

Project-based language learning: In pursuit of authentic connections

by Stephen L. Tschudi & Julio C. Rodriguez

Multiple news sources early in 2017 cited a study by PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) that estimated almost four in ten US jobs could be lost to automation and artificial intelligence over the next 15 years¹. Soon afterward, a report from the Institute for the Future, commissioned by Dell Technologies, projected that 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 have not yet been invented². While the economic landscape faces mind-bending changes, **THE EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS NOT FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED IN MORE THAN 100 YEARS**. The disconnect between the discipline-based “industrial model” that prevails in educational institutions and the 21st-century needs of economic actors is acute, and educational consultants are sounding the alarm³. The problem? Existing educational models built around the temporary mastery of bodies of knowledge, assessed using standardized testing, turn out to be very bad at helping learners retain the knowledge past testing time and apply the knowledge to produce creative solutions to real-world problems.

ENTER PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL), defined by one of its chief proponents, the Buck Institute for Education, as “a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge.” PBL has been gaining ground as an alternative organizing principle for K-12 curricula, and momentum in the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) disciplines has been particularly robust. Moreover, PBL is strongly associated with new technologies such as robotics and the maker movement, so “responses” – that is, project products – often include mechanisms, made objects, or artworks. Typically, a project will bring together faculty with different backgrounds and will deal in subject matter from more than one traditional discipline to challenge learners to develop a solution or response to a situation that originates beyond the school walls. For example, a teacher with a background in physics and engineering might partner with a teacher from a humanities background to offer students the challenge, “How can we create physical working models that represent the narrative and thematic forces at work in the universal monomyth as described by Joseph Campbell?”

FEATURED THEME

PROJECT-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

MAIN ARTICLE

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LOOKING FOR FREE LANGUAGE- TEACHING RESOURCES?

Visit the joint website of the
Language Resource Centers to
find information about materials
and professional development
from CLEAR and its sister
centers: www.nflrc.org.



SUGGESTIONS WANTED!

We strive to publish *CLEAR News* articles that represent current topics in foreign language teaching, and we want to hear from you! If you have an idea for an article or would like to see a particular subject addressed, please let us know at clear@msu.edu. We will consider your idea for future issues of the newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE TO CLEAR NEWS

CLEAR News is available in hard copy at conferences and workshops, and in PDF online. Visit our website to download PDFs of new issues as they are published, and to access all archived issues. You can also sign up to be notified via email when a new issue is available for download. To add yourself to our mailing list, click on "Contact Us" from our home page, then create an account for yourself.

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,

As language teachers, we are constantly searching for ways to make language learning relevant to our students and their lives outside the classroom. In this issue of *CLEAR News*, we bring you an article from our friends at our sister Language Resource Center, the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa that provides resources for doing just that. They are working at the forefront of Project-Based Language Learning (PBL) and their article delivers not only the solid reasoning behind introducing PBL in your classroom, but concrete ways you can do so.

Drawing on their experiences publishing and leading numerous successful workshops on PBL, the co-authors walk us through the six tenets of this teaching method, which has been growing in popularity as educators recognize the benefits of real-world applications in their teaching.

A long way from Hawai'i, here on MSU's campus, we enjoyed welcoming participants from all over the country (and abroad) to MSU for our professional development workshops this summer. Our offerings for summer 2018 will be online by mid-October.

There is a bit of good news this fall for former users of our Rich Internet Applications; please see the announcement on p. 7 for more details on how some of your content can be retrieved.

We hope you'll look for us and our sister Language Resource Centers in November at the ACTFL conference in Nashville—we always enjoy going to regional and national conferences to share about CLEAR's products for world language teachers. And as always, you can visit our website for the latest information about CLEAR and our projects: <http://clear.msu.edu>.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joy Campbell".

Joy Campbell
Executive Associate Director

As teachers of a performative skill, language teachers are used to the idea of developing proficiency that does not fade away after answers are given on a standardized test. Moreover, we are used to using authentic, real-world materials, and we often ask students to complete semester projects. So what is the difference between what we do now and project-based language learning (PBL)? The key differences are in depth of inquiry, presentation to a public audience, critique and revision, student voice and choice, and other elements that are regarded as essential project design elements in “Gold Standard” PBL⁵.

We define PBL as an articulated series of activities, motivated by real-world needs and driven by the learners' interest, whose common goal is to improve language learners' communicative competence in the target language through the construction of products. PBL should provide a high level of learner autonomy; invite critique and revision; promote the use of the 21st Century Skills⁶ such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity,

Just-in-time instruction is related to the second tenet: **PBL INSTRUCTION IS LEARNER-CENTERED**. Because content is student-driven and language is taught on a need-to-know basis, instruction becomes an activity that is centered on the needs of the learners. Specifically, language learning focuses on the language knowledge that the learners need to acquire in order to complete the project. This is related to the idea that PBL content should be significant, that is, perceived as important and immediately relevant.

