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# Positive and Negative Outcomes in Creative Project-Based Learning: Two EFL Projects

Ashley FORD, David KLUGE

## Abstract

Project-Based Learning (or PBL), a student-centered teaching approach which uses extensive projects in the classroom, is defined in this paper. The concept of Creative PBL is developed, and two projects conducted in Japan are then described: a film-making project and an oral interpretation project. The positive and negative outcomes of the projects are enumerated, with suggestions on how to alleviate the negatives, and it was found that although negative outcomes such as lapses into the first language (L1) and difficulty of assessment were found, the increased creativity, motivation, and leadership outweigh the negatives.

Many university classes still have the traditional teacher-fronted structure, with the teacher lecturing, students taking notes, and then showing they have learned what the teacher lectured on through quizzes, exams, or papers. However, many of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes tend to be more student-centered, with the teacher acting as a facilitator, first explaining the activity and helping to structure activities, then letting students work either individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a whole class while checking to make sure things are going smoothly, and helping when asked. There are several ways to structure these student-centered learning activities: as individual-focused methods such as autonomous learning or self-directed learning, or as group-focused methods such as cooperative learning, problem-based learning, or project-based learning, among many other options. The focus of this paper is project-based learning (PBL).

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is generally accepted in western educational settings as being more valuable than traditional methods due to the student-

centered nature of it, and PBL has developed from being a popular trend or innovation to being a standard in some settings. Although the conversation has already been had in many schools and classrooms in these settings, it is just beginning to pick up momentum in parts of the world that are slow to change their educational policies and are wary of accepting new methods. This paper offers examples of two PBL projects, both implemented in a similar context, and reports the positive and negative outcomes so that it may contribute to the conversations between teachers and administrators about the possibilities and considerations they should have if they would like to incorporate aspects of PBL into their curricula.

This paper first defines and explains the main principles of PBL looking at the positive and negative aspects of it, then describes two projects conducted in Japan, a film-making project and an oral interpretation project, next evaluates the two projects in terms of how they meet the principles of PBL focusing on the positive and negative outcomes of the two projects, and finally ends with a discussion of the merits of the two projects, giving some suggestions for the next time the projects are attempted by the authors, and ideas for further research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Definition**

Project-Based Learning (or PBL) is a student-centered teaching approach which incorporates the use of extensive projects in the classroom. A project poses a challenge to engage students in a process of discovery of knowledge and skills that culminates in a tangible product of their discovery process.

### **Origins**

While “Learning by Doing” has been advocated in education since the early 20th century by John Dewey (1933), the use of projects as a formal method was not popular until towards the end of the century. The use of PBL increased when student-centered approaches began to replace more traditional models in education. Morgan (1983) suggested there are three types of projects typically found in classrooms. The first type, “Project Exercise,” in which students apply knowledge and skills already acquired, is often referred to as a “capstone.” The

second type is “Project component,” in which teaching occurs parallel to the project, and students learn while practicing real-world skills and abilities. The third type, referred to as “Project Orientation,” is where projects encompass the entire curriculum and the material studied is determined by the demands of the projects. Generally, PBL refers to the “project orientation” type indicated by Morgan (1983).

### Characteristics

What specific characteristics must a project have in order to be considered appropriate for PBL? It is difficult to say because there is great variety in the kinds of projects included in PBL that contain different characteristics (Thomas, 2000), and PBL seems to continually expand to incorporate new characteristics. Therefore, it may be more useful and practical to consider the features of PBL defined in previous literature and consolidate it into the definition for this current paper, with the features considered not simply as fixed, clear-cut points, but as variables, each variable being represented by a continuum. In other words, any single project utilized in PBL would contain different degrees of each of these features.

In this view, the definition of PBL would theoretically consist of the following twelve variable aspects of PBL. The following list (in Table 1) put forth by this paper has been devised through a careful review of the literature and previous definitions of PBL proposed by Adderley et al. (1975), Blumenfeld et al. (1991), Thomas (2000), Savery and Duffy (1995), Helle, Tynjälä, and Olkinuora (2006), Larmer and Mergendoller (2010), Buck Institute for Education (n.d.), and is inclusive of “Creative PBL” suggested by the authors’ own observations.

Table 1 Twelve Variable Aspects of PBL

(1) Essentialness	(5) Engagement	(9) Production
(2) Centrality	(6) Creativity	(10) Reflection
(3) Goal Relevance	(7) Ownership	(11) Application
(4) Motivation	(8) Collaboration	(12) Challenge

A description of each variable follows:

- (1) Essentialness: The project creates a need to know or to acquire skills and knowledge in order to successfully complete it and/or answer the driving

- question (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).
- (2) Centrality: The project must be central to the curriculum (Thomas, 2000). It serves as an essential part of the curriculum: students achieve the curricular goals through the project specifically (Helle et al., 2006).
  - (3) Goal Relevance: The project must set clear, realistic learning objectives that must be communicated to the students (Helle et al., 2006) so they understand why they are completing the project. These goals must be directly related to the goals of the curriculum.
  - (4) Motivation: The project introduces a problem or prompt which will engage the students in the process of learning and will motivate them to find a solution, i.e., a “driving question” (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Thomas, 2000; Helle et al., 2006; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).
  - (5) Engagement: The project entails investigation and engagement in a variety of activities by students over an extended period of time in order to gain knowledge and skills (Blumenfeld et al., 1991), find answers, and create their products, i.e., “Constructive Investigation” (Thomas, 2000).
  - (6) Creativity: The project encourages students to take initiative and be innovative in testing new things (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). The current paper proposes to include within this aspect that the project encourages students to develop their own ideas and creativity in its artistic sense and to test those new ideas and as well as to develop creativity through new skills. Feher (2007) explained why creativity is important in the language classroom in terms that fit with PBL — that language use is a creative act that requires creativity, that creativity leads to greater motivation and a sense of challenge and inspiration, and that creative thinking is an important real-world skill. This is why the present authors are introducing a new term, “Creative PBL,” not to indicate that previous PBL was not creative, but that the focus of the new category of PBL is to develop creativity in the students. (For another paper on two more creative PBL projects, see Kluge & Catanzariti, 2013.)
  - (7) Ownership: During the project, students have the power to make their own decisions, manage time and responsibility, and be autonomous learners. Students find their own path to the solution (Savery & Duffy, 1995; Helle et al., 2006), and have ample “voice and choice” (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). This also assumes a shift in the teacher’s role toward advising and facilitating

- students (Adderley et. al., 1975).
- (8) Collaboration: The project allows for the development of 21st century skills such as collaboration, cooperation, and communication (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). It creates an environment conducive to the challenge of working with others (Savery & Duffy, 1995).
  - (9) Production: The project results in a final product or presentation created by students to share their ideas with the class or the larger community (Adderley et. al., 1975; Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).
  - (10) Reflection: The project includes opportunity for critique, revision, and reflection (Barab, Hay, Barnett, & Keating, 2000 cited in Helle et al., 2006; Savery & Duffy, 1995; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).
  - (11) Application: The project offers an opportunity to use or apply knowledge and skills to other activities and themes. PBL demands “a flexible and useful form of knowledge to be applied in other contexts” (NEA, n.d.) and “multiple forms of representation” (Helle et al., 2006, p. 293).
  - (12) Challenge: The project must “be complex enough in order to induce students to generate questions of their own” (Helle et al., 2006, p. 294) and must serve a more intellectual purpose as students “construct knowledge by solving complex problems in situations in which they use cognitive tools, multiple sources of information, and other individuals as resources” (Blumenfeld et al., 1991, p. 372). In Creative PBL, the project must also challenge the students to be as creative as possible in making the culminating product or performance.

