

CHAPTER 7

Challenging EFL Learners Through TV Advertising and Student-Produced Multimedia Projects

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Using television (TV) advertisements involving well-known brand names and products can motivate and engage English language learners in active discussion in a collaborative learning environment. The Intercultural Communications course at Ibaraki University exposes Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) undergraduates to advertising before undertaking a multimedia project based on making short TV commercials. In this way, the oral proficiency of these learners, who have had little or no contact with English-speaking countries, is improved along with awareness of persuasive advertising tactics. This chapter describes the two major challenges for students in this course: (1) using English actively to deconstruct advertisements and (2) incorporating advertising techniques into self-made digital commercials. The general procedure for making such video productions is outlined. Little research has been published on the effects of digital media on EFL students' oral proficiency and learning when exploiting advertising in the classroom. The present study seeks to answer the following questions: What is the impact of media production on students' learning of English, and to what extent can it increase their participation? How can current EFL pedagogical practices be improved when blending media with classroom language teaching? Student feedback is drawn from self-evaluations, interviews, and student logs in order to shed light on ways to enrich instruction, strengthen overall organization of course content, and increase students' learning.

Advertisements permeate the modern world and have a strong influence on our lives. One study found that U.S. "children view more than 40,000 commercials each year" (Wilcox et al., 2004, p. 4). Given this constant exposure, learning more about the persuasive intentions of advertising could provide stimulating practice to increase aural/oral English while raising students' awareness of the true significance of the brand names that they gravitate toward. As a teaching

tool, short TV commercials are ideal for in-class activities and for analyzing cultural attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Speaking of pedagogy in the digital era, Nahachewsky and Begoray (2010) point out that “effective teachers are those who find a way to engage in new approaches by building on previous understandings” (p. 429). By engaging with students’ background knowledge regarding their preferred brands and products, using commercials in the classroom can stimulate student interest and improve learning outcomes. It is also my belief that the project described in this chapter enhances not only language skills but also participation, motivation, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Although teachers generally support integrating technology into their English lessons to foster creative expression and critical thinking, actual practice appears to lag behind. In Japan, due to intense pressure from rigorous university entrance exams, there is little opportunity for pair or group discussion, and critical thinking is often discouraged in mainly teacher-centered classrooms that emphasize translation activities, rote learning, and memorization of vocabulary and grammar. In such contexts, educational technology use often takes the form of computer programs that drill students with more of these types of activities. For example, as Erkaya (2005) points out, students are not encouraged to share their points of view with their peers and teachers, whereas teachers are entitled to share their opinions with students, or even impose their opinions on the students. Thus, although studying a foreign language, some students do not identify with the target language or culture, and they often feel reluctant to speak if presented with the chance. However, when encouraged to collaborate on structured projects of real-world relevance, students often discover new strengths and talents within themselves while grappling with novel concepts and technological skills. Positive comments were received from students in the present project, such as from Makiko,¹ who said, “We learned about their culture. It was fun [and] . . . helped me to change different idea, information, viewpoint on commercials made by ourselves.” These words clearly indicate that student experiences with such projects can foster new identities and a sense of pride in their achievements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of authentic TV commercials has been researched and incorporated into effective language learning activities. Erkaya (2005) suggests techniques such as making predictions, brainstorming words or phrases that will be seen, using only the sound, transcribing the message, working with as many senses as possible to describe the commercial, and discussing the commercial from a prospective consumer’s point of view. In addition, Schmidt (1998), Ambrose (2002), Sherman (2003), and Stempleski (1992) offer rich and varied activities but do not venture

¹All student names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

solidly into the realm of film production or video editing in order to enhance the study of media literacy and improve language skills. Prior to the filming and video editing stages, it is useful to complete some preliminary activities. A general outline of such activities could include the following:

- screening TV commercials for applicability, appropriateness, and degree of interest for learners (e.g., fashion and brand names, cosmetics, sports)
- viewing and familiarizing students with TV commercials, their genre, and advertising techniques and claims
- developing learners' critical thinking by exploring how the advertiser makes the product more attractive or persuades the consumer to buy the product
- having students brainstorm and refine ideas for the final project while elaborating on and negotiating ideas with the instructor and student groups

Even with the huge strides being made in technology in recent years, teaching and learning practices related to filming and video editing continue to be largely overlooked, and practical information in this area is lacking. Some authors (e.g., Harris, 2006) do give extensive instructions to help teachers with preproduction, shooting, editing, and publishing procedures. However, these authors often do not attend to students' actual experiences when using digital equipment and editing programs. Fritsch (1998) describes simple, short, autonomous projects in which learners designed and produced vacation commercials on a single video camera, followed by viewing. Daniels (2004) mentions learner-generated video clips and proposes useful suggestions for filming and video editing, with students presenting their favorite restaurants, hometowns, or enjoyable activities. He recommends that teachers become familiar with video editing software. Nikitina (2011) describes a video project and analyzes the benefits for authentic language learning wherein collaboration leads to ownership of the learning. McGee and Fujita (2001) recommend preparing university EFL students for filming commercials by viewing "six commercials selling the same type of product . . . so that students are able to recognize different strategies used by makers of commercials to target certain groups of consumers within a given market" (p. 115). On another note, Yildiz (2008) reports on teacher candidates wishing to upgrade their knowledge of media and educational technology and integrate video production into their classes. This study highlights the importance for teachers of being aware of user-friendly video editing software before embarking on such a project.

Projects described by Henderson et al. (2010) and Kearney and Schuck (2004) refer to the learning that occurred through video production among elementary school students in Australia. The authors note that learning outcomes were principally those of communication, observation, and reflection, and pedagogy

had shifted to a more student-centered approach, which also offered more opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice. McGee and Fujita (2001) provide a practical master list of required vocabulary from the field of commercial advertising, along with helpful guidance for the teacher and students. Elsewhere, Concerned Children's Advertisers (n.d.) has supplied key terms and worksheets to increase awareness of advertising tactics, storyboards, and information about filming.

When using commercials in the classroom, it is critical to select commercials that are within the range of students' linguistic abilities and comprehension and are appropriate for the given age group. Commercials should contain simple language, everyday settings, and actions to which students can relate. Sherman (2003) advises the use of "images which suggest the product without revealing it . . . and an effective punch line, slogan or catchphrase" (p. 108). By careful selection, the teacher can settle on short, appealing, and dynamic clips that lend themselves well to classroom activities. The very brevity of these clips motivates students to watch them again and again, thereby improving listening skills. Moreover, the clips' accessibility via the Internet makes it easier for students to view them again on their own time, which would be helpful for students with lower proficiency. However, some content may be questionable, especially if assigned for homework. To avoid this problem, students can be invited to join a closed Facebook page where a choice of assigned commercials has already been posted.

CASE STUDY

The semester-long, 15-week course on commercials consists of 15 ninety-minute classes and is offered in the Intercultural Communications section in the Faculty of Humanities at Ibaraki University. Generally at an intermediate level, the participants have passed the Level 4 General Education English classes, with a TOEIC mean score of 551. Because the course is elective, each third-year university student must consider his or her objectives for attending these small classes. In 2009, only three students enrolled in the course, and in 2010, seven full-time students enrolled. In 2011, due to a scheduling conflict among other interested students, only one student enrolled. However, the insights and experiences gained from this sole case were most helpful, because there were fewer distractions and I had more time to interact on a deeper level. The course was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of exposure to advertising with careful scaffolding to build student understanding of its specialized vocabulary, claims² made by advertisements, and techniques used in producing commercials. The second part was the student-generated project itself. Please see the Appendix for a variety of course and project activities.

²The *advertising claims* (or simply *claims*) referred to in this chapter are techniques used by advertisers to inspire perceptions of the superiority of a given product.