Another tenet of PBL postulates that **COLLABORATION IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF LEARNING**. As human endeavor becomes more and more technically complex and knowledge-intensive, collaboration becomes ever more critical. This is why collaboration (along with critical thinking, communication, and creativity) is listed as one of the 21st Century Skills. When teachers incorporate collaboration in instructional design, language learning



and intercultural communication; and include the sharing of the constructed product with a target audience. The six tenets explained below constitute the backbone of PBL.

Projects bring learners face-to-face with real-world situations that have a real audience and require the use of the target language. That is, **LEARNING IS ORGANIZED AROUND AUTHENTIC, REAL-WORLD ACTIVITIES**. The starting point of a project is an engaging central question⁷ which learners can relate to and feel motivated to address. In ideal cases, the central or “driving” question is crafted by the learners themselves. Related to this idea is the notion that thematic content should be significant, that is, of interest to the learners and guided by standards. Language learning is facilitated by giving learners just-in-time instruction in the language learners' need to successfully complete the project task at hand.

becomes a more cooperative and social undertaking, and the instructor takes on a more facilitative role. Projects that incorporate structured international collaboration offer the potential to foster intercultural competence⁸. The concept of collaboration in PBL implies engagement not only in the process, but also in assessment.

Because PBL is a process defined by a sequence of learning activities, **ASSESSMENT HAS A DUAL PURPOSE: GUIDE THE PROCESS AND MEASURE PROGRESS**. PBL assessment is typically collaborative (participants and their audience are involved), formative (occurs periodically and informs learning), performative (is meaningfully connected to the performance of tasks), and multidimensional (encompasses the entire experience, including both the process that learners engage in as well as the resulting product).

In PBL, **THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTOR IS THAT OF A KNOWLEDGEABLE PARTICIPANT AND FACILITATOR.**

The instructor provides different types of scaffolding to ensure that learners can successfully complete the project. Typically, four types of scaffolding are needed in a project: project process scaffolds (for example, providing students an outline of the phases of the project)⁹, content scaffolds (for example, engaging learners in activities that activate prior knowledge of a topic), linguistic scaffolds (for example, providing just-in-time instruction that focuses on meaning, such as a cultural note, or on form, such as glossaries of key words or contextualized grammars of use that help learners understand authentic materials), and final product scaffolds (for example, providing a template for the final product). Keep in mind that the learners themselves can be given the role of the knowledgeable participant at different points in the process and be charged with providing scaffolding for other learners.

Modern technologies now make it possible to provide an unprecedented level of authenticity in PBL as language learners can connect with peers around the globe and interact with worldwide communities in rich and engaging learning experiences that foster intercultural competence. Authenticity of PBL outcomes is expected and is measured against two main requirements: **PROJECTS RESULT IN THE CREATION OF A REAL-WORLD PRODUCT AND INVOLVE A REAL AUDIENCE.** Project authenticity can range from the political, such as addressing social or environmental injustice in a community, to the personal, such as examining spending habits or time management.

If you would like to learn more about PBL, please consider participating in the University of Hawai'i National Foreign Language Resource Center's 2018 PBL professional development events. Keep your eyes on <http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/projects/view/2014A/>.



AUTHOR BIOS

Stephen L. Tschudi is a Specialist in Technology for Language Education at the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Since the 1990s, Stephen has worked on developing distance education applications for Chinese language at all levels. He also teaches, supports faculty offering distance language courses, develops Chinese language educational materials, and engages in teacher training, research, and publication. Stephen has led numerous workshops and institutes on PBL.

Julio C. Rodriguez directs the National Foreign Language Resource Center and the Center for Language & Technology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He has published and presented extensively on instructional technology and design-based research. Within the broad field of instructional technology, his primary interests are in the areas of faculty development and the design and implementation of quality online learning experiences. Among his many duties, Julio leads a professional development program for faculty which includes activities such as the exploration of pedagogical frameworks that support the creation of highly engaging learning experiences like PBL.