### **Implications for Successful Project Design**

As students are learning through doing the project, PBL’s emphasis is on the process. Students must be engaged and focused on this process and not solely on the product, content, or any other single feature. Therefore, it is crucial that projects be designed with this emphasis in mind. Students need to be able to “think through the steps” by continuous task-oriented interactions with classmates (Helle et al., 2006). There will be gaps in knowledge, and support will be necessary for new concepts. These gaps provide learning opportunities.

Success in PBL has also been linked to projects that are carefully planned, relatively brief, and problems that are reviewed frequently (Achilles & Hoover,

1996). Thus, teachers need to carefully plan the themes and outline of the project with its objectives and requirements clearly stated, and need to make sure they are clear, attainable, and relevant to students. Lattery et al. (2001 cited in Helle et al., 2006) echo that success can only be achieved if the projects are simple, relevant, and student capabilities have been appropriately matched with the task requirements.

Thomas and Mergendoller (2000 cited in Thomas, 2000, p. 28) suggested three principles were necessary to the success of PBL: “creating a culture of self-management” to support good behavior in project work, “models of excellent work” for the students to follow, and “a physical environment conducive to project work.” Without these, teachers will certainly experience challenges with student participation and motivation, achievement of the project’s goals, classroom management, and access to necessary tools and resources.

### **Benefits of Project-Based Learning**

This section will describe general benefits of PBL, benefits specific to second language learning, and benefits specific to language learners in Japan.

**General benefits.** In addition to claiming it is better than the traditional teaching methods because it is student-centered, and relying on the research on student-centeredness, PBL proponents have conducted quantitative studies. PBL has been shown to be related to significant test score improvement on standardized academic achievement exams (Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, 1997, 1999a, 1999b cited in Thomas, 2000), increased ability to solve problems (Gallagher, Stepien, & Rosenthal, 1992 cited in Thomas, 2000), increased ability to understand the content of subject matter (Boaler, 1997 cited in Thomas, 2000), as well as improved understanding of the skills and strategies introduced in the project (Barron et al., 1998 cited in Thomas, 2000). Tretten and Zachariou, (1995 cited in Thomas, 2000, p.19) found “perceived changes in group problem solving, work habits, and other PBL process behaviors.”

**Benefits specific to language learning.** Benefits specific to second language learning include findings that PBL provides rich opportunities for comprehensible input and output (Eyring, 1989 cited in Beckett, 2006) and that it improves critical

thinking and problem solving skills, as well as improves higher order thinking skills (Beckett, 2006).

**Benefits specific to language learners in Japan.** For Japanese language learners, it has been shown that PBL allows Japanese students to experience intercultural experiences without leaving Japan or in preparation for leaving Japan (Maekawa, 2009 cited in Yashima, 2015; Falout, Fukada, Murphey, & Fukuda, 2013).

### **Challenges of Project-Based Learning**

This section will describe general challenges of PBL, specific challenges to second language learners, and specific challenges to second language learners in Japan.

**General challenges.** While researchers and teachers have identified and recounted the numerous benefits of implementing PBL in various educational contexts, they are not conclusive and as straightforward as described in the previous section. There have been many reports of unsuccessful projects, and scholars have identified recurring and substantial problems and weaknesses of PBL as well.

In 2006, Helle et al. reviewed the body of current research in PBL in post-secondary education to define and identify motives and effects of its use in education. They reviewed 37 studies which were identified as specific to PBL and analyzed patterns in their results. The findings of this review indicated several recurring challenges in implementing PBL in various contexts. Several problems were found in regard to administration. PBL was often too time consuming or not practical for the constraints of many schools and curricula. Teachers also identified exceptional difficulties with student requirements and assessment, student motivation, student group dynamics, classroom management, and with organizing and supplementing tasks. Helle et al. also indicated a recurring problem of an overabundance of goals, and goals that lacked clarity and defined outcomes. This highlights the necessity for teachers and administrators to discuss the positives and negatives of implementing PBL in their schools and classrooms before deciding if it is valuable to use, and to also identify clear and concrete learning

objectives for students for each individual project before designing the projects. This claim also supports Heitmann (1996 cited in Helle, 2006) as he illustrated how motives and objectives correlate to and shape the type of project to be used as this determines the experience the learner will have. Helle et al. conclude that PBL users need to have clear learning goals and pay attention to the “congruence of goals and activities” (p. 307).

Thomas (2000) analyzed several accounts of PBL use in various educational contexts to identify and review some of the most important findings in PBL research. His study highlighted several frequently reported problems in using PBL. Students had difficulties generating questions and topics, managing the time and complexity of the project, and working in the group environment. These findings emphasize the need to assist students and support them in choosing a topic or designing their projects. In the study, teachers often exhibited major problems understanding their own role in PBL and also struggled with the use of time in classes. It was difficult to balance the time it took for students to find the answers on their own (Ladewsky, Krajcik, & Harvey, 1994 cited in Thomas 2000) with covering what students must learn. How much should the teacher step in to control students’ learning was a major question. It often took students longer to complete the projects than teachers had planned for and in some cases teachers felt they should step in more; in others, there was too much student independence and not enough modeling and feedback. This stresses the importance that PBL places on clearly defining the teacher and student roles, and on practitioners and administrators allowing for flexibility in these classrooms. Other findings in Thomas’s review included difficulties with classroom management, technology use, appropriate assessment, and finally, balancing goals of skill development with content because both could be too much of a burden and result in cognitive overload for students (Rosenfeld, Scherzo, Breiner, & Carmeli, 1998 cited in Thomas, 2000). Thus, it becomes clear that PBL practitioners must be realistic with their expectations of students’ capabilities and again, be very clear about what knowledge or skills the students should achieve or demonstrate through the project.

A more recent study by Wijnia, Loyens, and Derous (2011) found more mixed results than past studies. They compared the effects of a more traditional lecture-based environment with a PBL environment in an undergraduate psychology

course and measured students' competence and student motivation. Their results showed that PBL students' competence was higher, but the PBL environment did not significantly influence students' intrinsic motivation for learning. The research found that the collaborative nature of PBL was perceived as motivating; however, the students' anxiety about relying on their abilities to complete the project and the necessity of their attendance contributing to the project's success were shown to be demotivating. The report suggests that students need some structure and control in balance with autonomy for PBL to more effectively motivate students.

**Challenges in second language contexts.** It is important to address the specific features of PBL in second language education because while PBL is generally favored in content areas, it has been shown through multiple studies in second language education to have more mixed results (Beckett, 2002). It is also important to address the differences in cultural ideas which may also be an influence on how students perceive student-centered learning methods such as PBL in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Beckett, 2002).

Language students have trouble seeing the benefits PBL has on their language development. A review of literature by Beckett in 2002 comparing student evaluations of PBL to those of teachers finds that in evaluations, students often have indicated that they are unaware that they are using language skills in order to learn (Eyring, 1989; Beckett, 1999). Teacher and student perceptions of what they are learning are likely different because they are holding two different points of view of language learning — the former being functional and the latter form-based (Beckett, 2002).

In previous studies the use of the second language in PBL has also been shown to have negative effects on student attitudes. Language students often find that PBL is too challenging and too much work because of the types of activities involved (Beckett, 2002). PBL often incorporates activities such as research, presentations, and written reports, and the second language component makes these tasks even more time-consuming and difficult. Students also suffer from feeling like they do not have the communicative competence to complete these types of activities. (Beckett, 1999 cited in Beckett, 2006) Feeling overwhelmed and unable to complete tasks may lead to other effects such as lower student

motivation, engagement, and independence, which are directly counter to the primary goals and justification for utilizing PBL in the first place. Therefore, careful planning and construction of tasks is crucial for teachers who hope to utilize PBL in the second language context. Tims (2009) also came to similar conclusions in that students' learning needs should determine the type and length of the project, focus or topic, and the degree of teacher involvement and control.

