

Letter of Intent for David Penner

Computer Animation: Project-Based ICT-Rich Language and Content Learning

Animation projects for ESL students have much potential. As language “is learned most effectively for communication in meaningful, purposeful social and academic contexts” (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989, p. 202), projects, as “multi-skill activities focusing on topics or themes rather than on specific language targets” (Haines quoted in Beckett, 2006, p. 23), foster socialization, creativity, independence, and skills involving decision-making, critical thinking, and cooperative learning (Becket & Chamness, 2006, pg. 59). Moreover, Gary F Hoban’s (2005) pioneering research with “Slowmation” and science students, involving the production of slow-motion movies to demonstrate scientific processes, reveals that “translation tasks” require a multitude of connected processes, such as “researching information, planning and writing a story, storyboarding, designing models, taking digital photographs, using visual literacies, using technology, evaluating and, most importantly, working collaboratively as a team” (p. 27). Students can apparently create a Slowmation in 60 minutes (p. 28). In my own LLED 478 class with Professor Slater, my group created a Slowmation within 2 hours. It is my hope that by implementing animation projects to teach curricular content, ESL students can practice the above skills in an English environment, while simultaneously stretching their communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), and increasing their cultural (Duff, 2002), and ICT literacies.

There are several angles of research I would like to pursue. I would like to evaluate which available freeware proves most beneficial, such as Pivot Stick Animator or Windows Movie Maker 2 (Sanders), in that it is user-friendly and not time-consuming, it encourages communication in each process, and it can easily be implemented within a project framework (Beckett and Slater, 2005). The focus would not be on artwork or technical skill, but whether or not students communicate well enough to produce animations that teach an aspect of curricular content, such as the process of evaporation, a climactic scene from a short story, or even the essay writing process. I would also like to look at the effects of scaffolding and instruction before the students begin each part of the project. Also, by recording student speech, I could analyze which speech functions and linguistic features (Halliday, 2004) come out during each process, and where each process fits into Bernie Mohan’s heuristic, the Knowledge Framework (1986). As there has not been a significant amount of research involving the implementation of technical projects as part of an ESL curriculum, I would like to survey the students and teachers about reactions and language-related issues before and after their projects.

Regarding practicalities, I could work with students at Ritsumeikan (I helped create a Wiki under Bill McMichael’s supervision), or at ELI (I was a communication contacts volunteer under Barbara Shuman’s supervision). I could also find students through International House or the Richmond School District. To gain an idea of the animations that students could create, please visit my website, www.davestravels.com/animationprojects.html.

According to recent statistics (Gunderson, 2007), and Baek, Jung, and Kim’s 86 reasons to use technology (2008), we must find new ways of teaching in order to more effectively help and motivate those fighting daily to conquer English. As there is “scanty research on project based instruction in general” (Becket, 2005), and even less that combines project based instruction with ESL and technology, I believe there is much to learn by researching language use through the production of curriculum-inspired animations.

Works Cited

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