Multimedia projects

Diana Katz

Rationale
Project-based learning shifts the emphasis from teacher-centered to pupil-centered lessons and makes learning more relevant. In multimedia projects, pupils are motivated to pursue their own interests and choice of topic while using multimedia technology in the research, planning and presentation of their projects. This paper describes my experience of multimedia projects with eleventh grade 5-point Bagrut classes and tenth grade native speakers.

Choice of topic
Pupils chose topics they were interested in. They submitted a form, specifying the group members, topic chosen, sub-topics and research questions (Appendix A). I then assessed the choices, decided if the topics were appropriate, narrowed down the content areas (if necessary) and provided direction as needed.

Working groups
Pupils worked individually, in pairs or small groups of three or four. The rationale for this is that “in cooperative learning, students help other students ... in an effort to reach goals” (Richard-Amato, 1996, p. 270). Several studies have shown that weaker pupils benefit most from working in groups and that this is not to the detriment of high achievers. I found that weaker pupils felt less frustration in their learning as part of a group and high achievers were challenged by the project. Pupils who understood the technology used the opportunity to show their expertise and teach others. Small groups also ensured that each pupil had to contribute. Members received individual grades based on the group product.

Instructions
The pupils received clear and detailed written instructions, which were discussed orally in class, also concerning the written assignment, the media for the oral presentation, and assessment. (See Appendices B and C for instruction pages.)

Research
Pupils researched their topic using the library, the Internet and human resources. Because today “the computer age has presented a momentous challenge to society and school planners” (Wiles and Bondi, 1993, p. 17), use of the Internet in research has become essential. It also allows pupils real life connections with the outside world. Pupils should become proficient in accessing and using information from unadapted oral and written texts. In the written report, pupils had to assess the research process and specify the problems/benefits experienced. (Appendix B, # 6).

It was made clear to pupils that, in their written report, grades would be deducted for “copying and pasting,” which constitutes plagiarism. Pupils were told that they had to read material, integrate it and write up the information in their own words, to suit their specific research question. Although some pupils encountered difficulties in doing independent research and reading authentic material, most were able to comprehend the articles’ content, and I dealt with any problems at the conferencing stage. Alternatively, easier websites or resources are available or, if absolutely necessary, students can use some information on the Internet in their mother tongue. They can then express this in their own words in English. Since one of the objectives of the project was to expose pupils to authentic material, reading in English using easier English language websites was encouraged.

Pupils’ choice of topics varied. A few chose literary subjects which broadened their exposure to English literature (the poetry of Shel Silverstein). Others chose topics on music (The Beatles and Mozart), art (Picasso) and Greek mythology, thereby gaining insight into other cultures and appreciation of cultural differences.
From the Field

Conferencing
Although it was difficult to find time to meet with pupils, it was important to check that they focused on their research questions. While conferencing, I clarified the meaning when ideas were not clearly expressed, introduced new ways of thinking about the topic and evaluated the progress of the group. Groups worked on the projects during class time. They brought material and diskettes to work on in the computer room. This gave me a chance to monitor the group work and conference with some pupils while others were working.

Presentations
The final stage of the project was the presentation, both oral and written. The oral component was presented to peers and teachers. All group members were required to participate. Many groups chose to do PowerPoint presentations on the computer. Others chose poster or video presentations, or presented survey results either on handouts or using an overhead projector. The oral presentation lasted about 30 minutes. Topics chosen ranged from drug abuse, chocolate making (and tasting), Maradonna and astrological signs to the use of laser (a studio was set up and a laser machine was demonstrated), Teddy bears, Harry Potter, Aldous Huxley and a survey on education and whether the teaching profession is worthwhile!

