouraged to come to the Learning Center for one-on-one help to work together with an instructor in preparing their script.

C. Prop Deadline/Rehearsal (Week 13)

Before the rehearsal day, students often make use of the Learning Center to receive personalized coaching for pronunciation and fluency. Dornyei (2001) states that learners' self-confidence can be increased by giving students "regular experiences of success" and by simply giving them personal and verbal encouragement. An in-class rehearsal day is useful to catch any major errors with props and prepare for a successful final presentation.

V. The Final Presentation (Week 14-15)

Each student is graded according to the quality of their handwork in addition to the presentation of their story.

VI. Conclusion

When students are given ample time and proper teacher support, it is possible for them to deliver a final presentation in accurate and fluent English. In addition to fulfilling the requirements to complete this English Communication course, the student is able to make materials that will be useful to them in the future. At St. Margaret's Junior College, several students have subsequently used their projects in volunteer positions both domestically and abroad. As they see children positively respond to their theater, they have reported an increase in

their confidence and a desire to work on their English to improve their performance.

Acknowledgements

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