The End of Slideshows:
Animoto in English Language Education

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Keeping youth engaged in learning is almost an overwhelming challenge. However there are many different Web 2.0 applications offering different services, which especially encourage individual learning and improve collaboration and communication. Animoto, a web-based tool in the world of Web 2.0 designed with a constructivist approach, can bring youth together in its innovative way. As constructivist theory focuses on making connections and creating meaning in the learning process, it enables students, teachers and researchers to take advantage of web-based developments. With Animoto, students can each have their own accounts to make full-length videos while in class and at home, they can also download their videos. This makes both in-class and homework assignments easier to do whenever an internet connection is available. Language learners can create unlimited videos for themselves and also share them with their friends, which is the most significant feature of Animoto.

Introduction

Recently, the emergence of Internet-based technological tools in the student learning process has enhanced and promoted practice at various levels (Ritter & Lemke, 2000). Animoto is one of the web-based tools in the world of Web 2.0, which is designed with a constructivist approach encouraging students to navigate, create, and construct their knowledge. It offers an interactive environment that allows students to design learning and to be creative by constructing their own learning experiences. It is also a free program that mixes students' images and music together to create music videos. It opens up a whole new world of possibilities for use in classrooms to make education more effective.

The technology behind Animoto is quite impressive. It looks at the music students have selected and the number of images they have provided and creates a unique video with pacing and special effects based on their choices. Any video can be remixed multiple times, which means that by changing the music selection, the video will look different from what was previously produced. The possibilities for Animoto are myriad. With different music selections, each video would be entirely different. Animoto also makes it possible to upload students' own music for a production. If teachers have teenage musicians, they could use their music instead of Animoto's.

Students can each have their own accounts to make full-length videos while in class or at home. They can also download their videos, which makes both in-class and homework assignments easier to access. Language learners can create unlimited videos for themselves and also share them with their friends, which brings their lessons to life. They can post videos to video sharing sites like YouTube, TeacherTube, and so forth or download them for in-class presentations. Animoto gives both students and teachers a chance to turn still images into professional looking music videos. For this reason, it is important to know how to use Animoto to create videos and to understand how it contributes to English language learning by considering its use, emphasis and function.

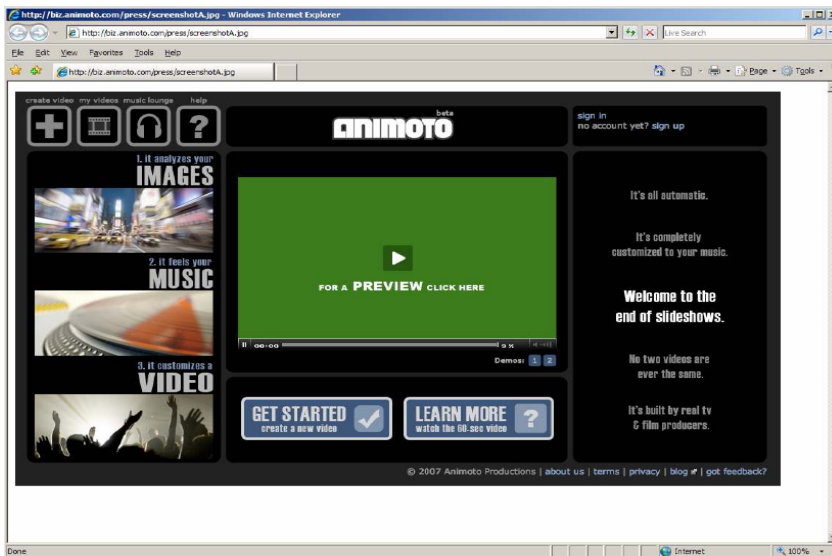## Using Animoto to Create Videos

Figure 1. www.animoto.com

Using Animoto to create videos is quite simple as long as students have an e-mail account and use a web browser, such as Firefox, Internet Explorer, or Safari, which are PC and Mac supported. Students also need to have an Animoto account directly from Animoto.com (Figure 1). All-access pass is free to educators after they register at http://education.animoto.com. After students have established an Animoto account, they receive a confirmation mail, which comes to their e-mail account, and from then on all the videos that they compose with Animoto, is sent to their both e-mail and Animoto accounts.