**Special challenges for Asian contexts.** Implementing PBL in Asian EFL contexts has been shown to have additional challenges. Communicative approaches to language teaching such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), Cooperative Learning, and PBL have faced challenges in adapting to the Asian context. Although methods such as CLT, TBLT, and Cooperative Learning are definitively different than PBL, because they are all rather new and innovative methods, or student-centered as opposed to traditional teacher-centered teaching methods, it is possible that PBL may face similar challenges in implementation.

Littlewood (2007) discussed five concerns about implementing communicative approaches in East Asian contexts: classroom management (due to class size, monitoring, etc.), avoidance of English, and minimal demands on language competency — Japanese students have anxiety about speaking English or have no sense of purpose to use it so they avoid it or use as little as possible to complete the task — incompatibility with public assessment demands dictated by the government, and conflict with traditions and values.

In fact, the concern regarding English language use for communication in the EFL context has been a major challenge for these student-centered methods. Butler (2005) asks why would students have a conversation in English when they already share the same first language? It becomes inefficient to use L2, especially when engaged in completing a more complex or time-consuming task (Eguchi & Eguchi, 2006) as is especially the case in PBL as compared to CLT and TBLT.

Eguchi and Eguchi (2006) piloted a PBL approach in a communication course at a Japanese university. The students' major task was the design and creation of an English magazine. While the students responded positively with enjoyment and satisfaction with the course, the researchers deemed the project “a failure” in terms of its lack of success in having an effect on the students' English learning.

The researchers found that the monolingual environment in the classroom created major challenges in that students completed most of the tasks in their first language. In class, students had little incentive to use English to complete the tasks, as all their classmates and teacher could speak Japanese. When working outside of class and in the community, students could only interact with other Japanese speakers because there was little opportunity for contact with native English speakers. PBL seems more effective in multicultural and multilingual classrooms as well as in ESL environments where students may interact with English easily outside of class, but this effectiveness is very limited in the Japanese context. Therefore, teachers in Japan or other EFL environments who hope to apply PBL in a foreign language classroom of monolingual learners must promote access to authentic English resources inside and outside of the classroom and implement techniques to encourage the use of English in class.

Moreover, Japanese learners specifically self-monitor when using language and feel a great deal of pressure to not make mistakes in public (Thornbury, 2005) which likely leads them to have even weaker communicative skills. Since PBL requires communicative skills as the central tools for negotiation and discussion necessary to complete the project, the difficulties found in Beckett (2002) of the general language learner may prove to be especially more difficult for the Japanese learner.

In EFL contexts, particularly in Asia, implementation of new methods may present even greater challenges. Conflict with traditions and values, as stated by Littlewood (2007), is a challenge for CLT and TBLT, and Littlewood wondered if these methods are even appropriate in different educational cultures. Not only is there a history of more teacher-centered educational methods in such cultures, there could also be a preference for these types of activities rather than the student-centered activities of PBL (Eyring, 1989).

**Justification for use of PBL in the Japanese context.** In spite of the situation described in the above section, PBL is utilized in Japanese classrooms for several reasons which often relate to culture and the student profile. Often, Japanese classrooms utilize traditional methods of memorization and testing of declarative knowledge. In language classes, translation methods are often utilized over communicative methods, although recently there has been a push toward

reforming the style of education (MEXT, 2003 cited in Eguchi & Eguchi, 2006). Still, many students who enter a Japanese university have only studied English in the traditional fashion.

Years of study in this way has caused students to suffer a loss of interest and initiative and created a student who is more passive and demotivated, (Ushioda, 2013; Kikuchi, 2009). Since PBL is a different approach than they are used to, it can renew energy in the tired student, and allow for a more active role for the student.

The collaborative element of PBL should not be overlooked as well. Japanese society highly values skills of cooperation and teamwork. PBL provides students with a task in which students must work well together to complete a goal and finished product. They can practice and develop these collaborative skills in a different context than they are used to. Additional benefits of collaboration are in subtle regard to the student and their language development, i.e., Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development" (1978) that states that peers with a slightly higher ability may help lower level classmates to understand and attain skills at a higher level than they would by themselves, and the "Cognitive-Elaboration Perspective" (O'Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013) which posits that teaching something to somebody helps the teacher to learn the material or skill better themselves.

As implied earlier, Japanese students tend to be more reserved than students from other cultures; they are more afraid to take risks, they fear making mistakes, and are deeply embarrassed when they do make them. However, the collaborative element of PBL allows students to get to know their classmates more closely and it fosters a better environment for language development. Students who feel more comfortable with each other will be more comfortable taking risks when using the language. Risk-taking has been shown to be an essential factor in improving language ability (Brown, 2000). Feeling more comfortable with classmates will also help students become more comfortable expressing their opinions with each other more openly. This can help them to break out of their shy habits when necessary and develop the social skills necessary when communicating with other speakers of English.

## Two EFL Projects

This paper introduces two projects piloted in English language courses at Japanese universities at various language levels and will provide an account of positive and negative observations of the method and of the project themes/products. The authors are both instructors at a Japanese university and have freedom to utilize their own methodology and design their own syllabi so long as they fit into the course and curriculum goals. Generally, this means that the course objectives must fit the curriculum goals, but the instructor can decide how to arrange the activities of the course to fit the objectives and goals of the institution's curriculum. Specific objectives will be discussed within the context of each course.

The two PBL projects, a film-making project and an oral interpretation project, are described below in terms of how they fit as PBL projects. Details of how the projects are set up, practiced, and performed are explained. In addition, the outcomes and results, both positive and negative, are discussed for each project.

To help organize the discussion of the two projects, three focus questions are posed:

1. What are the positive and negative outcomes of PBL for English language students engaged in a film-making and an oral interpretation project?
2. What are the positive and negative outcomes of PBL for Japanese students engaged in a film-making and an oral interpretation project?
3. What outcomes of these projects are especially true or specific to Japanese learners?

## Description and Results

The two projects are described in detail in these sections.

**Project 1: Film-making.** Film-making is an activity which has a history of incorporation in EFL classrooms. Teachers have used it as an activity to increase students' motivation (Chen & Li, 2011). Some common film-making activities have included adaptations of popular movies, recording of scenes or dialogues from movies or textbooks (Eken, 2003), and the writing and production of original works (Flowers, 2014). Student-produced films have often appeared as a product

of PBL (Carter & Thomas, 1986).

Film-making as an English language project fits into the realm of PBL when it is examined in relation to the twelve characteristics of PBL described previously through the literature, as shown in Table 2.

Film-making projects in second language classrooms also include distinctive characteristics, such as the application of knowledge to be applied in another context (in this case, English knowledge to be applied to film-making). This adds complexity and flexibility in the project, as well as serving a “more intellectual purpose,” (Blumenfeld et al., 1991) i.e., learning content and information about film through English. The project is central to the school curriculum as it reveals gaps in skill or knowledge and creates learning points based on student needs. It could also be even further adapted to be central to a curriculum such as in a content-based English language or Art course titled “Intro to Film.” Additionally, the stipulation of writing and telling an original story through their film allows students freedom to be creative and test new ideas and new language.

**Course description and background.** The film-making project was piloted in five semi-intensive English courses at two Japanese universities over four years. Four of these courses were elective English courses in which the primary objectives were to build fluency and competency across the skills. Each of these four classes was of a different size and different level: one class of 3 students at the upper-intermediate level, one class of 6 students at the advanced level, one class of 12 students at the intermediate level, and one class of 15 students at the elementary level. The students in these classes all chose to take the course as an elective. Classes met for 90 minutes 1 time per week for 15 weeks. The film-making project was central to the curriculum and about half of the total time in class was devoted to working on the project, while the remaining class time focused on film as content. The general course description is provided below.

