An Analysis of Student Motivation in an ESL Classroom by Using a Movie and Reader's Theatre Styled Assignments

based on student feedback

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Abstract

    The viewing of a full length movie and the use of Reader's Theatre styled assignments as part of a standard university level ESL classroom has been found to increase learner motivation based on the authors' student feedback.

1. Introduction

    This paper focuses on the authors' experience in using a movie and Reader's Theatre (RT) styled assignments as part of regular ESLclasses. The reason for writing the paper was that a significant amount of open student feedback focused on how much they appreciated the movie and the RT styled assignments used in the authors' classes. This prompted a slightly more formal (empirical) look at the role of the movie and RT styled assignments and their effects on the dynamics of the class and learning motivation.

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2. Background

2.1 The need for a shift toward speaking and writing

To date the trends for learning English in Japan have been a focus on Examination English at high school, and then TOEIC[4] at university. In a previous paper the authors outlined these trends in detail (Inage, Lawn & Lawn 2011) The focus has been on passive English; that is, reading and listening. However, independent surveys have shown a high percentage of people who" do" achieve high marks in TOEIC are unable to communicate in English (*Weekly Toyo Keizai* 2012)[5] Although the facilitators of the TOEIC exam are mindful of this and in 2006 launched the TOEIC" SW" (speaking and writing) exam, it has yet to gain wide spread acceptance. TOEIC is mainly used in Japan (65) followed by Korea (12) with these two countries accounting for 80 of those taking the exam worldwide (2005) (*Weekly Toyo Keizai* 2012) Clearly the current" passive English" focus of the Japanese education system needs to be upgraded to be more communicatively focused.

2.2 Serial dramas or movies in the classroom

The authors have used movies in the ESL classroom for some years. A simple survey conducted at the end of each teaching term highlighted the movie as often being a significant motivating factor in learning despite its representing only 10 minutes of each 90 minute class. This then led to building on to the movie with short tests regarding the content (in English) and the use of Reader's Theatre styled assignments. The concept of watching part of a movie (DVD) each week can perhaps be most easily liked to a" serial drama" where a certain amount of action occurs each week, yet the overall plot unfolding during the entire series, furthermore the episodes usually ending on a" cliffhanger" and therefore maintaining a high level of interest every week. A simple look at TV viewer surveys shows that" serial dramas" are very popular. With regard to showing about 10 minutes or so of a movie each week; the concept is similar, while each short segment is in itself exciting and hopefully educational, the presence of an overall plot and the cliffhangers provide something to look forward to every week.

2.3 General class motivation

Motivation to learn is key in any classroom. In the case of the ESL classroom it will begin with the individual student's desire to learn the new language and be influenced by a wide variety of factors. Some of these factors include the physical classroom environment, the motivation of other students class dynamics, the role of the teacher and actual taught content and/or textbook used. A good teacher works to provide and maintain an environment which facilitates learning, and he/she uses a textbook that is geared towards student in-

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[4] Test of English for International Communication.

[5] Learners tend to focus on becoming proficient in the TOEIC exam rather than in English itself.

terests or persuades the students that they" need" to know what they are being taught. The teacher who has an in depth knowledge of the subject being taught, who is a brilliant communicator, has charisma, will naturally do better than those who are not so gifted. However, it has been the authors' experience that making use of a good movie in the ESL classroom inherently provides a very high level of learning motivation, despite the lack of these" teaching gifts or advantages"

3. Method

This study is based on student feedback from five English classes. Three of the classes are at a public university and two at a private university. All students were first year students; the major of the students ranged from" English and Computing" to non- English majors. The classesare divided into three physical types of classroom: firstly a regular classroom[6]   secondly a regular computer classroom and finally a computer aided language laboratory (CALL) type of classroom

A movie was selected and played during the final 10 minutes[7] of each of the 15 lessons. A typed edition of the movie subtitles was provided in both English and Japanese. A short test of the movie's content was carried out at regular intervals. Finally" Reader's Theatre" styled assignments were also carried out.