Assessment
Projects were given grades for oral presentation (40%) and the written assignment (60%). The typed assignment was marked according to specific criteria, including physical appearance (attractiveness), clearly stated research questions, introduction, division of topic, conclusion and bibliography. (For the assessment sheet, see Appendix C.) I plan, in future, to use a rubric for assessment (Appendix D). The oral presentation was assessed according to content, presentation aids, i.e. the use of various media, and the general level of English spoken. This was the most subjective part of the assessment since much depended on the interest level of the topic and how the group chose to present it (Appendix E). It is also possible to have the class assess the presentations by means of an assessment checklist, and their evaluations should be taken into account. The project grade constituted 20%-30% of the semester grade, which was substantial enough for pupils to feel that they had to invest time and effort.

Problems and benefits
Problems:
1. There were many technical problems in organizing equipment (computer, video/TV) for use in lessons. On some occasions the equipment was not in working order or the room had been locked and the key was unavailable.
2. Despite clear instructions to the contrary, some pupils did copy material from sources. I therefore had to check drafts carefully, using spelling and grammar mistakes as a guide. The presentations also helped to verify original work; pupils could not present their project orally and answer questions if they did not understand the content.
3. Scheduling time for conferencing with pupils remains a problem. Schools that encourage multimedia projects should allocate a few extra hours for this purpose.

Benefits:
1. The learner-centered approach motivates pupils to pursue their own interests.
2. The project gives opportunities for interdisciplinary learning as pupils choose topics related to other fields.
3. Learning becomes relevant and useful since pupils use the Internet to relate to real life concerns.
4. Pupils acquire skills of collaborative learning as they work together to gather information, make decisions and present their work.
5. Pupils take more responsibility for their own learning. They are accountable to the group and to the entire class.

Conclusion
By promoting multimedia projects, educators believe that pupils learn expertise and skills which prepare them for functioning in the real world (Simkins, 2000). In my classes, they provided an interesting and stimulating way of learning. Some pupils, who had complained at the beginning, eventually admitted to enjoying the project. Pupils also said that they had learned a lot of information about their topic. The conclusion of one
pupil who researched the Holocaust and wrote about his trip to Poland is presented in Appendix F. The multimedia project method which I used was also an assignment which could be spoken about in lieu of a book report. Some pupils substituted their project for one extensive reading task for our internal Oral Bagrut.

Pupils invested time and effort in their research and presentations and these projects were a good example of pupils doing more and teachers talking less (Steiner, 1999). The thesis that “students learn best when they are actively engaged in gaining knowledge and are required to show evidence that they have learned” (Cody, 1996, p.15) was demonstrated in this project.

References


APPENDIX A
Multimedia project - preliminary form

1. Group Members:

2. Topic
a. General definition of topic:

b. Subtopics - Divide your topic into subsections
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 
   d. 
   e. 

3. Research Question/s
Write a research question for each subtopic.
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 
   d. 
   e. 

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English Teachers’ Journal  ■  June 2002
APPENDIX B
Multimedia project

1. Written assignment
Your project must be typed and attractively presented. It must be organized with headings and sub-headings. Read and summarize your sources and integrate your material into a fresh look at your topic. Do NOT copy and paste sections of the information from the Internet. This is plagiarism and will be penalized.

Include the following:
1. Cover page
2. Table of Contents
3. Introduction – State your research question/s and give a general definition of your topic. Explain why you chose to research this subject.
4. Main Topic – divided into subtopics.
5. Results
6. Report on the Research Process – Explain the process that you used in your search for information. Answer the following questions:
   a. What problems/achievements did you experience in your search for information?
   b. How long did the project take?
   c. Which sources were more/less helpful?
   d. Did you use the Zapper search engine? Did it save you time? What were the problems, if any, that you encountered?
7. Conclusion
8. Bibliography and Sources

2. The oral presentation
You may use one or more of the following media for your oral presentation:
   posters; computers; televisions, videos and tape-recorders; interviews; questionnaires; newspapers; models; drama; overhead projector

3. Assessment
   Oral presentation = 40%
   Written assignment = 60%

APPENDIX C
Project assessment form

Pupil’s Name: ____________________________
Oral Assignment = 40%
Written Assignment = 60%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Maximum %</th>
<th>Pupil %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Oral</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Written</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Aesthetic appearance</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clearly stated research question/s; relates to the topic throughout</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Introduction, table of contents, division of topic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organization of material into logical sequence</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use of sources, bibliography, and discussion of research process</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: ____________________________