While creating the first video, if students are not already logged into their account, then they must first log in to start creating their video and then click on the "My Videos" Icon at the top left-hand side of the page. If this is their first time, they click on "Create-One"; otherwise, they may click on the "Animoto Short" button to start their video creation (Figure 2).
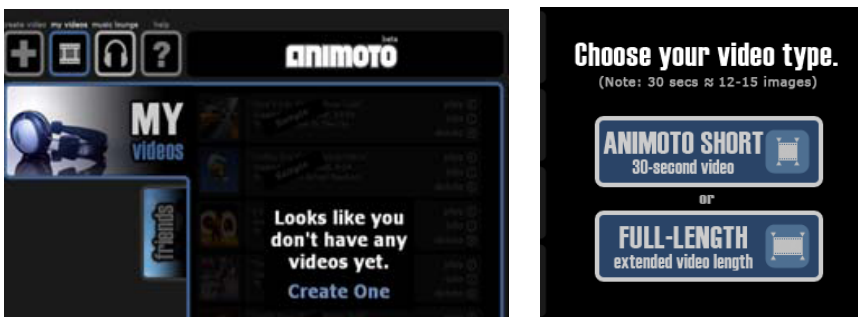

Figure 2. Create video and Animoto video type buttons

Next, students must either Upload pictures (Figure 3) from their computer or retrieve them from websites such as Flickr, Facebook, Smugmug, Picasa, and Photobucket. They can also highlight certain photos by selecting them and clicking the star button at the bottom of the upload screen, add text to their video by clicking on the text button and change the place of the written texts and photos. However, it is not possible to write lengthy and complex sentences because of limited

space; only 22 characters for the main text and 30 characters for the sub text are allowed so language learners are encouraged to compose using more meaning-focused phrases and well-chosen words instead of sentences. In the process, students can learn to use words economically and synthesize compositions written beforehand. It can activate content teaching as well.

Figure 3. Upload images

The next step is to choose the music students wish to use in the background (Figure 4). Any MP3 formatted file will work. They can choose to pick from the Animoto music gallery, upload their own music or narrate their own life-experience with images, thus supporting visual learning with music, which is a new approach to digital story telling. Harper et al. (2000) state that a sense of ownership should be a prominent feature of learning. Students can activate self learning by giving priority to oral communication skills.
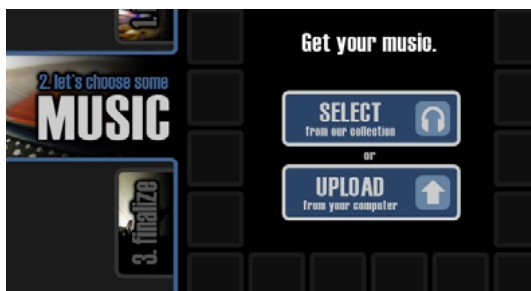

Figure 4. Get music

After students fill in the video information and click the "Create Video" button, the video rendering process will start. Their video could take several minutes to render. Once they click "Create Video", they do not need to stay at the site or on the Internet. Animoto will send them a link when their video is done. Once students receive the email, they may go back to Animoto and log into their account. To download the video or place it on social network sites like Facebook, MySpace or YouTube (Figure 5), they just need to click the appropriate button at the bottom of the page.
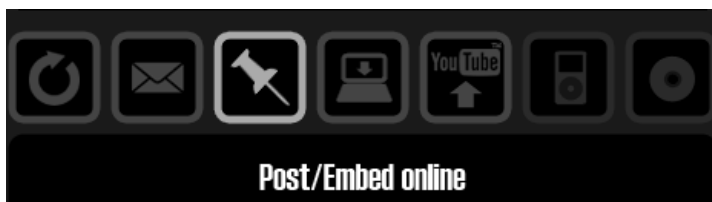

Figure 5. Download video

If students do not like certain transitions or the way in which some of the pictures are displayed, they can create new ones. They can get a different show each time. They can send the link to someone or a group of people for viewing. This link, the same link that was emailed directly to the students upon completion, is appropriate as the link in their website, too. They can insert the video directly into a site, blog and so on, use the code to embed it into a page, save the video as a QuickTime movie to their computer, send the link or the video itself to their iPhone and download their video on DVD.

Animoto and English Language Learning (ELL)

Animoto is designed with a constructivist approach encouraging students to navigate, create, and construct their knowledge. For most educationalists constructivism offers far more scope for realizing the possible learning benefits of using information and communication technology (Atkins, 1993). Similarly, many writers have expressed the hope that constructivism will lead to better educational software and better learning (e.g. Brown et al., 1989; Papert, 1993; Jonassen, 1994). Harper et al. (2000) stress the need for open-ended exploratory authentic learning environments in which learners can develop personally meaningful and transferable knowledge and understanding. As noted, Animoto offers an interactive environment that allows students to design learning and be creative by constructing their own learning experiences. Only in complex, rich environments will learners have the opportunity to construct and reconstruct concepts in idiosyncratic and personally meaningful ways (Harper et al., 2000).

As constructivist theory focuses on making connections and creating meaning in the learning process, it enables students, teachers and researchers to take advantages of the web-based developments. Students can each have their own accounts to make full-length videos while in class and at home, they can also download their videos. This makes both in-class and homework assignments easier to do as long as there is an internet connection. It is easy to access and user-friendly. Language learners can create unlimited videos for themselves and also share these with their friends, which is the most significant feature of Animoto. They can post videos wherever they want or download them for in-class presentations.

