Methodological Changes to an Active Learning Tourism Video Project

John Patrick OWATARI-DORGAN, Brendan VAN DEUSEN and Thom RAWSON
(Department of International Tourism, Faculty of Human and Social Studies)

Abstract

This paper discusses continuing efforts to build a successful active learning tourism video project at a university in Japan. More specifically, this paper focuses on the methodological changes made in trial two of the project. The paper addresses major changes to the administration, structure as well as expectations of the project. In trial two the authors collaborated closely with Huis Ten Bosch, a local tourism location near the university. Additionally, the authors changed the way that work on the project was distributed throughout the curriculum. Furthermore, the authors increased their expectations for thematically consistent videos. Finally, minor change were also made to the equipment used during the production of the project videos. In addition to discussing changes made in trial two, the authors also provide observations and evaluations of the impact of these changes on the project's outcome in trial two.

Key words
active learning, multimedia production, collaboration, English as a foreign language

Introduction

In the modern competitive global environment, it is vital that students acquire practical, job-related skills in addition to academic skills. Creating a group project that encourages the development of such skills...
as well as emphasizes active learning was the primary goal of the authors in trial one of the *Tourism Video Project* (Van Deusen, Owatari-Dorgan, & Rawson, 2016). Based on the research of Bonwell and Eisson (1991) as well as Prince (2004), the authors hoped that the emphasis on active learning in the project would have a positive effect on student learning. While the authors believed that trial one of the project was largely successful, they also determined that there were several areas in which the project could be improved. In this reflection on the project, the authors decided to focus on improving collaboration with local sightseeing locations, making clearer and more strongly enforced guidelines as well as providing the students with better equipment. In general, the authors believe that those improvements had a positive effect on both the process and final product of the tourism video project.

**HTB Collaboration**

The first area selected for improvement in trial two of the project was collaboration with the local tourist destinations that could be potential subjects for the video projects. To facilitate the process of collaboration, the authors elected to limit video projects to a single tourist location. Based on the wide variety of activities available, the close proximity to the university as well as the location’s close working relationship with their University, the authors elected to focus their attention on collaborating with Huis Ten Bosch, a Dutch-themed theme park in Sasebo, Japan. Following that decision, the authors contacted Huis Ten Bosch and arranged a meeting with a general affairs manager at the theme park. The manager offered to provide support with both the planning and execution of the project. During the early part of the planning phase, the manager came and spoke with the students in class. She provided them with helpful suggestions about interesting locations and topics for their video projects as well as information about the operations of the park. Later in the planning stage of the project, the students communicated directly with her via email about their recording locations and schedules. The manager offered feedback and help with the schedules. During the filming, she supported the project by providing free tickets to various attractions and activities as well as early access to the park and restaurants prior to opening. The support of Huis Ten Bosch and the manager ensured that the students were able to produce their video with minimal problems as well as reducing possible disruptions to park operations. While the students already receive free entrance into the theme park as a part of their tuition, the support helped to reduce the financial burden of the project on students. After the completion of the video projects, the manager who had supported the students throughout the project was given an opportunity to view and comment on the projects. In general, her comments about the resulting videos were very positive.

**Activity Focus**

Another area that the authors focused on improving was the length and breadth of the project as a whole. In the trial one of the project, the preparation and production spanned three separate classes and lasted for roughly two months during the spring semester. In trial two of the video project, the authors made a goal to have most of the
work concentrated in a single class with a limited amount of work done in outside classes. If possible, the authors also hoped to reduce total amount of time required for the project. In the trial one of the project, various tasks were completed in different classes over the course of the project. For example, the script for the video was created in a writing class, the students were taught how to perform in front of the camera in a presentation class and students kept detailed logs and made plans in an academic skills class. The goal of conducting the project in this manner was to provide a diverse and multi-discipline approach to the project. Furthermore, it was hoped that this arrangement would allow for activities outside of the project to be continued in each of the participating classes. While the method was able to achieve that goal, the authors discovered that coordinating the efforts across multiple classes was very challenging and resulted in multiple delays during the planning and production. Furthermore, the authors discovered that the multiple-class plan did not actually afford a significant amount of time for other activities during class. Based on those observations, the decision was made to concentrate the entire project, with the exception of the script writing, into the presentation class. During the planning of trial two, there was some concern that concentrating the project into a single class might prolong the project and prevent other class activities from being completed. To mitigate that risk, the authors decided to remove and streamline some of the student planning of the project as well as shift much of the planning work out of class and into homework. As a result of this streamlining process, combined with fewer delays caused by inter-class coordination, trial two of the project was completed roughly two weeks quicker than trial one.

Structure

In addition to the changes made to the planning and production procedures of the project, the authors also made some improvements to the overall structure for trial two. In trial one, students were given a loose structure within which to make their video. In the initial trial, students were divided into groups of three or four and each group was tasked with making a single video. Each student in a group was asked to present one activity within the tourism location. Students were given little to no guidance with regard to the type or number of activities they were permitted to choose for the final video. On the other hand, students were given specific guidance about the structure of each student’s individual section. In general, students were able to maintain the suggested structure within each section of the video. Moreover, the structure within each section was maintained in trial two.