3.1 Reader's Theatre styled assignments

The concept of Reader's Theatre (RT) styled assignments was explained in a previous paper (Inage, Lawn & Lawn   2011)   The students worked in groups to reproduce parts of the movie using their voices as if they had been" voice actors"   The benefits of using drama in the ESL classroom is detailed well in a paper of the same name (Boudreault, C 2010)   where Boudreault extends the role of drama beyond the" second language acquisition" to inspiring students to become the people they want to be. The RT assignments were done in groups of about four members. The length of the assignment was typically less than five minutes. Regarding the RT assignment, as the original video did not provide a narration, the authors created model audio recordings for the" narrators"

3.2 Reader's Theatre adapted for the regular classroom

In a regular classroom, students do not have access to play or record equipment during class[8]   They were divided into groups and assigned chapters, and the leader of each group was provided with a copy of the chapter on a USB memory stick. The leader then distributed this chapter video to the other members, which included the narrator's audio file. The students were expected to practice at home before coming to class, and when the students

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[6] Students were provided with tables and chairs.

[7] Actual play times varied from 5 to 15 minutes depending on the content and class situation.

[8] With the wide spread use of smart phones it may be possible to emulate something close to computer room functionality in the near future.

do come together to practice in class. It was expected that there would be students who naturally do very well and they would be encouraged to help those who would struggle. During class practice the teacher walked around listening to the groups and chose the two top groups (based on their ability to dramatize the scenes effectively)　These groups were asked to present in front of the class in order to set the standard　to provide role models for the other groups. This practice took about 30 minutes, including the class presentation, and was carried out two or three times before the final presentation. Students groups were each assigned different chapters and the final presentations were carried out in chronological order (typically about half of the movie　10 or so groups)　The use of actions, gestures and props was encouraged. The final presentation was carried out in front of the class and videoed. The students evaluated each other's presentation while watching them. Details of a similar evaluation were provided in a previous paper (Inage, Lawn & Lawn　2011)　The final video was then made available online for students to watch their own performance for self-evaluation purposes. Based on the evaluations (including the teacher's)　the top three students were chosen and the reasons for the choice, namely the comments from the evaluations, were outlined in front of the class.

3.3 Reader's Theatre in a computer or CALL classroom

In the case of the regular computer classroom and CALL classroom, the students presented Reader's Theatre in groups simultaneously. The students were encouraged to practice first, to record and listen, and to rerecord several times until they were happy with the result, which was then submitted. The teacher then graded the work and commented the following week and played the works of top groups work and perhaps some parts of other groups

The main difference between the regular computer classroom and the CALL type was the ability to record simultaneously with multiple microphones. In the case of the regular computer classroom, group recording is typically restricted to using a single microphone and standard Windows recording software (Windows 7 sound recorder)　While this did prove difficult compared to the CALL type classroom it should be possible to obtain a similar result. The CALL type of classroom (CHIeru) enabled the group members to converse and to record simultaneously, and this also combined with voice waveform level viewing of speaking volume, making the recording process very easy. Furthermore, the use of good quality microphones (CALL) minimized the background noise

3.4 Student feedback - Class surveys

As mentioned previously, general end of term surveys were conducted. These were followed up by a specific survey to further refine the trends noted in the general surveys. A further source of feedback was via the student's writing of their impressions of the movie in English. This assignment was set at the end of the term and was either a part of the final exam or was submitted before the final class. This assignment was set to provide additional

writing practice as well as being useful in providing feedback.

4. Results

4.1 The general survey　Results

As a regular part of the authors' classes, students are asked" What did you like about this class?" among other questions, in order to improve the classes. The students are free to mention any aspect of the class. The percentage of students that answered" Narnia (the movie) or the RT assignment" are shown in Table 1　The situation regarding each of the five classes is also shown in Table 1　A simple average of the five classes showed that 52 of the students that were asked for feedback regarding what they liked about the class, chose Narnia (the movie) or the Reader's Theatre styled assignment. This figure represented 42 of all comments. A detailed breakdown of each class survey is provided in Appendices A to E. Furthermore, comments made by students regarding the movie and / or the RT assignments have also been provided.

Class/ Appendix No.	Univ. Type	Major	No. of responses /stud. s	Classroom Type	Liked movie/RT most(/total No. of responses/comments)	
					Response	Comments
1/A	Public	Engineering	34/41	Regular	47 （16/34）	24 （16/66）
2/B	Public	Health	33/37	Regular	30 （10/33）	19 （10/58）
3/C	Public	Dentistry	45/49	CALL	36 （16/45）	29 （16/55）
4/D	Private	English/Comp.	36/36	Computer	81 （29/36）	72 （29/40）
5/E	Private	Child/Welfare	39/43	Computer	67 （26/39）	67 （26/39）

Table 1　Percentage of students that answered" Liked movie/RT most" in an open class survey and the details surrounding the five classes

While the above results cannot be directly or precisely compared, it may be concluded that on average about half of the students of the five classes indicated that watching the movie was a very enjoyable part of a regular ESL class. A look at specific comments relating to the movie and Reader's Theatre assignments provides more details on why they were appreciated. The following two representative comments were made by class 2 members from" Impressions of the Narnia movie." (Grammatical mistakes have not been corrected.)