To engage students actively in analyzing ads, I first elicited learners' most and least preferred commercials in their first language (L1). The students became the experts who explained the background, message, images, actions, and purposes of the commercials, while I took on the role of the learner. Another potentially effective technique here would be for small groups to make brief reenactments of such commercials; this technique has the additional benefit of helping students gain insights into the thinking of advertising companies and their commercials, which may have been viewed only passively prior to this time.

Two well-constructed PowerPoint presentations were particularly useful to introduce the essentials of advertising. These presentations give clear examples of advertising claims and techniques such as appeal to authority figures and ordinary people, snob and sex appeal, and the four Ps in advertisements (point of view, position, posture, and the person speaking). These presentations are titled "Recognizing Common Advertising Strategies" (Hatzigeorgiou, 2009) and "Advertising Techniques" (Nakazaki, 2011). Advertising notions from this material were integrated into classes to further familiarize students with TV commercials by showing examples of commercials,³ which would reinforce the four Ps and general advertising techniques and claims from these two presentations. Prior to the project, the worksheet "Deconstructing an Advertisement" from Media Education Foundation (2005) provided excellent support for a more thorough analysis of such ads, which eased students into interpreting, evaluating, and analyzing them.

Given the sheer volume and the wide range in quality of available commercials on YouTube, a great deal of sifting through material was required to select appropriate commercials. All videos were previewed and selected based on appropriateness, vocabulary, pace, length, clarity of message, relevancy, and appealing content. To start with, the 1987 Diet Pepsi commercial "New Neighbor," starring Michael J. Fox (www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvsbeQbj8tM), was chosen for students to simply count how many times the product was mentioned. The commercial was short and full of challenges for the protagonist to face, and the ending was unpredictable. The well-chosen background music clearly demonstrated for students how music could contribute to the overall effect of the commercial. After viewing this commercial, students practiced with the transcript to infuse more drama, emotion, and voice projection into their own role-plays.

Homework for the project included weekly vocabulary logs and student journals, which engaged the class in learning and self-reflection. Journals enabled

³Among others, the following commercials (with purposes in parentheses) were used for this exercise: (a) Diet Pepsi (band wagon and sex appeal), as described in this chapter; (b) Visa (celebrity endorsement, explicit-implied message), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4L1utP35oA>; (c) Seatbelt public service announcement (lends itself well to a storyboard exercise and example of public announcements), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2o1oJ1zk_w; (d) Sapporo (position and point of view of product), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-Rs6YEZAAt8&noredirect=1>.

the teacher to become more aware of each group's progress and the difficulties that students encountered. Prompts were initially provided orally and on the blackboard to introduce the journaling activity. To foster more spontaneity and reflection in the log sheets, the rationale and general questions were explained as follows: "I am interested in your experiences, observations, learning, reactions, and feedback during this course. Please write at least half a page after each class and hand it in during the next class." The goal in the journaling activity was to encourage review of weekly activities as well as group work and to discuss impressions and insights that might not surface otherwise. Students were to focus especially on the learning in each class as well as what was interesting and surprising to them. They were to include individual or group challenges and problems during the activities, their feelings about these, and any solutions they found, as well as to mention questions and worries they might have. The vocabulary logs encouraged learners to take note of and write down words and sentences from a particular context to share in class. These scaffolds enabled students to describe the commercial with pertinent words in context.

PREPRODUCTION: RECORDING ROLE-PLAYS

Active practice is of utmost importance, and time on task can dramatically enhance learning and recall if students are more directly involved in an activity (Harris, 2006). Thus, role-plays preceded the actual filming and acting in the final video project and provided opportunities to discuss the results constructively. The goal was to keep role-plays as simple and familiar as possible while completing them rapidly. Thus, small groups focused on enacting a familiar family scene after deciding on family members, names, ages, jobs, and one family problem. They took brief notes, rehearsed briefly, and then filmed the role-plays. All students benefited from short appearances in front of a camera before the final project because some might have felt unprepared, reluctant, or anxious about being filmed. One student named Yoshiro, from the 2011 cohort, explained, "It was very shyness for me. Very hard for Japanese people to out [i.e., express outwardly] feelings but the commercial needs strong feelings. I must project feelings." These sentiments may be shared by many students in East Asian countries and can help the teacher understand why role-plays are an essential step in the project.