Although the methods used in trial one produced reasonable videos about tourism locations, those videos often seemed somewhat repetitive. Based on those results, the authors decided to make major changes to the structure of the project for trial two. The first significant change to the structure was a reduction in the size of student groups. As previously mentioned, students were in groups of three or four in trial one. In trial two, the authors arranged students into groups of two. It was hoped that students would be able to work together more efficiently and
with better coordination in smaller groups. Moreover, the authors hoped that working in smaller groups would help to maximize the level of motivation that Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) observed in collaborative environments. In addition to adjusting group sizes, each student was asked to make two sections in the final video. Since each group consisted of two members, each video contained four sections discussing activities and locations of interest within Huis Ten Bosch.

Another change made by the authors was to add strict requirements about which activities or locations each group was allowed to choose. While any location or activity was acceptable, groups were restricted to choose a minimum of one location related to food, shopping, and attractions. Since each group needed to produce four segments, they were permitted to use one of the above location categories a second time. It was hoped that this added structure would prevent groups from becoming overly repetitive by choosing multiples of the same type of attraction. Based on the observations of the authors, the changes made to the structure of the project were successful. In trial two, groups tended to act in a more organized fashion and were able to complete the project more quickly. This may have been the result of the changes made to the group size. The authors also observed that the videos produced in trial two covered a wider variety of attractions than the videos from trial one. This can most likely be attributed to requiring groups to choose only one of each type of attraction. From the perspective of the authors, the major structural changes in trial two of the project were successful in improving the quality of the videos produced.

Theme

One major change to the overall design of the project that was instituted by the authors was the inclusion of a general thematic requirement for the final videos. In trial one of the project, the authors suggested that students should connect their locations with an overarching theme but did not enforce this during the project or include it as part of the final assessment. While some of the resulting videos in trial one maintained a reasonable level of coherency, the authors observed that many videos contained some sections that focused on attractions or activities that weren’t harmonious with the rest of the video. The presence of these disharmonious elements led the videos to seem unprofessional and poorly produced. In trial two of the project, the authors elected to combat this problem by including a requirement that all segments of the video support a theme. This approach seemed to match arguments of Willis and Willis (2007) as well as Benson (2011) that meaning-focused tasks in task-based learning should have clearly defined outcome. To enforce this requirement, the authors checked on student progress at several stages during the project. If a group was found to be deviating from their chosen theme, the authors offered guidance. Additionally, group adhesion to the theme became a subject for assessment on the final rubric for the project. By shifting the emphasis onto the theme, the authors hoped to avoid the problems with disjointed videos that occurred during trial one. Based on the observations of the authors, the changes made to the design of the project were successful. For the most part, the videos resulting from trial two demonstrated a much higher level of thematic
cohesion. Most attractions within each group could be easily connected to the group’s stated theme. Obviously, it is probable that this change in thematic quality was the result of the changes instituted by the authors.

Equipment

While significant changes were made to the structure and methodology of the project, some changes were also made to the equipment used by students for the project. In trial one of the project, the students recorded on digital video cameras that were purchased specifically for the project. With those cameras, the students used relatively inexpensive shotgun microphones. Furthermore, the students typically held the cameras in their hands to record the video. While everything functioned as expected, the authors observed that the microphones failed to record all of the dialogue spoken by the students at an acceptable level. Moreover, the authors also noticed that students struggled to keep the camera steady while they were recording. For trial two, the authors changed the types of microphones that the students used to record their video. Instead of shotgun microphones, the students used lapel microphones to record their audio in trial two. Additionally, the students were also provided with tripods to use while recording. As a result of these changes, the authors observed that the audio quality of the videos in trial two was much better and easier to hear. Moreover, the videos were much steadier with the aid of the tripods. While these equipment changes may seem relatively minor, the changes in equipment seemed to have had a noticeably positive effect on the quality of the audio and video produced in trial two.

Results

Despite the large number of changes that were made to both the structure and execution of the tourism video projects, the authors encountered few difficulties in implementing the changes. Moreover, the quality of the video produced as well as the efficiency of the production process seemed to have improved in trial two of the project. By collaborating closely with Huis Ten Bosch, the students were able to focus their production efforts on a single location which was easily accessible. As a result, students were able to spend more time on completing the project and less time considering the logistics of production. Furthermore, the support provided by Huis Ten Bosch afforded students a high level of access to the park as well as advice on the best ways to complete the project. Enforcing a consistent theme for all sections of a group’s video as well as requiring different types of attractions resulted in a noticeable improvement of video coherency as well as a greater diversity within each video. Additionally, the small changes made to the recording equipment helped students to achieve a much more professional level of quality while requiring only a minor amount of additional training. Without reservation, the authors believe that the suite of changes made to the project were successful in improving the student experiences and the quality of videos produced by the students. While the project may still require minor changes going forward, it is likely that the authors will continue to adhere to the methods that were used in the second trial of the project in future trials. Going forward, the authors intend to conduct further trials of the project while continuing to collect student feedback on the experience. It is hoped that
this extensive information will allow the authors to formulate a tourism video project that is well suited to the needs of the students.

References