From the Field
APPENDIX D
Rubric for assessment of written project

Rubric for Assessment of Written Project: 60%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Levels</th>
<th>0-2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6-8</th>
<th>9-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness (10%)</td>
<td>Not aesthetically presented. No cover page.</td>
<td>Aesthetically presented. Lacks attractive cover page and graphics.</td>
<td>Typed and aesthetically presented with cover page</td>
<td>Typed and aesthetically presented with cover page and graphics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content (quality of information) (10%)</td>
<td>Knowledge of content is minimal and there are factual errors.</td>
<td>Includes essential knowledge about the topic, but there are some factual errors.</td>
<td>Includes essential knowledge about the topic. Subject knowledge appears to be good.</td>
<td>Covers the topic in depth with details and examples. Subject knowledge is excellent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of material (10%)</td>
<td>The information is disorganized.</td>
<td>Information is organized but paragraphs are not well constructed.</td>
<td>Information is organized with well constructed paragraphs.</td>
<td>Information is well organized with well constructed paragraphs and subheadings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics (10%)</td>
<td>Many grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.</td>
<td>A few grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.</td>
<td>Almost no grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.</td>
<td>No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of sources and Internet (10%)</td>
<td>No evidence of Internet use. Sources of information are not accurately documented.</td>
<td>Occasionally able to use Internet links to find information. Many sources are not in desired format.</td>
<td>Usually able to use Internet links to find information. Not all sources are accurately documented.</td>
<td>Successfully uses Internet links. All sources are accurately documented in the desired format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations and diagrams (10%)</td>
<td>Illustrations and diagrams are not accurate and do not add to the reader's understanding of the topic.</td>
<td>Illustrations and diagrams are accurate but do not add to the reader's understanding of the topic.</td>
<td>Illustrations and diagrams are accurate and sometimes add to the reader's understanding of the topic.</td>
<td>Illustrations and diagrams are neat, accurate and add to the reader's understanding of the topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX E
Guide to oral assessment - a checklist

Pupil Name: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

Content:
☐ 1. The pupil was focused.
☐ 2. The pupil was well-informed on the topic.
☐ 3. The pupil presented ideas logically.
☐ 4. The pupil presented information others didn’t know.
☐ 5. The pupil was able to answer questions from the audience.

Delivery
☐ 6. The pupil did not read from written work.
☐ 7. The pupil spoke in fluent English.
☐ 8. The pupil maintained good posture.

Presentation Aids
☐ 9. Presentation aids enhanced the speech and increased its interest level.
☐ 10. Handouts /visual aids contained no spelling or grammatical errors.

APPENDIX F
Excerpt (unedited) from a native English speaker’s project on “The Jews of Poland” (PowerPoint presentation)

“At first when I got the assignment to do this project, I wanted to do it on a completely different subject. But then came the journey to Poland, it inspired me so much that I decided to change my subject and write about Poland and my journey. I decided to do that because besides the huge inspiration Poland gave me, I felt that if I added to the project a personal dimension, it will be more fun to do and much more interesting to read or hear...

This project was done after my journey to Poland and draws the inspiration from it. The part of my own journey is the most important and meaningful to me. From this project I learned more about the Jewish life in Poland, how the Jews were actually part of the Polish nation for a time and I understood even more deeply how during the Holocaust the Nazis erased almost completely the huge Jewish community in Poland. The project helped me organize my thoughts and feelings about my journey. For me the journey to Poland was a kind of look inside my soul and a very humane experience and I think anyone who comes back from that journey comes back a better person in his soul. … My mental journey is not over yet. Other than that I still have one physical action that is also mental that I still have to do. This is to light 21 candles in Treblinka to honor the memory of my family, a very important task that I did not get the chance to do while I was in Poland. This project was special and different because it was made shortly after the journey when all the memories and feelings are still fresh and it helped me show others who were not there what I experienced.”