After watching the role-plays together, we focused on what students had done well to build confidence in risk-taking and creative experimentation. Finally, a goal-setting activity was assigned as homework to promote further self-reflection. A clear example of such self-reflection was provided by Sachiko, from the 2009 cohort, who wrote the following in her log after viewing her own role-play video:

I should have performed more dramatically. I was very nervous so I couldn't talk a loud voice and perform very well. After we finished and watched it in the class, I regretted. I will try hard in the final video.

It is worth noting that activities involving video production warrant careful consideration by practitioners. For example, implementing these activities with large groups of students would be more challenging, as the number of video cameras has a direct impact on filming schedules. In such cases, some students should practice their role-plays while others are filming. Time should also be allocated for viewing and discussing common errors such as filming into the light or turning backs to the cameras. Some other points that should be covered in the context of these role-play videos are body language, eye contact, intonation, loudness, and the general effectiveness of the role-plays.

Once the class had viewed several commercials and attempted a first film appearance, students found a topic suitable to produce as a commercial for their final project. In groups, students brainstormed products they used and liked and then agreed on a message, slogan, and technique or claim. The San Diego County Office of Education (2009) advises that “each team ‘pitch’ their product . . . [to] check idea feasibility and be certain that the video plan has been thought through” (p. 4). Strong planning created more successful products, and having an evaluator assess the feasibility of students’ ideas and provide constructive feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of the project assisted in refining their plans. In addition, the pitch was a valuable opportunity for students to build enthusiasm for the project, use voice projection and appropriate body language, and incorporate some drama into their explanation. Students could write down ideas on large sheets of white paper in text or picture form. Each member took a turn at explaining the product, title, message, and technique or claim. By organizing one idea per page and posting them on the walls, learners could better articulate their goals and develop their plans. In this way, all members were able to visualize and work on the organization of their pitch at once. Students were instructed to refer only to the notes on the posted papers.

A normal TV commercial lasts from 30 seconds to more than 1 minute, and it was therefore required that scripts not exceed 2 minutes in length. One enormous benefit of shorter scenes and dialogues was that students were under less pressure to memorize. However, creating dialogues took time, and approximately two class periods were required. It was acceptable for students to loosely base ideas on real TV commercials. The focus was less on narration and voiceover, and more on group interaction when writing active dialogue for each scene, wherein all members except the director of a particular scene appeared and spoke. Before dress rehearsals, scripts were practiced.

After scripting the dialogues, each group focused on designing a storyboard, the project blueprint that included outlines and sketches of information such as settings and props. Storyboards served as road maps, which encouraged the planning of ideas scene by scene, as well as locations, camera positions or angles, the shots, and the approximate length of each scene. The San Diego County Board of Education’s (2012) *Production Tips*, which supplies sample storyboards and worksheets, could also be used as a resource for creating storyboards. Storyboards

helped students break down scenes into the shortest units possible. This had a huge impact during filming, because longer scenes took time and effort to reshoot. Dress rehearsals were essential to check on the flow and energy of each scene and address technical issues such as forgotten props, pronunciation, facial expressions, and gestures. Meanwhile, the individual directors of each scene also practiced with the camera in place to check the positions of actors and products as well as to experiment with different camera angles. Finally, prior to filming, students signed a release form (Glass, 1992).

Production Process

The digital aspects of student-generated commercials were created in two stages: filming and editing. Of course, filming went more smoothly when students had prepared well. This meant that locations for filming had been verified and storyboards had been reordered and adjusted to reflect conditions such as lighting, space for the camera, and the framing of each scene. In her final self-report, Yuka, from the 2010 cohort, realized the importance of the setting: “Our camera angle had to be changed because just filming at the front angle is boring. Different angle makes audience attract[ed] more [to the product].”