Student A " At first I worried that I couldn't understand the content of this story because I hadn't seen a foreign movie in English and I am poor at English. But I was looking forward to seeing this movie because I like watching foreign movies and I hadn't seen " The Chronicles of Narnia"　There is only ten minutes per a class. So I was looking forward to the last ten minutes in a class and I wanted to see the next chapter every day. Just as I expected, the foreign movie was difficult. But I could understand the content over my expectation. Because there is Japanese caption and I ran over printed sheets. The printed

sheets were very useful…"

Student B "…I was always quarreling with four brothers and I was impressed more and more, and began to overlap with that miss into university. I am looking forward to summer vacation back to my home and to reunite the whole my family."

Comments from the general survey in the Appendices touch on:

- "Increasing confidence in speaking in front of other people"
- "The desire to watch other foreign movies in the same manner" (in English with English subtitles).
- "Surprised at just how much of the movie they could understand"
- "The benefits of the RT styled assignments"
- "How it (the movie etc.) was an enjoyable and easy way to learn English" (6 comments).
- "How it brought new motivation to learning English"
- "It reduced my sense of being poor at English" (3 comments).
- "Appreciation of being able to watch the movie for 10 min. per week" (5 comments).
- "Don't like learning English, but watching the movie and the RT assignment was very enjoyable"

See Appendix A　E for the detailed responses. These are represented as simple percentages in Table 1 and have been summarized above

4.2 The specific survey　Results

The above general survey led to another survey focused on the movie, RT assignments and English learning motivation in general. This survey was answered by students of classes 1 and 2. The request for participation in the survey was made using Facebook and data collected by using Google forms. The authors' comments were written after the student's responses. The survey consisted of 8 open-answer questions. The summary of the main points is as follows;

Prior to this class (Comprehensive English 1)　had you watched a movie in English with English subtitles?

Responses:

- Yes　(x 7)　No　(x 8)

Authors' comments　The more general survey gave the impression that few students had seen foreign movies with English subtitles.

a. As part of this class you watched a movie in English with English subtitles. Would you like to watch a movie again in this way?

Responses:

- Yes　(x 8)　No　(x 1) - wished to see Japanese subtitles.

Authors' comments　It is very encouraging to see that watching the movie in English with English subtitles has inspired many students to study English more.

b. Please explain how you watched the movie, for example, did you focus on

listening to the English or reading the subtitles, etc.

Responses:

- Listened mainly to the content (spoken English) - but also read the subtitles when I couldn't understand the English   (x 7)
- Only listened to the content (spoken English)   (x 2)

Authors' comments   most students read the subtitles as required while watching the movie.

What did you think of doing the Reader's Theatre styled assignments while watching the movie? What was good or bad, enjoyable or difficult?

Responses:

- I learned colloquial expressions.
- I could understand the content better.
- It was an enjoyable way of learning English   (x 3)
- Through RT I learned how to create an atmosphere (mood) through using my voice.
- Learning how to use intonation and accent was new and enjoyable   (x 3)
- It was so much better than just watching and listening to the movie   doing it yourself as RT assignments in groups   listening to my friends present was great.
- Practicing native pronunciation was great.
- It was great to have a focus on speaking different from high school.

Authors' comments   The RT assignment seemed to have given the students the opportunity to recreate the scene as if it was a real life situation. This would be most likely to have an influence on their future conversations in English in that their focus would go beyond the words to the" message" as conveyed by appropriately using intonation and accent in creating an appropriate" atmosphere"

What did you think of the Reader's Theatre presentation?

Responses:

- We don't usually read aloud   it was a great opportunity to learn accent and intonation.
- This was a better way than just to read longer texts   and to learn more natural English pronunciation.
- Reading the text out loud was much better than just listening and writing at our desks.
- I was nervous but watching other groups and their unique presentation styles was great/stimulating   (x 3)
- Very enjoyable   (x 2)   Everyone was great.
- I was nervous but learning to speak in front of others will be essential in the future   a precious experience.
- Making an extended presentation in front of others was a first time   a good experience.
- Evaluating each other's presentations was good.
- When watching other's presentations, I saw others in a different light   I saw the hid-

den talents of others.