In this class, students will use and improve their English skills while learning about film and engaging in a film-making project of their own. Students will perform each step of the process of film-making such as story writing, scriptwriting, film production/planning, shooting, editing, and acting. Students practice the four skills in English – reading, writing, listening, and

Table 2 Aspects of the PBL Continuum and Film-making

Aspects of the PBL Continuum	Film-making
(1) Essentialness	The English-only nature of the project demands application and use of English knowledge and communication skills.
(2) Centrality	The project is required for the course; specific language learning points are addressed as needs arise during the project and students are evaluated on the language and skills they demonstrate.
(3) Goal Relevance	Students will improve specific <b>listening</b> skills through watching and discussing example shorts films; <b>speaking</b> through class discussions, practice, and performance; <b>writing</b> during project activities and reflection tasks of the film-making process; and <b>academic skills</b> through classroom tasks and interactions.
(4) Motivation	The problem is to plan, write, and produce a creative short film in English in 15 weeks.
(5) Engagement	Students are required to complete a series of tasks leading to the completion of the project, such as creating character sheets, storyboard, and script.
(6) Creativity	Students must write an original story.
(7) Ownership	Students are responsible for completing all stages of the film-making process from start to finish, making their own decisions.
(8) Collaboration	Students complete the project in groups of 3-5 which necessitates discussion and collaboration with academic peers.
(9) Production	There is a final 5-10 minute short film to view in class (or at a mock film festival).
(10) Reflection	Students are subject to ongoing reviews and revisions of their work. Students must also write a final reflection and critique.
(11) Application	Students exercise their knowledge and skills in English by applying them to a new theme and discipline of Art and Film
(12) Challenge	In addition to the challenge of being creative, students also expand their knowledge and skills by exploring new content in the discipline of Art and Film and by experiencing an authentic task performed by many university film students.

speaking through classroom tasks including watching and discussing short films; group discussions, writing, and preparation of their own films; and individual reflection and critique activities.

The course and its framework were also adapted to supplement one “Interaction in English” course in which the objectives were also to increase fluency and communicative competency in English. The size of this class was 18 students. All students in this course were at the upper-intermediate level and were taking the course as a requirement for their degree. Classes met for 90 minutes 1 time per week for 15 weeks. The film-making project was a supplemental activity that spanned the length of the course with project work constituting half of the total class time. The additional class time was spent on other class work.

**Goals and objectives.** The specific goals and objectives of the project are as follows:

Listening: Students should be able to complete the following listening tasks through watching example short films or lectures on film-making appropriate to their target level – elementary, intermediate, or advanced (ACTFL, 1982):

- › Listen for main ideas, supporting details, and specific information
- › Infer meaning based on context, intonation, etc.
- › Organize and synthesize information from a listening source
- › Relate information from listening to personal experiences
- › Incorporate related information and ideas into discussions of their own films.

Function: Students should be able to perform the following functions, using appropriate grammatical structures, vocabulary, and communication skills when discussing their films appropriate to their level – elementary, intermediate, or advanced.

- › Summarize points from group discussion or classroom tasks
- › Form, express, and support opinions
- › Check understanding
- › Ask and answer questions
- › With practice and preparation, perform dialogue with natural speed and clear pronunciation.

Writing: Working both individually and collaboratively, students should be able to perform the following written tasks, using appropriate grammatical structures and vocabulary appropriate to their level – elementary, intermediate, or advanced.

- › Develop descriptions of characters
- › Construct a well-structured, complete story in cohesive order
- › Construct well-articulated and thoughtful dialogues
- › Construct film critiques and self-reflections which apply information learned through the project.

Study and Academic Skills: Students should be able to demonstrate the following academic skills.

- › Use peer and teacher feedback to revise
- › Work collaboratively and communicate effectively in a group
- › Use technological equipment and computer software for recording and editing of audio and video.

**The Process.** Students were randomly assigned into groups of three, four, or five, depending on the class size for the film-making project. Each group was responsible for writing, planning, and producing an original short film of their own. Since the film-making project used a PBL approach, the goal was to get students to focus more on the steps of the creation process as suggested by Helle et al. (2006). The film-making project was broken into the five stages of film-making as shown in Table 3 under “Film-making Process.” The first two stages (Development and Pre-production) were completed during weeks 1–10, while the final stages (Production, Post-production, and Distribution) were completed in weeks 11–15. Additionally, as Nye læringsmetoder (2000 cited in Helle et al., 2006) claims, many students find the projects overwhelming due to the amount of work, and the study suggests that distributing the workload in small chunks and activities over time may help students. Since writing and making a film is indeed a daunting task, each stage of the project was further broken into specific language-focused tasks and discussions to ease the workload. These tasks are denoted in Table 3 under “Student Tasks.”

The Development stage is by far the most time-consuming part of the process. It takes time to brainstorm ideas and for everyone in the group to express opinions and move forward with one idea. During the Development stage, the

Table 3 Student Tasks in the Film-making Project

Film-making Process	Students Tasks
<b>Development:</b> Storywriting Scriptwriting	Watch a short film Develop characters and write character sheets Create a description of their original story idea Complete a model script Create dialogue for their film
<b>Pre-Production:</b> Storyboarding Building Sets and Collecting Props	Create the storyboard and plan their shots Plan locations and prepare checklists of their props and costumes
<b>Production:</b> Acting	Practice their performances Shoot their film
<b>Post-Production:</b> Editing	Edit their film
<b>Distribution:</b> Promotion and Release Critical Analysis	Analyze and create a logline, poster, and complete a film festival entry form Show their film Review a film

first task assigned to students was to watch a few example silent short films and analyze elements of character, setting, and plot. The following discussion focused on describing the characters, particularly their function and characteristics, and then on the central conflict (or problem) the characters face. The next discussion focused on Freytag's plot structure (Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, and Resolution) and they were asked to summarize the stories. The example short films provided students with model language and content focus for the discussion of their own films, brainstorming story ideas, and interesting characters. The next task the students completed at this stage was to write character sheets to introduce their characters and to write a cohesive outline of their original story. This resulted in written products to be reviewed and evaluated for feedback from the other classmates and the teacher, even though students were just in the beginning stage of the project. The final task for the students at this stage was scriptwriting. Students first watched an example scene from a film and completed cloze exercises to complete the script. The activities focused particularly on descriptive adjectives

of actions and the inference of feelings and emotion. This introduced the format of the script, content to focus on for their discussions, and the kind of language they should be using to complete the task. Then the students turned to their own scripts, dividing their story into scenes, incorporating actions and feelings, and writing well-articulated and thoughtful dialogues for each of their scenes.

The next stage was Pre-production. Students were given a storyboard in order to divide their film into scenes and plan their shots. This task overlapped nicely with the scriptwriting, and because the scriptwriting task took more time, students could work on these two tasks simultaneously, splitting responsibilities, or changing activities if they become creatively blocked. During this phase, students also were shown model short films. The teacher introduced some useful vocabulary to discuss the various types of shots they might use (i.e., close-up, long shot, high/low angle, pan, zoom, etc.). Students identified the types of shots in the model films, tried them out with the cameras, and immediately began using this vocabulary to discuss the types of shots they would use for their films. They added this information to the storyboard. In addition to the written storyboard and script, students also discussed locations, props, and costumes needed for shooting, and created checklists as a final product of those discussions.

The students then moved into Production. They practiced their scripts at natural speed with clear pronunciation and delivery, and then spent one entire class period shooting their films. Students finished up any additional shooting outside of class.

During Post-production, students combined their shots with a simple movie-editing software program (Windows Live MovieMaker or Apple iMovie), added titles, credits, and music, and exported the final version of their films. Students brought their own laptops or borrowed one from the university. The teacher introduced the software, and some editing vocabulary in class and led students through the beginning of the editing process. Once started, the students discussed editing responsibilities and completed most of the editing on their own outside of class.

