

Task-based Peer Collaboration: Two City-based Projects in a Mixed-level Advanced Chinese Language Class

Xuehua Xiang & Duosi Meng

University of Illinois at Chicago

Abstract

Modern language education in the public university context has increasingly faced budgetary reductions and fluctuating enrollments, resulting in mixed-level classes. Content-based, project-based language learning is a creative way to address and utilize the different linguistic needs and content sensibilities of mixed-level students. This paper reports the design, implementation and evaluation of two peer collaboration projects in a third-year heritage-non-heritage mixed advanced Chinese language class. Both projects utilize urban cultural resources as incentive to communicate where target language skills are connected with 21st century digital skills. The first, midterm project combines a field trip to the Art Institute of Chicago with group video skits and in-class video demonstration. Students work in groups to research their favorite art pieces in AIC and subsequently record a mock art guide in the museum next to their favorite artwork. The project concludes with a group presentation and screening of students' art guide videos in class. The second, final project is a data visualization project with the theme of "City PK", i.e., to compare two cities for a purpose of students' choice (such as which city is best for retirement with certain budget or which city is more suited for a new study-abroad program). Students practice data-related and urban development-related vocabulary, practice skills to explain trends through numbers, compare and contrast, describe cause-effect and learn to argue a thesis and provide data visualization support. The project concludes with a "gallery walk" in the classroom where students present their arguments through data visualization in posters. We also demonstrate students' products and critical assessment of areas for improvement. We hope to share our curriculum with colleagues working with similar challenges of mixed-level classes and benefit from collective discussion.