Although student preparation is crucial to success, there are also many practical things teachers themselves can do to ensure smooth preparation and organization during the video production process. The importance of respecting time slots when working with the cameras and computers should be impressed upon the students, and in doing so, they will learn time management. Sign-up sheets for camera equipment should be posted in accessible areas. A checklist of basic equipment required for filming can be distributed so that nothing is missing before heading out:

- newly charged camera batteries and a charger in case of emergency
- a head set
- a video tape (if needed)
- an external handheld microphone with fresh batteries
- a tripod
- and so on

There should be a safe place to keep the group video when not in use so that a late or absent classmate does not cause undue stress when failing to appear with the tape. Effective camera use should have been explained previously (e.g., framing for camera angles, different kinds of shots, shooting extra blank footage before and after each scene). Finally, the instructor should be available and reachable while students are shooting during class and after, for problems crop up and some creative solutions may be suddenly needed. I took these practical steps in the present case study, and it greatly complemented students’ own efforts.

This activity further extended students' technical literacy in terms of both audiovisual recording equipment and digital video editing software. For filming, a tripod and microphone were needed; the tripod keeps the camera steadier to facilitate video editing afterward, and the microphone improves audio quality. We used Apple iMovie 2 and iMovie 11 for all digital video editing purposes. The newer version of the program (iMovie 11) had various user-friendly features that enabled students to produce higher quality videos. For example, the new audio editor can modify voices to sound like they are on radios or telephones, and the pitch can be made higher or lower. If there is unexpected background noise, original footage can be muted and newly selected music or sound added. Special effects such as slow motion or fast forward are also easier to apply to the clips. To this end, a student named Satomi wrote in her group evaluation, "Setsuko said to me 'We have to use it. Tempo is very important point of commercial! In this case, slow is bad!' . . . Simple commercial is boring." On the newer version of iMovie, files can also be saved much more readily to a number of social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube or synced with iTunes.

It was important to celebrate the successes of students who appeared in front of the camera, used computer video editing software, and cooperated in groups to respect deadlines while producing creative video clips. The commercials were then viewed by an exchange class at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Students in this exchange class were eager and curious to watch and did so without judgment. After each viewing, the UAB students were encouraged to ask questions, and one or two constructive points were written by all and redistributed to each group in the original Japanese class. The exchange class procedures are described in more detail next.

EXCHANGE CLASS AND PROJECT ASSESSMENT

A real target audience outside the country heightened interest, engagement, and motivation, although identifying partners required time and effort. Through an exchange class program, the class in Japan received input from native-speaker peers rather than from the teacher or classmates. The students at UAB who were our partners for the present project were unexpected because they were studying Japanese, not English.

I was able to forward our 2011 production videos directly via Dropbox, a free online service that allows users to upload and share files from anywhere in the world. The UAB class viewed and evaluated the 2011 clip according to various criteria, including originality, effective slogans and messages, the use of at least one or two advertising techniques or claims, background music, and camera work. Written comments by UAB students were emailed to the class in Japan, and the videos were also discussed between the two classes via Skype. In order for interaction to be more meaningful for the target audience, Yoshiro prepared as both director and actor to answer questions and explain behind-the-scenes

decisions and challenges. To build on his linguistic and cultural knowledge, he wanted to understand his U.S. audience's perceptions of the commercial and its potential effectiveness in the United States. Comments from UAB students were constructive and positive; they included specific information about his oral English abilities (e.g., intonation, pauses), which he particularly appreciated.

In this project, work was collected in various ways for assessment purposes. First, understanding was evaluated through more traditional means, such as several short vocabulary quizzes and a test on advertising claims and techniques. Second, summative weekly journals tracked individual effort and gave insights into students' learning processes. Third, vocabulary logs were completed by students. And finally, portfolios of work were compiled throughout the course. These portfolios included examples of work in progress on video production as well as final self-reflections on the challenges and problems encountered when working individually and in groups. Printouts were made of the questionnaire, storyboard, dialogue, personal assessment of the group's video clip, and a final self-evaluation along with the grade the student believed he or she should receive. These assessment strategies helped students develop metacognitive skills and assisted them in becoming more self-directed in their learning. Finally, teacher observations of class work, filming, and video editing provided further reference for assessment.