Finally, in the Distribution stage, after having completed their film, students worked on promoting their film. They wrote a logline (a one-sentence descriptive summary of their film) to attract attention for their film, produced a poster, and filled out an entry form for an actual film festival (but whether they actually

entered it or not, was up to them). One goal of this activity was to understand that their project had worth in the real world and was more than an English activity. They had to face some of the challenges that independent film makers would. On the final day of class, the films were shown, and the students reflected on the process. They also completed an individual final report consisting of a review of a film of their choice.

**Assessment.** Assessment consisted of a combination of several individual and group components during each step of the film-making process. Objectives of each task were considered, and students were asked to brainstorm ideas or recycle information about their projects in homework assignments and reflections that were included as individual assessment. Students also wrote an individual final reflection of their project and a critique on a film of their own choice, focusing on aspects of the film-making process to demonstrate language, skill, and knowledge gained through the process. Group products such as the character sheets, storyboard, script, and film were collected and assessed as a group component. Students also were observed by the teacher during class time and notes were kept on students' participation and progress in regard to the functional goals of the course. Since each of the courses was conducted at a different level, a rubric assessing individual and group work was created and adapted relative to their level, informed by the ACTFL target guidelines (1982). In addition, a content component was added to the storyboard and discussion component to reflect an understanding of the focus of the tasks. The film project and its associated tasks and assignments contributed to 50% of the student's final grade in the elective classes, and 40% as the oral component in the Interaction in English class.

**Results.** The results are discussed looking at the student work and the perceptions of the teacher and students.

***Observations on the structure and process: Evidence from student work.*** The observations from the student work can be seen in Table 4.

*The positive observations.* The framework of the film project was easily adaptable to students' levels. Film concepts were relatively simple and easy for students of all levels to comprehend. Of course, advanced students were able to discuss those concepts more deeply and show more creativity within the projects. Even so, all

Table 4 Positive and Negative Observations from Student Work

Positive Observations	Negative Observations
Framework is adaptable for language level and curricular goals.	Lack of preparation or absences led to lack of initiative and focus.
Structure and modeling creates more output.	Writing tasks lost momentum and were often incomplete.
Structure and modeling produce more focused discussions.	There was a tendency to lapse into the first language.
Supplemental content and exceptional examples encourage or inspire more creativity and better quality products.	Students did not take advantage of revision opportunities.
Extension of projects to the real world generate feelings of pride and accomplishment.	Students had to rush to complete or needed more time to complete the project.
Students indicated the project was useful and enjoyable.	Students did not enjoy spending extra time outside of class working on the project.
Motivation and creativity increased with modeling.	Adjusting for the quantity of student output without a standard measure is difficult.
Close interactions with classmates developed interpersonal as well as intrapersonal skills.	Individual language improvement is difficult to identify.
Plentiful individual and group written work allow for easy assessment of student work	Collaborative skills are difficult to assess.
Clear goals make it easier to take notes on student behavior and participation.	

groups were able to successfully create a finished product. Another positive point about the framework of the project was that it is language dependent, but not language specific. The students needed to produce almost all the language during the project and when they did, they produced language structures, vocabulary, and used skills that they were in the process of learning. When the students asked questions or identified a learning point, these were appropriate for their levels. As the students wrote descriptions of scenes on the storyboard, it was clearly evident that students at the elementary level were producing short, simple sentences, while students at the advanced level were producing detailed paragraphs. However,

and in addition, the storyboard structure meant that the elementary level students were not just producing one or two short sentences — they were producing one or two sentences for each individual scene of their film, of which there were several. Likewise, the advanced students were not just producing one or two detailed paragraphs — they were producing multitudinous paragraphs within the storyboard. This means more language usage and skill practice, and more opportunity for learning.

Adding structure and careful modeling can create more student output. What the film-making project could have been was a group discussion, a written story, and a recorded performance of the story. But when structure was added and distributed slowly over time using the framework, it became a series of focused discussions on characters, story elements, dialogue, cinematography, acting, shooting, editing, and promotion as well as written work including character sheets, storyboard descriptions, scripted dialogue including actions and feelings, visual notes, preparation checklists, synopses, posters, and an entry form. This does not even include their individual reports and homework assignments. In addition, the structure of the storyboard and script (being divided into multiple scenes) encouraged more language from students. The teacher felt that the sheer volume of student-produced output even when accounting for the level and the group work environment, was unequal to any previous course taught.

The fact that the discussions were structured around a task, and students being prepared for these through homework assignments and viewing of models, seemed to create better quality discussions. The discussions were focused and more ideas were able to be expressed. There was exchange of information, negotiation of meaning, asking and answering questions, and expressing opinions.

The quality of the product increased dramatically when students learned film language and concepts and provided with exceptional examples of short films. The first time the course was taught, the teacher felt students' stories were quite simple and lacked interesting characters and conflicts. After this, the teacher reviewed her models and chose model films more carefully. The second attempt and thereafter, the teacher showed examples of short films with more meaningful and complex stories (i.e., a homeless man who struggles to reconnect with his family, a mediocre composer and his rivalry with a genius), and the students subsequently produced films with more creative stories. In the advanced class,

when the teacher showed an example of a film with plot twists and unexpected endings, it sparked conversations within the groups' discussions and each of the groups produced films with a twist. For example, in one love story, two boys fought to win the affection of a new student at school and professed their love, only to realize "she" was a "he." Additionally, in a murder mystery, a substitute teacher and student have a secret affair which ends with the tragic death of the student. Her best friend uncovers the truth and is hunted down by the teacher. The friend wakes up just in time to realize it was all a dream, but then the door opens and the substitute teacher enters. These examples clearly illustrate new ideas the students were producing and how creativity played a key role in the success of the project. In addition, the teacher also supplemented with a short lesson on cinematography and taught students the basics of the rule of thirds and vocabulary related to various camera shots, camera angles, and movement. The final products showed creativity and attention to technique that resulted in higher cinematographic quality. Instead of level angles, and static shots with all the characters, there were closeups and long shots, powerful angles, and camera movement. This shows they were able to express themselves more purposefully through the process. The artistic freedom they were allowed was important to making the film truly their own, and in the end, they created a film that made them proud.

Giving students opportunities to extend the project outside the classroom with the film festival entry form also helped the students to connect their work to the real world. They felt value and ownership in their product. They felt proud of their effort. In the advanced class, one group decided to submit their film to a festival; however, in the end they missed the deadline. Their intention says something though, that they wanted to share what they had created with a larger audience.

*The negative observations.* When students were not prepared with their homework assignments or were absent from classes, there was a lack of initiative to work. No one had ideas to discuss, and there was a waste of time due to silence or loss of focus when students began talking about other topics. These students and their groups would quickly fall more and more behind and there was a last minute effort to finish.

There was an inclination, especially as the levels got higher, to work on the

tasks well for a while but then to hastily finish them with less quality, or in some cases, not fully complete them. In the upper-intermediate class and especially in the advanced class, students did not finish the final script and scenes for the storyboard. They started off well and completed at least half of the first half adequately, but then were not as thorough in the final scenes. The fact that they completed the films suggests that they discussed those scenes, but perhaps due to lack of time or growing tired of the activity, they did not complete the end of the written component to the best of their ability.

There was also a tendency across all levels to lapse into the first language during discussions. This was true particularly in lower levels. Students would use the first language when they struggled with a word or structure, or when other group members used Japanese. These students often needed prompting questions from the teacher for discussion, and more English-focused activities than discussion in class. In higher language levels, they were better monitors of themselves and each other, and could have longer discussions, but still tended to fall out of the target language, especially toward the end when they felt rushed to complete the project. This reinforces the importance of focusing on the process for activity and assessment and reminding students often because if the students start to focus on the product they will lose their attention to the language goals. Of course, the students want to, and should complete the product so they have something concrete to show for all their work, but only so long as it is not the main goal of the course.

