

## Creating a Bridge Between Liberal Arts Classes and the English Lounge Through Active International Lunchtime Projects

アクティブ・ラーニングのランチタイム・プロジェクトで  
教養教育科目と英語学習施設をつなぐ

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### Abstract

In 2017 and 2018, four groups of Liberal Arts students in different levels and different grades participated in spring lunchtime projects where they made official PechaKucha presentations, personal speeches and actual Japanese cuisine demonstrations. The projects have served to reshape the attitudes of underclassmen toward English and English-learning and have given the Hirosaki English Lounge (EL) language center an even stronger place in the academic lives of both the students who have presented and the student/faculty audience. This paper is a brief account of the outcomes of the projects vis-à-vis creating a bridge between the EL and Liberal Arts students.

**Keywords:** Language centers, experiential learning, PechaKucha, project-based learning, active learning

The authors have conducted international lunchtime projects with four completely different spring semester Liberal Arts classes over two consecutive years at Hirosaki University. In 2017, the classes involved were freshman “Intermediate Listening” and sophomore “Integrated A.” In 2018, the courses were freshman “Listening for Beginners” and junior “Integrated C.” The authors have created a number of papers and presentations on the projects (Berman & Tada, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Also, the philosophy for the out-of-class work on the project is delineated in detail in Berman’s article on flipped classrooms (Berman, 2017).

The same basic procedure has been followed throughout. The procedure has created many intersections between the required Liberal Arts courses and the English Lounge (EL), which is a language center that focuses mostly on voluntary participation. These projects have also brought participants into greater contact with the international students.

Based on an original active learning project model, the projects engage students in a variety of ways. They have ownership of the subject matter and are in a position of imparting knowledge to an international group. In the past, the Liberal Arts class students either went to the EL to interview overseas students, or they were interviewed by them in the Conversation Circle. The situations were almost always unnatural. With the lunchtime projects, they were able to be strong stakeholders. Students took pride in what they were accomplishing. The level of compliance was noteworthy. All students showed up for an outside-of-class presentation time slot. Members of the group shared

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a nominal expense and paid for the food. The instructors provided the paper products and kitchen tools. Below is an overview of the scope and procedures for the 2018 lunch presentations:

## **The lunchtime presentation projects**

### **Logistics**

Each group of students was assigned a food item in class. They were given some class time to brainstorm and decide on a Japanese dish that typically uses the designated item. For example, Japanese-style omelets were made both years in groups to whom eggs were assigned. For management purposes, the classes have existing squads with whom they work every week.

While they were given some class time to organize and practice, all final presentations were made during the lunch hour in the English Lounge (hereinafter, EL) (Nakamura, et.al., 2015). In 2018, during class, the week before each presentation, there was a dress rehearsal where the students did everything except actually cook. They moved around the utensils and the pan, so it was a chance to make sure that they had arranged for the right items, in advance, as well. Integrated C (3<sup>rd</sup> Year students, 3Y) gave their presentations from 12:00–12:30 on Mondays. Listening for Beginners class students (1<sup>st</sup> Year students 1Y) gave theirs the same time on Thursdays.

### **Promotion**

Students were asked to create a poster and an all-school e-mail invitation. They prepared this promotional material 10–14 days ahead of their presentations. Most of them consulted faculty or went to the EL and made small revisions to their original wording based on the advice of the English teachers or the international students that work in the EL, who are called Supporters. Posters were put up in the various departments, and the event was advertised one or two times by e-mail.

## **Execution**

### **PechaKucha portion**

Students mostly used the suggested template for a pre-presentation introduction of their group to call the session to order. They then began the formal part of their presentations by giving a PechaKucha-style PowerPoint slides (Klein & Dytham, 2017), in which the slides automatically advanced every 20 seconds. In most cases, one student had written the text for three consecutive slides and had other students convey the information for two of their three slides. The instructors insisted that students alternate the speaker to help them keep to the time limit of each slide, work on fluency and keep the audience engaged. This portion of the project took between three and four minutes depending upon the group size. They were instructed to overlap if a speaker went over the time limit and their slide appeared.

### **Cooking demo**

Next, the group cooked the food. They explained what they were doing as they cooked. Supporters asked pertinent questions while they were cooking. For many of the lower level students, it was the first time they had dealt with someone from overseas in a real-life situation. Unlike the tendency of the EL “Conversation Circle” to devolve into students interviewing one another, this type of question felt more organic and real-world to everyone involved. When the dish was ready, the group worked together to divide it up and distribute samples.

### **Personal stories**

While the dish was being distributed and tasted, each person in the group gave a one-minute speech about their own experience with the food. Some talked about not liking something as a child but growing to appreciate the ingredient; others talked about memories of family members, hometown customs, and differences in their eating habits since leaving home, etc. This is another area where creativity was encouraged.

### **Q&A**

The Supporters and other international students were invited specifically for this phase of the project. They asked many questions. They wanted to know if there were variations to the recipes, how often the particular food was eaten, if one ingredient was recommended over another, if something could be substituted, etc. In most cases, the presenters responded spontaneously and, once again, communicated in a real situation in real time. Some international students actually studied the ingredient, and its history in Japanese cuisine, before the presentation.

### **Audience response, peer advising**

Each time, feedback was elicited from the audience using a quick survey form. The form was then scanned, and posted to Moodle. The members of the groups that had already finished their presentations took on the role of advising and modeling for other groups.

The following list shows ways in which the project has created intersection and interconnection among Hirosaki University students. The bridge that this relationship between the Liberal Arts courses and the EL creates runs in both directions.

### **EL to Liberal Arts**

- In order to complete the project, Liberal Arts students have started to establish a regular English-learning habit. They need to access the available resources, using the EL to have their slide scripts and personal speeches checked. Some of the beginners have come to the EL before their presentation and had one instructor coach them on their oral presentations. The EL provides a venue for a flipped classroom. Students spend time practicing listening/speaking in the EL as part of the project preparation phase.
- The Supporters and other international students in the EL serve to broaden the perspective of Liberal Arts students. In general, throughout the two terms, overseas students have worked hard to provide the students with interesting questions and to be extremely supportive of the efforts on the part of the Liberal Arts students. Presenting in the EL to an international audience is the very definition of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014). This gives Liberal Arts students the opportunity for authentic communication. Participants are interacting with overseas students before, during and after their presentations.
- By and large, students cannot anticipate questions from overseas students the same way they can with their peers, so they have to be extra attentive in the EL setting.
- Experiencing the projects in the EL brings together Liberal Arts course students of different levels. The third-year students have made concerted efforts to mentor first year students and serve as role models.
- The physical attributes of the EL offer Liberal Arts course students a better venue for presentations with a small kitchen, multimedia equipment, etc.
- The EL experience makes Liberal Arts course students realize the necessity to utilize clarification and circumlocution tactics. Unlike classroom situations, students receive clarification and other questions in real time. They need to make sure to speak up and explain everything clearly. Reality helps them get over some of their hesitation.