

Motivating ESL/EFL Students to Use English Through Movie Making

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An ESL classroom is more than a class; it's a learning community that becomes a better learning environment when students are motivated, and comfortable with their classmates. That is not how students feel on the first day of class, particularly in mandatory ESL classes. That sense of community can be hard to create, but adding a couple of digital cameras and an unusual project assignment helps.

The Project Beginnings

In an effort to motivate students to get to know each other and to incorporate as many skills as possible in an English language experience, I took advantage of the high level of English fluency, creativity and technology among Korean students. They were asked to make an original four-minute movie using their digital cameras and cell phone cameras for their mid-term grade. The results far surpassed my expectations. The classroom turned from being a group of clock-watchers waiting for the end of class into a room of dynamic English-speaking butterflies. Students who were terrified of speaking forgot their fears as they argued over the advisability of using a digital camera or cell phone camera in a particular location. Music majors and physical education majors became authors as they shared their ideas for the dialogue. Students who would never have gone out together became friends as they made the movie and all of them forgot that most of the time they were speaking a language they thought was difficult

Procedure

To prepare for the project, students were semi-randomly placed in groups ranging from three to five. The students were not told about the project at this point. The main rule used for dividing the class was to have a variety of majors in one group to create the most fertile ground for creativity. In the instructor's experience, student conversation is most invigorated not by feeling comfortable but by variety. The students were given 30 minutes in the first class to become acquainted with one another.

Once students had become acquainted with each other, the class was told that the group they were sitting with would be their group for the movie project. The project was to be turned in seven weeks later. The movies had to be four minutes long. The scripts needed to be original, and all class members needed to contribute an equal amount of effort. The movies could be filmed on cell phones, digital cameras, webcams, or camcorders. The filmed segment needed to be put together on a CD and turned in on the due date.

Classroom Planning

For the first class, the group needed to work together to brainstorm a list of five ideas. The students were encouraged to come up with as many crazy, funny, strange ideas as possible. They were then told that a proposal needed to be either handed in or discussed with the instructor by next week.

In the second class, the proposals were approved with the instructor giving suggestions if needed. The students were given 30 minutes in class to begin writing their scripts and creating a filming schedule. The scripts needed to be turned in for approval in the third class.

In the third and fourth classes, the scripts were scanned by the instructor and specific comments were made about originality, grammar mistakes, and length. Students read their scripts aloud in small groups to check if they met the movies' time requirement and to begin memorizing lines. In this class, the instructor encouraged students to begin thinking about special effects, background music, costumes, lighting, computer graphics, and make-up.

In the fifth class, students were allowed to leave class early to begin or continue filming. Many students used the classroom in their movies. Scene changes were implemented by drawing pictures on the blackboard, simple props, posters, and signs with location names written on them.

In the sixth class, students were given fifteen minutes in class to set up any final schedules that their groups needed.

In the seventh class, students filled out a form about their movies and turned in the CDs.

Results

The movies were incredible. An enormous amount of time, creativity, and effort went into the movies. Scripts varied from a Cinderella tale in which Cinderella's credit card debt keeps her from marrying her prince to an original horror story of students mysteriously dying from failing English class by one point to documentaries on the lack of seating in the university libraries and nearby archeology sites.

The students were polled to see if my goals of encouraging them to speak in English, make friends, and incorporate more skills than just English were reached. The results were very positive. In fact, the results were incredible.

Seventy-four percent of students spent more than eight hours working on their movies. Almost 100% of students were surprised to watch their groups' movie and see how well they turned out. Nearly 80% of students felt more motivated to study English while making the movie and after the movie. Ninety-eight percent of the students enjoyed making the movie and eighty-two percent of the students would rather make a movie than have a regular test even knowing that they will spend a lot more time making a movie.

Student Opinions

In the comment section of the survey, students commented that they enjoyed the experience. Many students felt they had experienced something special. One student stated, "Making the movie encouraged my group to study hard. For example, I study English harder and my movie skill is developed." Another student commented, "I had a good time while making a movie. I met new friends (even Turkish) [exchange students]. I can't forget this experience. Thank you." Another student wrote, "I was forlorn at first, but it was fun and I used my computer skills." Even on their final exams given the first week of December, eight weeks after they turned in their projects, students were still talking about how many fond memories they had of making the movies and friends from different majors. Students wished we had an actual movie screen to view the other groups' movies.

Benefits to the Instructor

As an instructor, I valued the camaraderie created by the project, the sense of purpose students seemed to have in class, and the increased attention to grammatical detail in their scripts. The movie project reached all the students with the great improvement in speech and confidence showing up among the weakest students. A final added benefit for me as an instructor was being given hard evidence that my students had accomplished something they felt worthwhile.

Ways to Improve the Project

When I do the project again, there is only one adjustment I plan to make. Next time, it would be fun to arrange a 'Movie Night' to show all the student movies on a large screen television.

Examples: Movies Made by Pusan National University Practical English ESL V and VI Students

- [Peace Home Shopping Network](#) (5:55)
- [7 Minute Cook](#) (5:03)
- [Ghost of the Campus](#) (5:20)
- [Blind Date](#) (4:51)
- The YouTube Link with All of the Above:
http://www.youtube.com/profile_videos?user=PNUEnglish

The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. XII, No. 12, December 2006

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