Student Adaptation of Web-based Content Resources

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Abstract
In this presentation, the process of adapting Web-based content resources into the classroom in general, and into an EFL reading classroom in specific (Duggan, 2005), is taken one step further. Based on the teacher-produced lessons of the first-half of the school year, students, working individually or in pairs, were asked to make use of similar English web-based content resources, and with the guidance of the instructor, to develop lesson plans and "teach" part of the class period, keeping in mind the language-learning strategies used in the first-term. In this way students had not just a greater choice in choosing content material of interest to them, but were responsible for understanding the chosen material in more depth, as well as how best to present that material to their classmates.

Some of the points covered in this presentation include a discussion of the advantages as well as some of the difficulties involved with adapting Web-based content resources into the classroom, and the rationale behind involving students in the adaptation and presentation of these materials. This presentation then will display examples of student-produced materials, the strategies and processes involved in guiding students to play a greater part in their own successful learning, and end-of-the year feedback from students on their observations of the teaching methods employed.

Why Online Materials?
It's not surprising to come across a class of students uninterested with the readings in their textbook. Much too often the readings found in published text materials are outdated or, to keep from becoming outdated, based on general topics. Wouldn't it be preferable to work on lessons that covered topics or news items that were happening now, even as the students read?

Producing a textbook from start to finish can take years, almost ensuring obsolescence. In addition, textbooks are made to sell to as wide a customer base as possible, so teachers can hardly expect to find published text materials that are "perfect" for their classes, one that can meet the needs and interests of a class made up of students of differing personalities and abilities. Adapting online current reading materials into their lessons can help teachers to better meet the needs and interests of their students.

In addition to the topicality of on online materials, advantages of adapting Web-based content resources for the classroom include the amount and variety of sites and resources available on the Internet allowing the teacher to select and adapt material
best suited for one’s particular classroom. Students can also be involved in helping to find materials they are interested in reading (fostering motivation, a sense of involvement in their own education). Furthermore, some sites offer supplementary online resources/exercises for students to carry out their own study.

Ironically, one of the major advantages of adapting Web-based content resources for the classroom, its topicality, can also be one of its major disadvantages. The amount of valuable teacher time required to search, download, and adapt current topical materials into lesson plans, that, for all intents and purposes, can only be used once or within a limited time frame due to said topicality, can be considered a definite drawback. Several of the topics chosen and prepared by the students, such as “Yutori Kyoiku” or the Korean culture boom in Japan are good examples of this. Such lessons would be of much less value if used again at a later date.

Why Student Selected, Prepped, and Led?
This author has long believed that one of the most important roles of the teacher goes beyond simply infusing facts and information into students’ minds, but to guide students in the learning process by interesting them in the subject being taught and showing them how to take responsibility for their own educations by introducing and giving them access to various resources, and the skills to make use of these resources. In short, to give them the will and the way to learn. The Internet in general, and online reading resources in particular, offers us and them just such a valuable resource.

1) By involving them in their own learning, and that of their classmates, it is hoped that students learn to take greater responsibility for their own educations.

2) By allowing students to select reading topics of especial interest to them and to their classmates, it is hoped that students will take a greater interest in the lessons.

3) By involving them in the preparation of the reading activities, it is hoped that students are more appreciative of the work involved in lesson preparation and therefore are more attentive to the lessons presented by their teachers and classmates.

4) By asking students to present their readings and activities, it is hoped that students will gain experience in addressing groups of people in English as well as pick up some skill and experience in presentation skills and in a better understanding of classroom dynamics.

Teaching Situation and Course Goals
The type of course concerned was a second-year fall semester reading course of advanced English learners (students were placed based on the results of a diagnostic level test). Classes were held once a week, for 90 minutes, with approximately 25 students per class. Among the stated aims of this course (2004 Course Syllabi, Dept. of English) was “to give those students with a solid command of English the opportunity to further develop reading and comprehension skills.” Past experience has shown that students at this course level require reading materials of not just a higher level, but also
of a more topical and challenging nature.

With these items in mind, the following course plan was created and implemented by the instructor (this presenter) for one of the above courses for which this presenter was responsible.

**Class Procedure**
The year is divided into two semester courses. The first (Spring) semester was based on a three-week lesson cycle of reading, working on tasks and activities, discussing, researching, and informally presenting content-based material of a topical nature from various online media sources.

The instructor (this presenter) selected the articles and prepared the tasks and activities. It was to be the students' responsibility to read and further research into the topic, as well as to complete the assigned tasks outside of class so as to be ready to participate in discussion and sharing their ideas in class. This provided the best use of the time we had available to help the students to improve their reading and comprehension skills, as well as develop a greater understanding of issues and events happening in the world around them.