- Embarrassing but enjoyable, and amazed at the high level of other presentations.
- I had difficulty in visualizing which scene was being presented.

Authors' comments   It was great to see hidden talents come to the surface and be recognized by other students and that talent to further would inspire others to do better. The second from last comment was perhaps due to the intended chronological order being broken because some students were absent and the other students had to present out of order.

You watched the video of your presentation. What did you think of it?

Responses:

- When presenting, we thought we did great, but watching the video   we did not do as well as we had expected.
- I was nervous during the presentation   couldn't listen carefully to others during the presentation but later watching the video could appreciate what was done well and what needed improvement.
- Japanese English   as I suspected.
- Enjoyable   we don't usually watch our own presentation.
- I don't often record my own voice   good for checking my pronunciation.
- I watched my own video later. It was embarrassing and different from what I expected   I realized objectively how my English needs improving   (x 2)
- I wasn't keen to present in front of the camera but I could check my pronunciation.
- Watching my presentation again objectively was good   I noticed the good and bad points   and realized that my English needs further improving   (x 4)
- It was embarrassing to watch my presentation.

Authors' comments   Many teachers give the opportunity for students to present in class; however, by videoing the presentation and allowing the students to see their presentations objectively, students have opportunities to see what they did well and where they need to improve. Regarding the aspect of embarrassment, nobody (at least not the authors) likes to face reality, but the sooner it can be faced, the sooner it can be corrected.

Did the use of watching a movie and the use Reader's Theatre styled assignments provide additional motivation in regard to studying English?

Responses:

- Yes   I want to watch movies in English without any subtitles.
- I looked forward to watching the movie and the Reader's Theatre   it was my motivation to attend class every week.
- I studied English very hard for the University Entrance examination   this motivating class has brought back my desire to study English.
- Yes   very much   (x 10)
- Watching movies in English is a good way to learn English and is enjoyable   it is just like killing two birds with one stone.

Authors' comments   Watching the movie and doing RT styled assignments rated as a

popular reason to keenly attend this class. Enjoying learning English is " key " to motivation, and can facilitate an environment with students " wanting to learn " rather than been " forced to learn "

> We had a subtitle short test every week; did this help your understanding of the content? What other way/s do you think would be helpful to understand the contents better?

Responses:

- Yes, it was useful （x 14）
- Helped me to understand the subtitles.
- Perhaps having the subtitle test before watching the movie would be better to allow one to focus on the conversation itself, the pronunciation and the intonation.
- Helped me to understand the contents better than just watching the movie once.
- Taught me a variety of new expressions.
- For the subtitle test, if you play the audio rather than giving us the text, it would be good listening practice.
- I think it's the best way （x 2）
- The short test encouraged us to read the subtitles again to understand the content.
- Reading the subtitles out aloud (as recommended) was a good idea.
- If there was no short test, I would not have studied the subtitles well reading the subtitles prior to watching the movie would no doubt assist understanding but make the movie less interesting to watch.
- The short test helped me to understand the content better and helped me to do even better in the presentation.

Authors' comments Few people like tests, but without them the content will not be studied, understood and its value will not be appreciated. Reading the subtitles in advance versus studying them later are very good points.

> In class how do you think your motivation to study English could be increased?

Responses:

- To enjoy speaking English we need to communicate in English to read something light something we can laugh about and be provided with easily understandable conversational tips.
- To increase the opportunity to communicate with each other in class through conversation in class I was able to get to know other class members in this regard random partner assignment is best.
- Group presentations were good also listening to English music was good.
- The movie was a great idea （x 2）
- Watching the movie was good I could concentrate for the first 80 minutes, knowing that I could just sit back and relax and enjoy watching the movie at the end of class a kind of reward.

Authors' comments We can see the students' strong desire to actually use English, to

communicate in English and also their desire to learn simple communicative expressions which they can use.

5. Conclusion

The use of a movie and Reader's Theatre assignments in standard ESL classes has increased student motivation based on direct student feedback. Most students agreed that this was a very enjoyable way to learn English. Many of the students indicated that they planned to borrow foreign DVDs during the holidays for the specific purpose of watching them in English as they had done so in class. Regarding the movie and Reader's Theatre styled assignments, most students indicated that it provided significant motivation to study English. Specific skills identified as having improved included learning new colloquial expressions, how to use intonation and accent, and how to create a mood using different tones of voice. Working together in groups provided the opportunity not only to speak and present English but also the opportunity to listen to English and to be inspired by each other   discovering hidden talents. In regard to the recording or videoing of group work, most students agreed that despite the embarrassment the objective realization of how they were actually coming across was essential in order to be able to improve English.

