

The Dawn of Creation with Mobile Learning Technologies and Language Learning Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

The learning design with mobile learning technologies, particularly the iPad, affords the creation of learning products. Combined with task-based language learning and project-based learning pedagogy, mobile learning technology can be utilized with great effect. This short paper will describe the nature of creating learning products with pedagogy including task-based language learning and project-based learning. Student examples from an English as a Second Language classroom setting and self-reported teacher journal entries will be used to illustrate. Stemming from the teacher observations noted in the journal entries, there are two fresh perspectives on the creation of learning products. The pedagogy of task-based language learning and project-based learning afforded the creation of learning products throughout the learning process culminating in a final learning product.

Author Keywords

Mobile Learning, Task-Based Language Learning, Project-Based Learning, Second Language Teaching and Learning Pedagogy, Learning Design, iPad Teaching and Learning

INTRODUCTION

The use of mobile learning technologies has brought about a conversation shift. Instead of talking about web 2.0 and connecting learners with an authentic audience, conversations are taking learning beyond and towards seeing learning as a process of creating and delivering a product to an audience. Creation has become a part of learning as students film movies, document learning in action, make portfolios, design multimedia-based reports etc... Students utilize apps with a series of workflows to create an end learning product; one that in nature embody quality learning traits where learning is student-centered, active, engaging and intrinsically motivating. To maximize language learning potential when using the iPads, the students, pedagogy and the mobile learning technology need to be considered in depth. This paper looks at two pedagogical approaches that were used in conjunction with the iPad: Tasked-Based Language Learning (TBLL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL).

Task based language learning can provide the structure for learning design which provides effective language learning. Ellis (2003) and Samuda & Bygate (2008) describe the TBLL process as student-centered as it allows student choice to focus on language needs. Each task should have a focus on meaning, an information gap, a range of suitable language used to complete the task and clear outcomes of the task. Tasks should be authentic that represent real world problems or issues. According to Ellis (2003), there is a pre-task, task cycle and language focus and there are multiple engagements and language learning opportunities created within this. The iPad aids this process as language is recycled within the task and used with different apps and thus aiding language learning and acquisition.

Project-based learning is a student driven, in-depth form of research and inquiry for a specific audience that is often beyond the classroom (Boss, 2013). Boss (2013) places in our context as a lot of 21st Century skills, which is often discussed as necessities for our students, are needed to complete the project. Accompanying the project is learning that will aid student learning of content, inquiry, and the skills needed for the project (Larmer, Ross, & Mergendoller, 2009). There's evidence of increased student engagement, further student motivation and the promotion student voice and choice within each stage of the project (Larmer, Ross, & Mergendoller, 2009; Boss, 2013). With teacher guidance and scaffolding, ESL students can develop driving questions, the driving force and focus of the inquiry, and then engage with the question, content and the classroom via the iPad.

METHODOLOGY

Teacher critical reflection is one strategy for teachers to influence and impact on their own teaching. Through the use of journals, teachers can become aware of happenings and trends that are affecting teaching and learning in and out of their classroom. Dewey (1933 in Calderhead, 1989, p. 43) described reflection as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends". Schön (1987) furthers this when describing Reflection in Action to support the change that is a result of the critical reflections. In a case study on twelve novice and experienced ESL teachers, it was noticed that reflective

journals made these teachers more aware of the influences and problems within their teaching contexts (Mok, 1994). Journals were adopted as this action research's mode of reflection and observations are reported here. Observations of the class, students, technology, pedagogy etc... are used to describe the nature of teaching and learning and to make contextually relevant evaluations.

The studied context was a government Gulf-based university and the class was of female students only. The students were studying Academic English in a English as a Second Language classroom. The self-reported teacher journal was written after each lesson that utilized one of the two pedagogical approaches. Notes on the learning design and the influence on students, their behavior and reaction to the lesson / activity / pedagogical approach, and their use of the iPad were written in the journal. It was the author's intention that the critical reflections made from the journal would influence action in the classroom as well as being pertinent for research evaluations and conclusions.

DISCUSSION

Task-Based Language Learning

When designing the teaching and learning with tasks, representing the real world of task-based language learning was the first hurdle. Being at a Middle Eastern university with female students, there are certain limitations relating to the audience, product delivery and interactions. Therefore, tasks that represented the real academic world were designed. Specifically, students need to take the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) so tasks based on the IELTS academic writing were designed and used to create authentic academic learning.

