

Exploring Project-Based Learning (PBL): Understandings, puzzles, practices

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Ongoing questions

1. How do students and teachers understand Project-Based Learning (PBL)?
2. What practices do they see as central to PBL?
3. What puzzles come up for them as they do PBL?

Context

- ❖ Curriculum reform in which first-year research & writing classes are changing into PBL classes from 2023
- ❖ Current R&W classes focus on:
 - students researching global issues
 - writing in a range of real-world written genres (blog posts, research narratives, FAQs, essays, opinion pieces, and so on)
- ❖ With PBL the focus is on problems in society that interest students:
 - plan and carry out research
 - make personalised & local connections
 - **initially** talk with “close others” (other students, family members, people in local communities or networks they are part of, and so on)
 - **later** gather information from material and online sources
 - **where appropriate**, do fieldwork (e.g., visual research, interviews, surveys, stories), again physical or online
 - **journal each week** during a project
 - **create some kind of public product** at the end of a project
- ❖ Teachers experimenting with PBL elements this year ahead of the reform in 2023

Exploratory process

- ❖ Talking with students & teachers about PBL
- ❖ Following two students as they do pilot projects
- ❖ Trying out PBL elements in different classes that I teach
- ❖ Looking at non-academic discourses about PBL (blogs, videos, ...)

Mari: Pilot project on plastic recycling

- Started by looking at the recycling in her local supermarket



- Talked with her housemate about recycling
- Checked her supermarket's recycling policy on its website
- Called the supermarket's main office to ask about how their recycling policy works (= > Tachikawa factory)
- Mapped other recycling points in her neighbourhood (community centres, cultural centre, convenience stores)



- Found that clothes are “recycled” to south-east Asia, where they are originally produced
- Interviewed her neighbour about her recycling practices
- Will talk with a friend in Vietnam about clothes recycling



“... Through the maps and interviews, I was able to notice many things. In particular, I thought it was necessary to inform people about the meaning of recycling or reuse, and how these resources are used. If people know the meaning and the process of recycling and reusing, they will be more interested in them ...”

Intends to write a long blog post in Japanese for a blog community - <https://note.com>

Fumi: Pilot project on ethical consumerism

- Started by looking at climate change and came to focus on consumerism and minimalism
- Reflected & made notes about what she can't help buying (loose-leaf paper and notebooks, clothes, PET bottles)
- Talked online with 10 different people about consumerism
- Started understanding consumerism in psychological, environmental, and economic terms



- Researched advertising as a driver of consumerism
- Researched fast-fashion companies and started looking into sustainable consumerism
- Looked at the work of “The Citizens’ Network to Build a Sustainable Society through Responsible Consumption” (SSRC) – a Japanese NPO
- Developed her own criteria for evaluating brand products

1 = Poor 2 = Average 3 = Good 4 = Excellent

Criteria	Company X	Company Y
Environment impact	3	4
Work environment (labour rights and conditions)	1	1
Inclusiveness (LGBTQ + challenged + gender equality + no ageism)	2	3
Contribution to local communities	2	2

“... Many people might be in the same situation as me. They don't know what to do to live more smartly and simply in this consumerism society. I understand how bad buying more stuff than I actually need is, but I don't know what I should do. While I found actors, I almost felt less guilty. I was not the only one who should be accused, but also the system in our society ...”

Intends to make an awareness-raising vlog for young people

New questions to explore

- 1) Start with individual projects, then have group projects, and afterwards let students decide?
- 2) What are the benefits of individual or group projects?
- 3) Scaffolding and autonomy: Have students create individual or group plans week by week that they are accountable for?
- 4) What are some face-to-face and online options for fieldwork?
- 5) Have students produce both common and individualised products?
- 6) ...

What are your questions and ideas about PBL? Please share a Post-It:

Links & resources connected to this presentation