CASE ANALYSIS OF YOSHIRO AND HIS PEERS

It is essential that EFL learners who share a native language receive opportunities to practice speaking English with each other. In the context of this particular project, increasing oral expression during group work was crucial, because there was a tendency to lapse into Japanese during group activities when brainstorming or grappling with sophisticated technical terms or software. In working with Yoshiro, the only student enrolled in the 2011 class, I gained valuable insights. He was highly motivated and determined to take full advantage of the class to improve his English. He felt he lacked vocabulary as well as confidence in expressing himself orally, and he especially wanted to improve these areas. Yoshiro's opinions about his speaking skills concurred with students from previous years' classes; he also admitted to having little or no video editing experience and knowledge of media literacy. Because dialogue is an essential component in each production, Yoshiro invited another Japanese student, Wataru, to perform with him. This gave Yoshiro valuable opportunities to use his spoken English with a fellow speaker of Japanese.

For his project, Yoshiro decided to create a commercial about the energy drink Red Bull. He chose this product due to his own reliance on energy drinks to stay awake to finish his final essays at the last minute. Thus, he chose his topic based on his own experiences and background knowledge. The commercial Yoshiro created featured himself consuming the product and becoming rejuvenated in order to complete last-minute academic tasks. Like students from previ-

ous classes, Yoshiro used only words he was comfortable with, which were also easier for him to say and remember. Past groups had made commercials about a Japanese hot pot, a delicious snack, and a visit to a traditional Japanese home.

Although Yoshiro confessed to a general dislike of school assignments, he managed well with the video project and completed the editing on his own time. His positive attitude is clearly demonstrated in his journal:

I was interested in using iMovie. I haven't used it . . . and it was the first time with computer editing, so I was very worried. It is a nice feeling to finish my big work so I felt to get big success.

As mentioned by Henderson et al. (2010), "the process of digital video production and most importantly, the process of reflection, allow[s] students to find their own pathways in learning, while still engaging with the key curriculum goals" (p. 16). This was certainly the case with Yoshiro; in truth, it was the first time in the history of this class that a student had completed the video editing outside of class without assistance. Yoshiro showed evidence of problem-solving skills, which allowed him to excel at this task. For instance, uploading and integrating appropriate music to iMovie 11 was a challenge for him initially; however, Yoshiro displayed his increasing autonomy by searching the manual and even visiting a media professor for advice.

Yoshiro's journal revealed some doubts about the purpose of the video editing project. He wrote, "To use iMovie 11 is to know about editing way rather than to improve my English." He had a valid point, and I interviewed him to search for solutions together. We considered lengthening the video editing period, but we came to the conclusion that such a modification was not feasible due to scheduling difficulties. Rather, Yoshiro suggested that the initial period dedicated to advertising techniques be shortened. In this way, more time could be spent on the project itself. Yoshiro explained:

Before making the commercial, I watched a lot of commercials. It is nice for Japanese people . . . [who] haven't watched [foreign] commercials. . . . But if you shorten the [initial example] commercials, and give students [only] two to three [advertising] techniques, maybe it is enough to understand. . . . If there is more time, they can remake some scenes . . . there will be more time for editing. . . . There was no time, so I couldn't do it.

Following his suggestions, the final class sessions could be used to review and consolidate advertising techniques while viewing more commercials. Students often speak mostly in their L1 when contending with highly technical vocabulary and concepts during the editing process. To increase English speaking practice, we therefore decided that during each class of video editing every group should report orally to the instructor on planned or completed work. Moreover, in order to simplify the editing period, the instructor or an assistant could do certain basic, time-consuming, or mechanical tasks such as importing group clips into

the computers, inserting the music, saving files, exporting and uploading the finished video, and making copies for students. This would allow students more class time to discuss advertising.