Although written work received teacher and student feedback on content, language, and an initial assessment which was open for revision and reassessment, students put little effort in to revising and editing. In fact, some language errors which the teacher asked students to correct, or in some cases provided correct forms for, were not addressed and were still problematic in the final film product. Lack of time or focus on completion of the final product may again account for this, but that still does not make it acceptable in terms of the goals of utilizing PBL.

Finally, many of the groups in all five classes needed to spend extra time outside of class in order to complete the project, particularly in the days before the project was to be presented. In the Interaction in English course, students had less time to work on the film due to the other requirements of the class, so the

teacher edited the films for the students. These students definitely needed more time in class in order to be able to complete the project by themselves.

***Observation on students' attitudes: Evidence from student reports and teacher accounts.*** This section discusses both positive and negative observations on students' attitudes.

*The positive observations.* Generally, students indicated to the teacher that they enjoyed the project and found it useful and challenging for their language skills. The investment in the project also seemed to create a heightened attention to language accuracy, particularly during the scriptwriting process. Students were asking more questions when they came across discrepancies or gaps in language. They wanted what they said to be accurate.

Motivation and effort seemed to increase when students had good models and were taught model language before their discussions. The students were so inspired by characters such as a homeless man or a magician that they began discussing their characters with more enthusiasm. Instead of generic males and females, students, or workers, their characters became struggling musicians, new study abroad students, or rival supermodels. Furthermore, when the teacher reviewed vocabulary related to the camera before the shooting discussion, students immediately began to use this vocabulary actively and creatively.

In one case, a particularly shy and quiet student who was reluctant to speak English or interact with classmates in the beginning, seemed to become more comfortable communicating with his group members in the end. He even played the lead role in the film. He expressed to the teacher in his reflection how proud he was about those points. This student and his group members also expressed in their reflections that they enjoyed how the project and all the time they spent working together provided them with an the opportunity to work with people with different personalities and to get to know classmates more deeply than they normally would. The admitted it helped them to understand their individual strengths and weaknesses and to learn from each other.

*The negative observations.* Students spent extra time outside of classes to work on the project. They asked to borrow cameras and discussed additional meeting times after class. Students indicated they enjoyed the project but still felt all the tasks and assignments equaled a lot of work. A lack of completeness reflected in these assignments may indicate a loss of motivation to fully complete them because the

students felt they had done enough work.

***Observations on assessment: Evidence from teacher accounts.*** This section discusses both positive and negative observations on assessment.

*The positive observations.* As expected, identification of clear and specific goals for students' language skills did make it easier to give individual assessment scores. These scores were often based on notes from observations of discussions, written homework, and reports. While still subjective, when the teacher and student remain focused on the goal, the scores can be a better reflection of student performance.

*The negative observations.* The assessment of individual and group work still had some problems. One that was quickly recognized was that there was no standard measure for quantity of student output. It became clear early that some groups were producing much more language during the tasks and created lengthier films than other groups. It was difficult to measure what is the most appropriate amount of language for students to produce and how the amount of work should be reflected in the assessment.

Individual language improvement was difficult to measure. The group work nature of the project and the lack of formal assessment made identifying and providing concrete evidence of language improvement difficult. Though students indicated they felt the class was useful for their language skills, this does not provide any evidence of language improvement. Though the teacher noticed some improvement in speaking and discussion skills, they are purely subjective judgments.

The assessment of collaborative skills was an area of particular difficulty. Since this is a goal of the curriculum, and a primary goal of utilizing PBL, it must be considered in assessment. Should students in the same group all receive the same grade for their collaborative efforts and results? Or should the collaborative skills assessment reflect more of their individual efforts to participate within their group? More discussion is necessary within the academic community in order to identify the most appropriate approach to assessment.

**The second project: Oral interpretation project.** The second project is an oral interpretation project.

***Background.*** Oral interpretation (OI), described as “the oralization of

literature” (Campbell, 1967, p. 9), is “the art of communicating to an audience a work of literary art in its intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic entirety” (Lee & Gura, 2005, p. 4). What differentiates OI from theatre is OI performers usually face the audience, not each other, and usually hold their script in hand. OI also differs from theatre in that it usually does not involve a set, costumes, or props, but can include dramatic lighting and music. OI has been an identifying characteristic of the junior college the authors teach at since 1981, but it has been taught since 1971, and became the public characteristic of the institution since the start of the Nanzan Junior College High School Oral Interpretation Contest in 1995. (Asano, Kluge, & Kumai, 2012) It was formerly an extra-curricular activity (prepared outside of class) until 2011, when it became a co-curricular activity (practiced in class, but the performance was not part of the class) and 2012, when it became a curricular activity — practiced in class and performed as part of the class (Asano et al., 2012). As a curricular activity, it became a part of a course called “Presentation in English.” Presentation in English is a required class for first and second year students each semester, with seven sections of each course, for a total of 14 sections. There were about 20 students in a class. Each semester the course is made up of at least three units: two speech units and one oral interpretation unit, approximately five weeks for each unit. The culmination of the oral interpretation unit is an approximately five-minute presentation in front of the entire student body of the junior college at an event called the English Performance Festival (EPF) which occurs near the end of each semester. The students in the author’s classes were high level English students.

***Justification of use and how it fits PBL.*** Because the oral interpretation reputation of the junior college predates the current curriculum which started in 2011, it was natural to continue the OI project. Even when it was a co-curricular class, the presentation class was where preparation for the EPF performance occurred. In the course description of the Presentation in English courses, the oral interpretation project was included in the grading. If oral interpretation is examined in terms of the 12 variables listed in Table 1, then it is clear that the OI project is indeed a PBL activity. See Table 5 to see a depiction of this analysis.

The oral interpretation project strongly qualifies as a PBL project in that performing the OI project is central to the identity of the institution (variable 2 Centrality); students know they must perform in front of the entire school so

Table 5 Analysis of OI as PBL

Variable Aspects of PBL	How OI Fits as PBL
(1) Essentialness	All students know that they will have to perform in front of the student body so peer pressure works on them to want to do well; therefore, students want to learn how to do it well.
(2) Centrality	OI is central to the identity of the institution and the curriculum.
(3) Goal Relevance	One of the primary goals of the curriculum is for students to develop different means of expression in English, which is also a main goal of OI. All students have either seen an OI performance at the EPF or have seen a DVD recording of one, so they know that others have done the task, and have done well in the amount of time provided.
(4) Motivation	The driving question is, “What is the most creative and interesting way to communicate the words and feelings of a literary piece?”
(5) Engagement	Students search for, find, and view videos that give them hints on how to create impressive and clear interpretation of the piece.
(6) Creativity	The students try many variations to find the interpretation everyone can agree with. They want to come up with something new or surprising in order to catch the approval of the audience.
(7) Ownership	Students, choose the piece, discuss it with student group leaders, decide how to perform the piece, run the rehearsals, and run the performance.
(8) Collaboration	Since it is a project that involves the whole class, they must collaborate and communicate in English.
(9) Production	The class performs their interpretation of the piece in front of the entire student body, faculty, and staff of the college.
(10) Reflection	Each rehearsal is video recorded and students look at their video, critique it, and discuss how to improve for the next rehearsal. The performance is video recorded and students must assess themselves and then evaluate themselves, making note of how to improve for the next EPF.
(11) Application	Students apply what they learn to the next rehearsal, the next EPF performance, and the next performance in a different class or situation.
(12) Challenge	Very few students have performed on stage in front of a large audience, so it is a challenge for everybody to come up with something interesting, creative, and unusual, and to perform it on stage.

they see acquiring the OI skills as important (variable 1 Essentialness); being able to express themselves in many different ways is a goal of the program and OI, and students know this is an attainable goal because they have seen samples of previous OI projects so they know that what they are learning applies to doing a good job on the project (variable 3 Goal Relevance); students are highly motivated and work hard to make a creative performance (variables 4, 5, and 6 Motivation, Engagement, and Creativity); “student voice and choice” (variable 7 Ownership) is central to the activity, as well as “collaborating and communicating” (variable 8 Collaboration) to create the project; feedback and revision (variable 10 Reflection) are done at each step of the project, and the product, the OI presentation, is performed for the whole college (variable 9 Production). Since there are other opportunities in other courses and in future EPFs, students can and do apply what they learned (variable 11 Application). Finally, students find creatively interpreting a literary piece in English so that the school will understand and enjoy it very challenging as they most likely have never done it previously to their first EPF (variable 12 Challenge). Students also find it challenging to top their previous performance.