Towards the end of the first semester, and after having taken part in (and being exposed to examples of the resources and activities) the prepared lessons prepared by the instructor (see Duggan, 2005) over the first semester, students were required to prepare and present reading lessons of simpler but similar structure as that given by the instructor during the first semester. Students were asked to prepare for the second term by forming pairs (pairs were necessary considering the limits on class time and frequency (12 weekly 90 min. classes in the second term), as well as the advantages of having students collaborate and work/cooperate in pairs.) In preparing their lessons, students were asked to follow the following guidelines:

1) Consider your audience—who they are and what topics might interest them/be of relevance to them/be achievable (appropriate content & level).
2) Search for several topics from online sources using the list provided by the teacher as a reference/resource.
3) Narrow your topics down to one, the one you feel to be best suited to the class and as a lesson (we should learn something)
4) Using the first terms lesson plan handouts as a guide, prepare an outline of a lesson: Introduction, Preview questions, Reading/Video/Music/Pictures, an activity/exercise based on a lexical, grammatical, cultural, linguistic, etc. point, comprehension and/or discussion questions, conclusion.
5) Fill-out and streamline your presentation.
6) Develop your supporting materials, AudioVisual aids, etc. (The classroom was outfitted with OHP, VCR, tape player, CD/MD player, LD/VCD player, and a computer projection hookup)

Prepare for and practice your presentation. Remember, you have about 60 minutes. (30 minutes would be used by the teacher—10 before and 20 after—for
administrative (class management) details and for any necessary supplementary comments, review/assessment of the presentation, and preparation for the following week’s presentation by the pair involved.

**Lesson Plan**
Over the course of the semester students researched, selected, prepared, and presented on a variety of topics, as follows:

“Yutori Kyoiku.”
The Korean culture boom in Japan.
The negative effects of cell phone popularity on the Japanese economy.
The pros and cons of ID chip technology.
“Indigo” children and the difficulty they have adapting to school and society.
The evolution of American music and its effect on sales.
Househusbands in Japan.
The dangers of passive smoking.
The popularity of soccer in Japan.
Modern techniques of cheating on entrance exams.
The encroachment of human settlements on bear habitats in Japan.
The promotion of English education in Japanese elementary schools.
Is there really a relationship between blood type and personality?

Actual (abbreviated) examples of student-prepared exercises and activities related to the selected reading topics adapted by students of this class and used in the course included the following:

**Pre-reading Questions**
(As in any "pre-" activity, the purpose was to get the students thinking of the topic at hand, and to develop some interest/motivation in the reading.)

(From “Test Scores for 226 Suspected Cheaters Invalidated”)
1. Do you like studying?
2. Have you ever tried cheating in tests?

**Vocabulary Practice**
(Working with the vocabulary should allow students to better understand it.)

(From “Blame It on the Cell Phones”)
Directions: Choose a sentence that properly expresses the word below:

a. sluggish
b. foster

1. To further something
2. Working more slowly than normal and in a way that seems lazy

**Reading Comprehension Questions and Exercises**
(Questions should reflect the pertinent points of the reading. When assigned as homework, assures that students complete the reading to a satisfactory degree.)

(From “At-Home Dads”)
1. What is Mr. Yamamura’s (the househusband) major problem?
2. Approximately how many men take child-care leave?

(From “Rap, Country Dominate Year of Slumping Music Sales”)
1. The most popular kinds of music in 2002 were:
   a. hip-hop
   b. country
   c. both of these
2. In 2002 industrywide music sales:
   a. rose
   b. dropped
   c. remained steady

**Discussion Questions**
(Taking comprehension one step farther. If possible, questions should elicit students’ own thoughts.)

(From “At-Home Dads”)
1. For girls: When you get married, do you want your husband to become a househusband? Why?
2. For boys: When you get married, do you want to become a househusband? Why?

(From “Blame It on the Cell Phones”)
1. What other products became popular during the last 20 years besides the commodities introduced in the reading?
2. What products have become unpopular and gone out of existence in the last 30 years?

**Other Student-Generated Activities**
**Pair Information-Gap (From “Rap, Country Dominate Year of Slumping Music Sales”)**

Group A: Industrywide, total album sales fell 8.7 percent from 2001 to nearly 650 million units, the second year-to-year decline in a row. A slump of nearly 3 percent the previous year marked the first sales drop in at least a decade. The major labels have blamed the 1.___________ and 2.___________ for weak sales.

Group B: Industrywide, total album sales fell 3.___________ percent from 2001 to nearly 650 million units, the second year-to-year decline in a row. A slump of nearly 3
percent the previous year marked the first sales drop in at least a decade. The major labels have blamed the sluggish economy and online music piracy for weak sales.

Debate (From “Test Scores for 226 Suspected Cheaters Invalidated”)  
1. Are you for or against punishing students who cheat?

Results  
Formal feedback at the end of the semester, in the form of student course evaluations (Students’ Course Evaluations, Fall Term 2004), and informal class observation and feedback over the course of the term indicated positive student attitudes towards the course in general, and towards the teaching procedure and use of Web-based content resources in specific. Students’ comments from the evaluations and feedback based on the student presentations observed and participated in specified that they had found themselves more aware of the events going on around them, and had developed a greater understanding and interest in those events. From a linguistic standpoint, students felt that they had improved their communication abilities, not just in general, but in being able to better express themselves on what they felt were “real” topics. In general, students felt an overall satisfaction with the course.

In Conclusion  
While drawbacks to adapting Web-based content resources for a class do exist, the positives cannot be ignored. Producing one’s own lessons can allow a teacher to better address the needs and goals of a course. Giving students the chance to do so as well can further the learning process. The adaptation of Web-based content materials into such lessons, whether by teacher or student, can lead to more interesting, relevant, and topical classes, and as such, can be considered a valuable educational resource.

References  
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