Students   next time you have the opportunity to watch a movie, if it was made in English   don't be shy   watch it" in English"   turn the English subtitles on if you need to then sit back and enjoy it !

Finally, the current" passive English" focus of the Japanese education system needs to be upgraded to be more" communicatively" focused.

References

Inage, I. Lawn, E. & Lawn, M   (2011   March)˸ Reflections on the Use of Original Dramatized Presentations in the Classroom: Based on Direct Student Feedback. ' *Bulletin of Faculty of Education*, Nagasaki University: Curriculum and Teaching No 51   pp. 93-108.

Weekly Toyo Keizai (2012   June)   /   TOEIC   (Getting away from the TOEIC)   TOEIC   (Just studying for the TOEIC exam doesn't improve your English!)   pp   34-35

Boudreault, C. (2010   January). ' The Benefits of Using Drama in the ESL/EFL Classroom. '   *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. XVI, No   1   January 2010   Retrieved September 8   2012   from http: //iteslj. org/Articles/Boudreault-Drama. html.

Appendices
Appendix A. Survey results Class 1

Public University, non   English majors (Engineering) based on 34 responses from 41 students, regular classroom   16 of the 34 responses related to the movie (below) thus

47　may be related to appreciation of the movie/RT. As a total of thecomments this is 24　.

Survey question: Please feel free to write any comments (impressions) about the class. It will be used for reference for future classes.

Responses relevant to this paper were as follows:

Regarding Narnia (Reader's theater)　I am not very good at speaking in front of people, I was nervous but it was a good experience.

Narnia was very refreshing, perhaps watching Harry Potter, Disney animations and Ghibli movies in the same way (in English) may also provide new perspectives on the movies.

I have always liked foreign movies, watching the Narnia movie in class was very interesting, it was very educational

Watching the Narnia movie with English subtitles was very interesting. I was surprised at how well I understood it. The regular subtitle short tests provided an effective way to encourage me to review the subtitles.

I have never watched a foreign movie with subtitles as part of a class before. It was very enjoyable and it was easy to learn English in this way　(6 similar comments)

Through the Narnia presentation, I felt English is becoming more enjoyable and my sense of being poor at English is reducing.
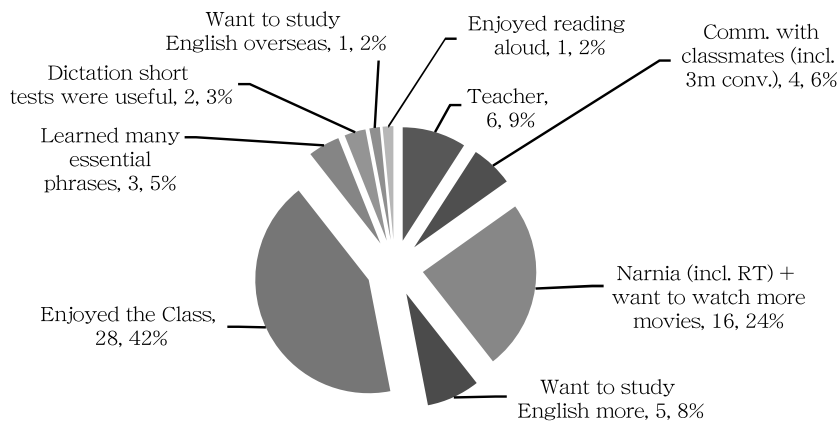

Figure 1　What do you like about this class? Summarized results Class 1

Appendix B. Survey results Class 2

Public University, non　English majors (nursing) based on 33 responses from 37 students, regular classroom　10 of the 33 responses related to the movie (below) thus　30 may be related to appreciation of the movie/RT. As a total of thecomments this is　19　.

Survey question: Please feel free to write any comments (impressions) about the class. It will be used for reference for future classes.

Responses relevant to this paper were as follows:

The system of watching the movie for 10 minutes each week was great, it was very enjoyable （5 similar comments）

It was the first time I had watched a movie in English, with English subtitles I was surprised at just how well I could understand and enjoy it. Next time I watch a foreign movie I think I'll do the same.