**Goals and objectives of OI project.** The six major goals of the English curriculum at the college related to the OI project are:

- G1. To encourage students to consider creative ways to communicate.
- G2. To help students learn how to use literature to communicate.
- G3. To help students improve English speaking ability (especially pronunciation, intonation, and prosody).
- G4. To help students become comfortable standing in front of a large audience and performing.
- G5. To promote class unity through working together.
- G6. To encourage students to take charge of their learning.

The specific objectives of the Presentation in English courses are the following:

- O1. Students will select a piece to interpret for the audience.
- O2. Students will learn the basic principles of oral interpretation (how to speak with vocal variety, how to use the body to communicate meaning, how to use gestures effectively, how to use movement effectively, how to use the stage, how to use variety of grouping to add interest, and how to work as an ensemble).

- O3. Students will read and understand the piece in terms of theme and nuance.
- O4. Students will work together to interpret the piece using voice, body, and movement.
- O5. Students will be in charge of the unit from beginning to end

**Process of the OI project.** The OI project can be divided into three stages: first steps, middle steps, and final steps. (See Table 6.) All three stages are described below.

**Stage 1: First steps of the project.** This stage starts out in the classroom for a few minutes the first two weeks, but most of the work is done at home. At the beginning of the semester in the first class, students are asked to come up with the title of a piece that fits with a particular theme or occasion and the time limits of the English Performance Festival (EPF). In the second week, the students write their suggestions on the white board, and the class votes, selecting one piece. The person who suggested the piece is asked to email a copy of the piece to the teacher who makes copies of the piece to distribute to students in the third week of classes, or the person digitally sends the copy to the students. Students are asked to read the piece and think of ways to interpret the piece over the next three weeks of the presentation unit that comes before the OI project. When the first unit of the course is finished, everyone is theoretically already prepared to work on the OI project for the EPF, the second unit of the course.

**Stage 2: Middle steps of the project.** This stage takes place at first in the classroom, but later on students practice at school, but not during class. In class the teacher describes the EPF and the OI project, showing video clips of previous OI projects performed at EPFs and other helpful video clips that inform them on what is expected of them and what is possible. Students discuss ways to interpret the piece. They divide the class into performing groups and assign parts of the piece to each group. Each group spends time practicing by themselves, but puts the parts together sometime during each class. They video record themselves in groups and as a class using their mobile phones. They then watch themselves, note what was not done well, and then discuss in English how to improve the performance. All this is conducted by student leaders for each group and for the entire project. These leaders emerge naturally through the process, with little guidance from the teacher. Throughout these middle steps, the teacher observes,

Table 6 The Three Stages of the OI Project

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
<b>First Steps: Preparation</b>	<b>Middle Steps: Rehearsal</b>	<b>Final Steps: Performance</b>
1: Teacher describes the OI project and its goals (in class).	1: Teacher gives basics of OI to students.	1: Students decide how to enter the stage space, do the final bow, and exit the stage.
2: Students think of a piece (as homework).	2: Teacher shows previous OI performances and other video clips that will inform them on what is expected and possible.	2: Students discuss/decide whether costumes, props, music are necessary.
3: Students select a piece (in class).	3: Students discuss the meaning of the piece.	3: Students discuss/decide how to dress, props, music, and other performance details.
4: A student distributes the script digitally (as homework) or gives it to the teacher who makes copies that are distributed to students in the next class.	4: Students discuss ways to interpret the piece.	4: Students rehearse with music, props, and costumes, if any.
5: Students read the script (as homework).	5: Students divide the class into performing sub-groups.	5: Students rehearse on stage.
6: Students think of ways to interpret the piece (as homework).	6: Students assign parts of the piece to each sub-group.	6: Students meet out of class for final rehearsals.
	7: Sub-groups select a leader.	7: Students perform.
	8: Students choose one or two overall leaders.	8: Performance is video recorded.
	9: Each sub-group practices by themselves.	9: Students watch the video.
	10: Sub-groups put the parts together each class.	10: Students do self-assessment and self-evaluation for the group and the individual.
	11: Students video themselves in sub-groups and as a class, using their mobile phones.	11: Students discuss what to do to improve for the next EPE.
	12: Students watch the video.	
	13: Students discuss how to improve the performance.	
	14: Teacher observes, answers questions, and occasionally gives advice.	
	15: Students also arrange to meet outside of class to rehearse.	

answers questions, and occasionally gives advice. Students also arrange to meet outside of class to rehearse.

**Stage 3: Final steps of the project.** This stage takes place in the classroom, on stage, and in large rehearsal spaces, such as the lobby of the auditorium, a large furniture-less classroom, and spaces outside the classroom. Students decide how to enter the stage space, do the final bow, and exit the stage. They talk about how to dress, props, music, and other performance details. (Although costumes, are not required, often the performers wear all black, or another particular color and kind of clothes. The same is true of props, which are not necessary, but small hand props are sometimes used.) Students rehearse with music, props, and costumes, if any. The class rehearses on stage. They gather before the performance for a final rehearsal. They perform. The department staff video records the entire EPF. In the next class, students watch the video and write their self-assessment (according to a checklist) and self-evaluation (giving grades for each stage of the project for both the group and the individual). (See Appendix 2 for the self-assessment/self-evaluation form.) Finally, students discuss what to do to improve for the next EPF.

**Results.** The results of the OI project based on the teacher's observation are listed in Table 7.

*Positive observations.* As Table 7 shows, the following were positive points observed:

- \* students worked in cooperation
- \* students improved English pronunciation and intonation
- \* students learned a piece of literature
- \* students gained a sense of group unity
- \* students gained a sense of sense of pride and satisfaction
- \* students gained a sense of excitement for the next EPF.

All goals and objectives were realized to some degree, with most of them very successfully met.

*Negative observations.* There were some negative points observed, too. As noted in the table, curricular goal 3 (To help students improve English speaking ability, especially pronunciation, intonation, other prosodic elements, was somewhat successful as students seemed to feel that they improved their speaking ability, but as was noted, there is no data to show the OI project helped overall English speaking ability. In addition, course objective 2 (Students will learn the basic

Table 7 Results of OI Project in Relation to Goals and Objectives

Goals and Objectives	Positive or Negative Result
<i>Goals of the English curriculum at the college related to the OI project</i>	
G1. To encourage students to consider creative ways to communicate.	This was very successful in that students were extremely creative in their interpretation.
G2. To help students learn how to use literature to communicate.	This was successful in that students were able to perform the literature piece, but students still needed more practice translating the written word into sound and action.
G3. To help students improve English speaking ability (especially pronunciation, intonation, other prosodic elements).	This was somewhat successful in that students received training in particular problem areas, but there is no data to show the OI project helped overall English speaking ability.
G4. To help students become comfortable standing in front of a large audience and performing.	This was very to extremely successful. Students looked comfortable and they seemed enthusiastic about the next OI project.
G5. To promote class unity through working together.	This was extremely successful. Most students claimed so in written comments
G6. To encourage students to take charge of their learning.	This was extremely successful, as students did take charge of everything.
<i>Objectives of the Presentation in English courses</i>	
O1. Students will select a piece to interpret for the audience.	This was extremely successful as students did so.
O2. Students will learn the basic principles of oral interpretation (how to speak with vocal variety, how to use the body to communicate meaning, how to use gestures effectively, how to use movement effectively, how to use the stage, how to use variety of grouping to add interest, how to work as an ensemble).	This was marginally successful. Students need more training and practice.
O3. Students will read and understand the piece in terms of theme and nuance.	This was successful as shown by the competent interpretations.
O4. Students will work together to interpret the piece using voice, body, and movement.	This was extremely successful as observed through the rehearsals and shown by the performances.
O5. Students will be in charge of the unit from beginning to end.	This was extremely successful as students stepped up to lead the project.

principles of oral interpretation, how to speak with vocal variety, how to use the body to communicate meaning, how to use gestures effectively, how to use movement effectively, how to use the stage, how to use variety of grouping to add interest, how to work as an ensemble) was marginally successful. This is to be expected as this is a complicated set of skills that require more experience to do well.