By sharing commercials with native speaker audiences, Yoshiro hoped to increase his oral communication skills and improve his speaking confidence. He willingly attended the extra Skype session at the end of the project so that UAB students could comment on the commercials. His confidence seemed to improve, for he stated,

It was the first time to use a web camera. The last time I had a chance to talk to an Alabama student . . . we [didn't have a] webcam. It was very hard because I couldn't see him, his body language. But today, with the picture it helps my English. And they were always smiling so I can feel comfortable to speak.

Yoshiro also appreciated the additional opportunity for direct communication:

It was most useful information for me. I was lucky to spend time to listen their impressions. It was a nice chance to practice my listening and speaking skill[s]. I feel [the UAB students] are very smart. I learned English for 6 years, but it was examination English. They are learning communicative Japanese."

This realization was crucial in that it strengthened Yoshiro's determination to actively practice English. He and I also understood how important webcams were as a visual aid to comprehension.

Tim Cook, the UAB professor of Japanese who was involved in the exchange classes, reported about the video project as follows:

I have been able to give my students numerous opportunities to interact with their peers in Japan, both in Japanese and in English. . . . Attendance was voluntary and 11 turned up for the viewing. Students viewed the video 30 minutes prior to the Skype call and students watched the commercial with an eye for critiquing it later. The producer-actor in the commercial, a male student with a flair for acting, gave a humorous performance in which the advertised energy drink gave him super energy, as he signified through fast motion video and upbeat music. My students laughed throughout and asked to watch again. Representative comments were mostly about the actor, such as "He's funny" and "He gets the point across." They also thought the use of fast-motion video was effective in conveying his newfound energy from the drink. To improve the video, they made comments on the production decisions. While they liked the fun upbeat music used for energetic work, students thought that an even faster beat might have been more effective. They would have also worked on some of the actor's English. While they found his Japanese accent charming, they would have corrected his misplaced emphasis on certain words and choice of wording here and there. However, these were minor issues. While they enjoyed the video, even more exciting was talking directly with the star himself. They continued talking about favorite music, free time activities, and other topics typical of young people everywhere, sometimes in English and sometimes in Japanese, and were excited to find common interests. Many asked for the Japanese student's Skype address.

With the permission of all involved, the 2011 Ibaraki-UAB Skype session was videotaped so that Yoshiro could review and reflect more deeply on the information contained within—U.S. verbal and nonverbal communication, in particular, facial expressions and body language. In his final evaluation of the project, Yoshiro expressed satisfaction and enhanced confidence: “This event was very delightful for me because I could communicate [with] foreigner.”

Yoshiro’s awareness of advertising strategies also increased over the course of the project. In his words, “Always before, I just watched commercials. I don’t think about [them]. After I learned the techniques . . . when I watched commercials, I think, ‘Now maybe they are using this [advertising] claim or that claim.’” Sachiko also showed proof of critical thinking in her observations of the project in 2009: “I could learn how commercial is made and how important to think about what the company wants to say to persuade people.” Other students from previous classes highlighted the positive outcomes of the video project. For instance, Kana wrote, “It was a fantastic experience to make our own commercial. . . . I thought it was difficult to make film smoothly and naturally but in fact, I enjoyed editing: for example I enjoyed choosing music and putting [effects] on film.”

It was fascinating to follow and observe Yoshiro closely, and I felt we were co-constructing the commercial and learning together. In effect, I became his assistant director; the position of the product and camera angle became important to me as his success and his learning became my success and my learning. I had time to think about what he said or wrote and received good ideas for improving my pedagogy. In the process, Yoshiro was gaining more practice in communicating his preferences to me.