REFERENCES

- ¹PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2017). *Bot.Me: A revolutionary partnership*. Retrieved from <http://pwcartificialintelligence.com/>
- ²Institute for the Future. (2017). *The next era of human/machine partnerships: Emerging technologies' impact on society and work in 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.delltechnologies.com/content/dam/delltechnologies/assets/perspectives/2030/pdf/SR1940_IFTFforDellTechnologies_Human-Machine_070517_readerhigh-res.pdf.
- ³Shaw, A. (2016). *Factory model vs. 21st Century model of education*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/factory-model-vs-21st-century-education-anne-shaw>.
- ⁴Buck Institute for Education. (n.d.). *What is project based learning (PBL)?* Retrieved from http://www.bie.org/about/what_pbl.
- ⁵Larmer, J., & Mergendoller, J. (2015). *Gold Standard PBL: Essential project design elements*. Retrieved from http://www.bie.org/object/document/gold_standard_pbl_essential_project_design_elements.
- ⁶Partnership for 21st Century Skills. (2014). *Framework for 21st century learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.p21.org/our-work/p21-framework>.
- ⁷Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdial, M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 26, 369–398.
- ⁸Godwin-Jones, R. (2013). Integrating intercultural competence into language learning through technology. *Language Learning & Technology*, 17(2), 1–11. Retrieved from <http://llt.msu.edu/issues/june2013/emerging.pdf>.
- ⁹Nekrasova, T., & Becker, A. (2012). *Integrating STEM topics in the foreign language classroom promising practices for foreign language instruction 1*. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. Retrieved from http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/promising_FL/ForeignLg_STEM.pdf.





PROJECT IDEA

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT A PERSON? **A project for Novice-level language learners**

Introduction

The backbone of a project consists of a series of articulated activities leading to the creation of authentic products that are presented to a real audience. After the project is launched, the role of the teacher is to guide learners through the project by helping them identify and learn what they need to know in order to successfully complete the project. With the end in mind, the teacher also facilitates the process by adapting activities or designing new ones and by scaffolding several aspects of the project, including the project process, content, language, and the final product.

Language learners at the Novice level often begin with the topic of personal introductions, using formulaic language to exchange name, age, nationality, and other personal information with new acquaintances. While such questions when meeting a new person do have similarities across cultures, there may also be significant differences in the questions that new acquaintances expect to hear. This project aims to take this usual topical material and shine a light on possible cultural differences, casting the beginning language student in the role of investigator. Whatever the learners find in terms of similarities and differences is then shared with a general public audience during an exhibition event such as Parents' Night at school, using a collaboratively created display showing comparisons between cultural expectations in L1 and L2.

Project Description

The teacher launches this project using what is called an "Entry Event" to convey the idea that there might be some cross-cultural differences involved in personal introductions. Since Novice learners' language proficiency is limited, an entry event is best accomplished using a very simple story or comic illustrating the issue, for example showing an American on a train trip in China who is confused after being quizzed by fellow travelers about his income, the size of his house, and so forth. Having established the topic, the teacher and students can work together to develop equivalent lists of potential "getting to know you" questions in L1 and L2 – covering a range of appropriateness – then develop a questionnaire to administer to native speakers of the two languages asking them to rate the appropriateness of each question. When questionnaire results are returned, the students can compare the appropriateness ratings given by speakers of the two languages, then develop their Public Product showing their conclusions regarding possible cultural differences in "what is important to know about a person." Ideally, the teacher will lead the learners to solicit responses from the public audience so they can gauge the impact of their work.

Projects for Novice-level learners may require heavy scaffolding as learners encounter for the first time not only the language that constitutes the focus of the project (in this case, questions that new acquaintances ask one another), but also the language they need to use for collaboration in class, for critique and revision, and for reflection on what they have learned. As learners become acculturated to PBLL, scaffolding can be reduced. Obviously, language learning in a PBLL context shows considerable differences with more traditional curricula: rather than focusing on the learner's future use of the language in-country, the focus is on the immediate needs of the project. As a result, while some breadth of coverage may be lost, deeper inquiry and 21st-Century Skills come naturally to the forefront.

All photos on the preceding pages are from the 2017 Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL) Intensive Summer Institute: Pathways to PBLL taught at the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Summer Workshops a Success

For the 21st consecutive year, CLEAR hosted workshops this summer, drawing participants from a dozen states and several other countries. World language educators from many levels and backgrounds gathered at Michigan State University to gain hands-on experience in a variety of topics.

GREAT MATERIALS AND PRESENTATION; REAL-WORLD ACTIVITIES THAT WE CAN IMPLEMENT IN OUR CLASSROOMS.

(2017 workshop participant)

New CLEAR presenters Matt Kanefsky and Walter Hopkins, both from MSU's Department of Romance & Classical Studies, led a workshop called "Assessment in a proficiency-based language classroom." Participants enjoyed their easygoing manner and depth of knowledge, as shown by this teacher's comments, "Matt and Walter were friendly, approachable, engaging, and knowledgeable about the workshop material; the detailed explanations of the various assessment tool options was fantastic. The detail included in the [slides] was also helpful, particularly as I go back and disseminate this info to colleagues." Another workshop attendee had plans to put her new knowledge into play right away: "I really liked the 'can do' statements and look forward to incorporating those in my teaching. I will be able to go back to my lesson plans and really look at whether they're proficiency-based and then adjust my assessment of these activities."