There were problems observed other than those related to goals and objectives:

1. *Too much time was wasted in class.* Even though the teacher talked to the student leaders before class, and often advised the student leaders to get together before class to make some plans and decisions, instead they often waited until class started to make plans and decide things while all the rest of the class did nothing. Perhaps if the teacher required a “lesson plan” for each class to be submitted to the teacher before the class started, it may alleviate this problem.
2. *Students complained there was not enough time.* This, of course, is related to the above problem. Students wanted a few more weeks to rehearse. This is a common complaint among all performers. The teacher tried to address this by starting the preparation for the OI project in the first class of the semester, but perhaps it needs to be started even earlier, maybe the end of the previous semester, whenever possible.
3. *Sometimes students lapsed into their L1 during discussion of what to do.* The teacher had to walk around the room and police L1 use.
4. *Sometimes the performance was not successful.* Sometimes, because of a lack of student leadership, conflicting student leadership, uncooperative students, a lack of motivation, a lack of creativity, technical problems, or other intangibles such as the difficulty of the piece, a performance was not successful. This has rarely happened, but when it does, it can negatively affect the class atmosphere. This is something the teacher is still working on, and has not come to any conclusion.
5. *Students could not improve English as much as they could have using a different approach.* Although the teacher and students all think the students’ English ability has improved to some degree, the teacher is not completely convinced that the OI project is able to significantly improve student English speaking ability. Perhaps this is not a primary purpose of the project, and language improvement should be thought of as a by-product, and not as a direct result.
6. *It was difficult to evaluate individual students as much of the rehearsal was done outside*

*of class time.* Although the teacher asked each student to evaluate themselves during stage 2 and stage 3, the grading was done through self-reporting and observation. Perhaps if the teacher asked sub-group leaders to grade the members of their groups, and asked the group leaders to grade the sub-group leaders, the grading would perhaps be fairer, but it still would not be accurate. In addition, group leaders may be hesitant to give their classmates and friends grades. Another approach would be to have all students hand in a journal of the experience that would be graded.

## **Discussion of Results**

The discussion of results is based on the focus questions of this paper presented in the introduction of the two projects.

*Focus Question 1. What are the positive and negative outcomes of PBL for English language students engaged in a film-making and an oral interpretation project?*

The two projects, although very different, had some similar outcomes, both positive and negative.

### **Positive Outcomes**

In both projects the following positive outcomes were observed:

1. By offering supplemental content, the goals and end product were more clearly understood by the students and resulted in more creative, higher quality products.
2. The showing of the product led to pride and a sense of accomplishment.
3. Students felt the projects were useful and enjoyable.
4. Motivation and creativity increased throughout the project.
5. Students improved their cooperative, collaborative skills.
6. Interpersonal and social skills, such as getting to know classmates more deeply and developing a sense of class unity, were improved.

### **Negative Outcomes**

In both projects the following negative outcomes were observed:

1. Lack of preparation led to a lack of focus and initiative, and wasted time in class.

2. There was a tendency to lapse into L1.
3. There was not enough time to do the project well, or in some cases to complete the project.
4. Individual evaluation of the group projects was somewhat difficult.
5. Individual language improvement due to participation in the projects is difficult to identify or measure.

*Focus Question 2. What are the positive and negative outcomes of PBL for Japanese students engaged in a film-making and an oral interpretation project?*

The positive outcomes are that PBL plays to Japanese students' strength of cooperation and collaboration, but structures it so as to create a good project in the time allowed. Also, PBL helps Japanese students overcome their natural shyness.

The negative outcomes for Japanese students is that it was easy for them to lapse into their L1 as they were planning their projects because of the monolingual environment and as mentioned before, due to the quality of not wanting to show errors or faults to others, they sometimes were not satisfied with the final product.

*Focus Question 3. What outcomes of these projects are especially true or specific to Japanese learners?*

It is difficult to say at this time as the only Creative PBL projects in the literature were conducted in Japan. After more Creative PBL courses and studies are reported from other countries or in a multicultural setting will researchers be able to distinguish which are general outcomes and which are specific to a particular nationality.

***Limitations of study.*** The current paper lacks measurable effects on students language proficiency or motivation and is purely an account of the teachers rationale and observations of the course and students.

In addition, which outcomes are specific to Japanese students cannot be clearly understood without an adequate number of comparative studies in other cultural contexts. However, educationally speaking, the two projects were worthwhile projects, and with improvements could be superb English education projects. These projects demonstrated that creative PBL is a useful approach to English language education in Japanese universities.

***Additional Questions Raised for Future Research.*** Additional research could attempt to address some of the negative outcomes specifically and report

the results, formally evaluate the English skills of students before the project and after to understand its impact on language development, and report on other projects which emphasize creativity and measure its impact of language use and development. Other areas for further investigation are the factors most responsible for successful PBL, and what teachers can do to address these factors.

## Conclusion

This paper defined and explained the main principles of PBL and described and evaluated two successful PBL projects, a film-making project and an oral interpretation project. It identified problem areas and possible ways to handle the problems. Three contributions of this paper to the field of PBL are the creation of a comprehensive list of PBL characteristics garnered from the previous research, the idea that these characteristics are variables that exist as continua and not as states, and the addition of a new category to add to the predominantly problem-based, research-based projects — Creative PBL. Hopefully, other practitioners in the field will try Creative PBL and add new dimensions to this potentially powerful approach to language teaching and learning.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1 Student Evaluation of Film Project*

#### **Film Project Survey**

These questions are only for the teacher to better understand and improve the film project.

Your answers **DO NOT** affect your grade.

	Not at all	Not really	So-so	Yes, mostly	Yes, very
1. Making a film was difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I think my film was interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I enjoyed making a film.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I enjoyed working with the other classmates in my group.	1	2	3	4	5
5. All members in my group helped make the film.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Writing the storyboard was difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I helped my group write the storyboard.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Writing the script was difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I helped my group write the script.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Shooting the film was difficult.	1	2	3	4	5

11. I helped my group shoot the film.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

12. We had enough time to shoot the film.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

13. Editing the film was difficult.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

14. I helped my group edit the film.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

15. We had enough time to edit the film.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

16. The thing I liked the best about the film project was:

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17. The thing I didn't like about the film project was:

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18. Suggestions?

### ***Appendix 2 Evaluation form for the OI project***

Name

What we did well

What we should improve

What I did well

What I should improve

Individual Grade for preparation \_\_\_\_/100 Why?

Group Grade for preparation \_\_\_\_/100 Why?

Group grade for performance \_\_\_\_/100 Why?

Individual grade for performance \_\_\_\_/100 Why?

Comment to Teacher