Animoto has started to become a popular tool among teachers, researchers, librarians and other educators around the globe, who use it to bring presentations and lesson plans to life in a whole new way. Animoto may be thought of as a gift to teachers as it empowers them with a tool that helps them to reach their students in a new and exciting way. It creates opportunity for educators to illustrate classroom projects, field trips, lessons and more in a brand new, entertaining and powerful way. As it is a free program that mixes students' images and music together to create music videos, it can open up a whole new world of possibilities for use in classrooms to make education more effective. In brief, it is edutainment and there are a variety of ways that teachers can incorporate Animoto videos into their individual or group projects and their daily lesson plans.

When Animoto is effectively integrated into curriculum activities, it allows for skills and processes to be practiced and developed. These skills and processes can be found within the information gathering process. Examples from tasks include locating and selecting pictures and music appropriate to a chosen theme and then using a worksheet as a means of reflecting on the task. In this way, students are constructing representations of their knowledge in a reflective way. These skills and practices can then be further developed and applied through other activities. Having these generic skills also provides more meaning and context for the skills and processes developed through the activities.

Online and Self-Learning

The 'always on' culture has created a new form of social media where students have the power and autonomy to locate knowledge instantaneously, anytime, anyplace, anywhere (Dale & Pymm, 2009). Learning technology innovations offer an opportunity for educators to engage students in the development of their learning journey (Dale & Pymm, 2009). Animoto offers new opportunities to

enhance self learning. It can be highly motivating to evaluate technology within real-life contexts as learners share their life experiences with peers. Labbo (1996) also states that encountering multimedia provides students with unique opportunities to engage in comprehension activities that are extremely motivating and responsive to individual learning needs.

Being online can be considered an effective way of enabling youth to access a vast range of resources and communication facilities, and thus develop new competences. Online learning is considered better achieved through interactivity among learners rather than learning alone (Kawachi, 2003). Thus, encouraging learner collaboration is becoming an important component. Animoto can play a crucial role in online learning as it provides opportunity to access the knowledge and expertise of peers and to write comments to created videos. This is especially needed in distance education systems where opportunities for students to meet frequently are limited by time, distance or resources. (Robertshaw, 2000). Sharma and Chaudry (2003) state that technology widens access to learning, helps to overcome time or distance barriers, and plays a major role in enhancing learner collaboration through effective use of e-mail, chat and computer conferencing.

Animoto can encourage user-centeredness and assist learners in gaining autonomy and finding their identity. These motivating factors offer a strong sense of personal ownership and can contribute to more engaged learning. When in need of help from peers to solve problems, they can apply to online communication and surf the Internet to access knowledge and learn to strike a right balance between personal skills and collaboration skills.

Animoto can provide children with a contextually rich environment to acquire and develop vocabulary by helping them to think about the related words with images. Animoto can be a new approach to digital storytelling with images and music, especially by focusing on peers' visual learning. The visual multisensory representation of words in action offers children memorable and highly contextual word-learning opportunities and teaches them to use context clues provided in multimedia features (Labbo, 2001). Animoto can be a great addition to a school's digital storytelling toolkit. Students might be asked to collect images that they believe best represent the community they live in and to put these into an Animoto show. They can then connect with another school willing to share Animoto movies about their own local community through a general inquiry on Twitter or through a service like ePals. This feature could be particularly interesting if they connect with different schools around the world.

Online Sharing and Assessment

Producing Animoto videos and posting their productions on the web as web-based video productions increases language learners' audience awareness. They discover the ins and outs of the videos created by others and evaluate them within real-life contexts. They comment on the videos by writing feedback and contribute to the development of other video owners. Peer to peer (P2P) sharing can help more experienced students to assist less experienced peers. In addition to this kind P2P learning, students can also explore the possibilities of reaching online dictionaries when they encounter unfamiliar words written in the text of Animoto videos. They also learn from each other's comments on the videos.

Although Animoto is not directly referred to in syllabuses, there are many examples where Animoto has been integrated to enhance the learning of students. In this sense, it is easy to give language learners a close-up view of the online Animoto library and involve them in online sharing.

The online Animoto library can be valuable in meeting the needs of language learners and in enhancing learning with formative and summative assessment. In formative assessment, the skills and processes previously mentioned could be assessed through the activity, teacher observations and student self-assessment. In summative assessment, the final product, i.e., the video itself or an online Animoto portfolio might be used. Teachers could evaluate their students' learning process and development throughout the semester.

Conclusion

At first glance, Animoto may seem trivial and not suitable for education but it can be used as a means for international social interaction. Animoto creates opportunity for learners to develop their language learning by using their life experiences, hobbies and interests as Dewey says, "Experience is knowledge and knowledge is experience".

Without a doubt, Animoto is one of the fastest and easiest ways to produce professional quality video from students' photos. Creating an Animoto video is as simple as uploading photos, choosing music, and letting it go. Animoto does all the heavy lifting, providing students with a stunning video in only a matter of minutes. If students would like to see for themselves, they register for a free demo at animoto.com. During the use of Animoto, technology-related problems, such as difficulty in internet connection, may arise, but this does not mean that Animoto should be avoided.

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