Erin Parris-Dallia, another new presenter, led the next workshop of the summer, titled "Increasing proficiency through World Language Core Practices." These participants packed a lot into a one-day workshop and left with lots of great ideas. Attendees loved the "very informative and lively workshop" and "real-world activities that we

can implement in our classrooms." Others were eager to carry out their new plans, "So many good ideas directly applicable to my teaching, it will be difficult to know where to start!"

I AM WALKING AWAY WITH THINGS I CAN USE NOW.

(2017 workshop participant)

Our third workshop was another one-day offering, dovetailing with the core practices workshop the day before. Led by newcomer Kellye Guzik, this hands-on workshop was called "Reaching 21st century learners through unit design." Participants liked putting themselves in their students' shoes, "Our workshop class did some of the same class activities our instructor does in class. This was helpful to experience in person." Another had a hard time listing her favorite thing about the workshop, "[It's] hard to narrow down! Ideas to use right away; ideas to improve my teaching; things to work for in the future."

THE ORGANIZATION, ENTHUSIASM, AND IDEAS PRESENTED WERE CLEAR, CONCISE, AND HELPFUL.

(2017 workshop participant)

Returning guest presenter Betsy Lavolette came back to us from Gettysburg College to lead the final workshop of the summer, titled "Teaching language with technology: Basic tools and techniques." She presented on a host of tools teachers can use to easily and creatively incorporate technology in their classes. Participants enjoyed the immediately-useful workshop content: "Of the six previous workshops I have taken - this is by far the most exciting and useful." Other attendees planned to put the tools to use right away, with one saying, "Lots of great ideas I will be using in my class this fall - online assessments and games, especially!"



RIA DATA RECOVERY PROCESS

We are pleased to announce that we now have mechanisms in place to send former Rich Internet Applications users data from some of the RIAs; we continue to work on ways to recover and package data from other RIAs. We thank our RIA users for their patience during this process, and apologize again for the abrupt end of the RIA program and the upheaval and frustration this has caused our users.

Mashups

Mashups (converted to web pages) are available and can be delivered to users via a time-limited link to a downloadable archive file. The archive contains a spreadsheet listing the name and description of each Mashups page. Also included will be any pictures (JPEGs) that were stored in the Mashups system. Note that if the RIA Conversations was used as part of the Mashup, those files are not yet available for recovery.

Viewpoint

Viewpoint audio and video files are available and can be delivered to users via a time-limited link to a downloadable archive file. The archive contains a spreadsheet listing the name and description of each Viewpoint audio or video file.

Audio and Video Dropbox

Audio and video files from Audio and Video Dropbox are available and can be delivered to users via a time-limited link to a downloadable archive file. The archive contains a spreadsheet listing the bank, deposit and student name for each Dropbox audio or video file.



CLEAR NEWS

CLEAR News is a publication of the Center for Language Education and Research and is intended to inform foreign language educators of the Center's ongoing research projects and professional development workshops, to report on current foreign language research and publications and their applicability to the classroom, and to provide a forum for educators to discuss foreign language teaching and learning topics.

619 Red Cedar Road
Wells Hall, Suite B-135
East Lansing, MI 48824-1027

Phone: 517.432.2286
Email: clear@msu.edu
Website: <http://clear.msu.edu>

Susan M. Gass
Co-Director

Charlene Polio
Co-Director

Joy M. Campbell
Executive Associate Director

Patricia R. Paulsell
Co-Director Emerita

This publication was produced with support from a Department of Education grant (CFDA 84.229A and P229A140006). The contents do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Education, and one should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

The US Department of Education awards grants through Title VI funding to a small number of institutions for the purpose of establishing, strengthening, and operating language resource and training centers to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages. There are currently sixteen Language Resource Centers nationwide: the ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (AELRC), a consortium of Georgetown University and the Center for Applied Linguistics; the CENTER FOR ADVANCED LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (CALPER) at The Pennsylvania State University; the CENTER FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota; the CENTER FOR APPLIED SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES (CASLS) at the University of Oregon; the CENTER FOR LANGUAGES OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION (CeLCAR) at Indiana University; the CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY (CERCLL) at the University of Arizona; the CENTER FOR INTEGRATED LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES (CILC) at City University

of New York; the CENTER FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (CLEAR) at Michigan State University; the CENTER FOR OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND LANGUAGE LEARNING (COERLL) at the University of Texas at Austin; the CENTER FOR URBAN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH (CULTR) at Georgia State University; the NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC) at Indiana University; the NATIONAL EAST ASIAN LANGUAGES RESOURCE CENTER (NEALRC) at The Ohio State University; the NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; the NATIONAL HERITAGE LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NHLRC), a consortium of UCLA and the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching; the NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR ASIAN LANGUAGES (NRCAL) at California State University, Fullerton; and the SLAVIC AND EURASIAN LANGUAGE RESEARCH CENTER (SEELRC) at Duke University.