To illustrate, a task was designed for the IELTS task 1 writing with the learning outcome that students should design and administer a survey, perform a data analysis and present their results. Along the way, it was intended that students practice such 21st century skills as communication, critical thinking and creativity both in the learning process, the survey and data analysis, and final learning product, the presentation. The long task was completed over several classes. The pre-task required students to brainstorm and research ideas for a survey that interested them. It was noted in the journal that this allowed for engagement through student-driven interests and this time allowed for preparation of vocabulary and language. iPad apps like Popplet was used for brainstorming and Evernote was repurposed as a language log.

Next, the task cycle consisted of activities to design, prepare and administer a survey. Students responded particularly well to this as they enthusiastically made questions based on the brainstormed ideas and language from the pre-task activities. They prepared and administered the survey using an app called QuickTap Survey. This app is for face-to-face delivery so students took their iPads around campus to find and survey their target audience. The answers were input using the touch screen of the iPad and this created interactions that would have been limited with paper or online surveys. After this students interpreted and analyzed the survey findings using Numbers among other apps. Journal entries show that throughout, students were encouraged to reflect on, add to and use the language to complete the steps within the task and this maximized language development.

Finally the language focus section of the task required students to reflect on and discuss results from the surveys. These were completed in class using apps like Keynote or completed in a video format using apps like ExplainEverything and iMovie. Students were engaging with the language and data to present their results and it was observed that target language was continually recycled throughout the tasks.

Throughout the task workflow, students created small products that culminated in a presentation of the data analysis. For the duration, students engaged and interacted with the language using the iPad and a combination of face-to-face, blended and online learning activities. In the teacher's self-reported journal it was observed that there was more sustained, focused work of the students compared with other previous activities. It was also written that the structure of the workflow allowed them to focus their attention on short engaging sections of the task.

Project-based learning

The second pedagogical approach that was reflected upon is project-based learning. Advocates of PBL prefer that all projects are student driven from the outset (Future Lab, n.d.). However, in practice it isn't always possible so to provide sufficient scaffolding for the ESL students, a generic prompt was given with the option for students to take the project in a direction based on their interest. Using the prompt, "How does _____ influence friendships in your community?", students created a learning project for themselves to research into their local community on an aspect, the blank space, that influences friendship. Using the Enquiring Minds model (Future Lab, n.d.) students completed four stages within the PBL learning process. Within each, a product of learning was created and built upon for a master creation: a documentary showcasing the influence of the chosen aspect on friendship. Some of the learning outcomes were that students develop and effectively communicate in on-topic language through brainstorming, research, surveying and making a documentary.

Firstly, students were introduced through warm up and engaging activities, discussions and inquiry into possible topics and aspects of friendship. Whilst there was teacher scaffolding present, the vast majority of time was spent in individual, pairs or group work where students voiced their own interests and ideas on the subject. During the next stage, students

defined their research based on their interests and refined their inquiry to their selected area. Apps such as Evernote and Popplet were used throughout this time to brainstorm, define their research and then record their research process. Using a standard driving question template, the ESL students could brainstorm and research for them. According to journal notes and the projects, there was a noticeable range in topics chosen and even when students chose the same topic, the research and the integration of their local communities produced quite different projects.

Using a vast array of 21st century skills, students communicated with other students, teachers, their community and sometimes outside institutions, collaborated with each other and their community, sought out different opinions, voices and information to think critically on the project at hand among other things. Once this process was complete using apps like Evernote and Pages. The final stage is when learners showcase their research and present it to the class. The self-report teacher journal reflects that creativity was highly visible as students chose a number of different modalities to present their research including text, audio and video using a number of apps. Some presented it formally, others through more comedic styles. All demonstrated their line of inquiry of the driving question and compared with previous classes, it was noted that these students researched more in their project. This deeper inquiry may relate to the driving and essential questions that is inherent in structured approach to PBL (Future Labs, n.d.; Larmer, Ross, & Mergendoller, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Teacher reflective journals were used to observe the interplay between teaching and learning pedagogy, the students and the iPad mobile learning technology. Observations were made which described student behavior as a result of two pedagogical approaches: task-based language learning and project-based learning. In general, a number of positive student behavior was observed and written in the journal. Students were engaged for longer periods, were more intrinsically motivated by the learning design and sustained their focus and attention to the learning activity. It was also noticed that activities within the tasks and projects were completed using the iPad. The use of workflows in and out of different apps provided a learning path that assisted in the creation of learning products.

Essentially, a duality of creation resulted in the learning process and final products of the learning with the end product being seen as creations. Creation in the learning process consisted of students actively creating their learning through the design of tasks and projects. This process culminated in a final product of creation and all were completed in and out of the classroom on the iPad. The iPad as a tool was integral in the teaching and learning of skills and English language learning development.

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