CONCLUSION

The present project yields some valuable insights into TESOL practices that integrate digital video production into the curriculum. First of all, teachers must be aware of issues that can arise during the course of a video production project such as the one described in this chapter. For instance, starting with a lower risk activity such as role-plays lessens student apprehension by providing a series of specific steps and guidelines and creating an opportunity for success before the final project. Second, although the initial brainstorming and video editing stages can take a great deal of class time, these steps are crucial to the process and are well worth the effort. In my experience with this course, students often worked very efficiently to complete these tasks during class time, because it was quite difficult to hold group meetings outside of class due to scheduling conflicts. Upon further reflection on the 2011 class, it would have been useful for Yoshiro to work more on his pronunciation and rhythm with members of the exchange class. In a language class, a native speaker instructor may become so adept at guessing student pronunciation and intonation that she or he fails to catch errors a foreign audience may not understand, which was exactly what happened in the 2011

production. More time for communication with the exchange class will certainly be integrated into the course in the future.

During this student-centered course and hands-on project, active communication skills were nurtured through discussion and evaluation of authentic advertising concepts and through the production of commercials for a real international audience. Learners were required to express themselves verbally when working in groups to brainstorm, write and revise their scripts, negotiate messages and slogans, organize settings and props, and integrate claims and techniques from the advertising media. As Foss, Carney, McDonald, and Rooks (2007) note, “in a world in which cooperative group efforts and achievement of tangible products is often a measure of success and accomplishment, project-based learning prepares students well for real world events” (“Final Thoughts”). Students in the present case study collaborated on a variety of activities, employing the real-life skills of acting, filming, video editing, and time management. They learned to assess their own and others’ work through portfolios and were finally able to actively express themselves with confidence in authentic interactions with international peers.

As Pearlman (2011) states,

students of today enter an increasingly globalized world in which technology plays a vital role. They must be good communicators, as well as great collaborators. The new work environment requires responsibility and self-management, as well as interpersonal and project-management skills that demand teamwork and leadership. (para. 8)

It is my hope that this project challenged students to develop just such skills—and also to become more aware of the consumer society in which they live and critically analyze some of the implicit messages and slick images of advertising.

ENDNOTE

Teachers should be aware of copyright laws. Erkaya (2005) states, “In America, if used for educational purposes and where no fees are involved, it may be acceptable. Concerned instructors should verify the regulations but, if worried, . . . use for one semester and then change.” Brant (2005) also adds, “Screenrights—The Audio-Visual Copyright Society does however make it possible for schools, TAFES and universities to use such material for educational purposes by entering into an agreement. As a result of this agreement, institutions are given permission to copy programmes from radio or television (both pay and free to air). More information can be found at (www.screen.org) or by emailing the company (licensing@screen.org).” Copyright laws are tightening, so copyright clearance on free social media sites such as Flickr or Picasa are helpful for self-created material.

APPENDIX:

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Week 1 Course introduction. View student-generated commercial. Start print media commercials with “Recognizing Common Advertising strategies.” Homework: Write down two to three products for final project.
- Week 2 Discuss favorite TV commercials. Teach “Advertising techniques.” View and analyze TV commercial.
- Week 3 View TV commercial. Introduce role-plays for next class. Brainstorm product. Form groups. Homework: Test on advertising strategies.
- Week 4 Sell group commercial to teacher. View another class-made commercial. Work on role-plays. Advertising strategies test.
- Week 5 Film role-plays. View and discuss constructively. Begin work on final project: Brainstorm ideas/details.
- Week 6 View TV commercial. Work on dialogues.
- Week 7 View TV commercial. Finish work on dialogues.
- Week 8 Begin storyboards. View another TV commercial. Introduce iMovie.
- Week 9 Finish storyboards. Dress rehearsals: When ready, practice in front of instructor, and film parts of project. Skype with exchange group.
- Week 10 Finish dress rehearsals. Continue filming.
- Week 11 Start video editing.
- Week 12 Continue video editing.
- Week 13 Finish video editing. Send to exchange partners.
- Week 14 Whole-class viewing of final projects presented via panels of directors. If time, work on portfolios. View another commercial.
- Week 15 Skype with exchange partners for feedback on videos. Finalize portfolios. Course wrap-up.