I don't really like learning English, but in this class having the opportunity to learn through such as watching a movie and Reader's Theatre was very enjoyable. Acting out the Narnia movie（Reader's Theatre）, then watching the video of our acting was great, a little embarrassing though.
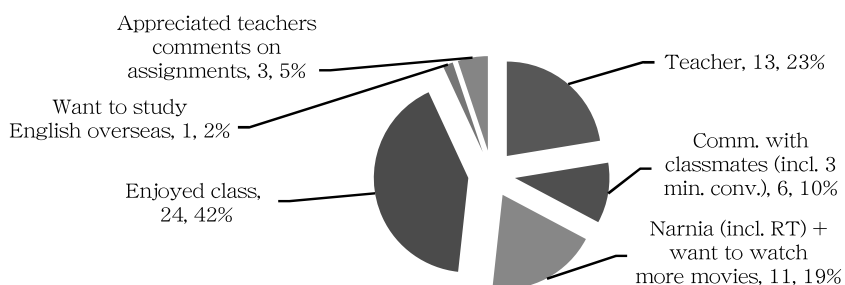
Figure 2　What do you like about this class? Summarized results Class 2

Appendix C. Survey results Class 3

Public university non-English major, Dentistry, based on 45 responses from 49 students using CALL classroom　16 of the 45 responses related to the movie（below）thus　36 may be related to appreciation of the movie/RT. As a total of the comments this is　29 ．

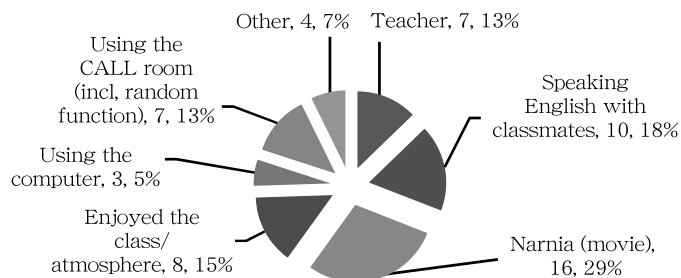Survey question: What do you like about this class?

Figure 3　What do you like about this class? Summarized results Class 3

Appendix D. Survey results Class 4

Class survey data summary. Private University English and computing majors, based on 36 responses from 36 students using a regular computer classroom　29 of the 40 responses related to the movie（below）thus　81　may be related to appreciation of the movie/RT. As a total of the comments this is　72 ．

Question: What do you like about this class?

I like Four Corners
online work, 1, 2%

I like Four Corners
online work, 1, 2%

atmosphere,
2, 5%

Four Corners
(the text
book), 1, 3%

Improve my
English
communication,
1, 3%

I like to talk with my
friends, 2, 5%

I like using a computer,
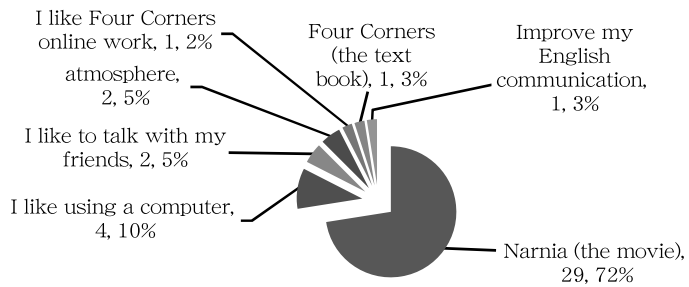4, 10%

Narnia (the movie),
29, 72%

Figure 4   What do you like about this class? Summarized results Class 4

Appendix E. Survey results Class 5

Class survey data summary. Private University non-English major (Child studies/Welfare), based on 39 responses from 43 students using a regular computer classroom. 26 of the 39 responses related to the movie (below) thus　67　may be related to appreciation of the movie/RT. As a total of the comments this is also　67　.

Question: What do you like about this class?

I like to talk with my
friends, 2, 5%

Exciting/best
fun class, 2, 5%

Communacate
in English 2, 5%

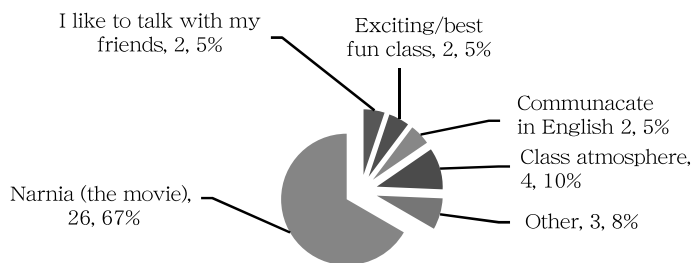Class atmosphere,
4, 10%

Narnia (the movie),
26, 67%

Other, 3, 8%

Figure 5   What do you like about this class? Summarized results Class 5