Project-based learning

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What is project-based learning?

Project-based learning is a student-centered pedagogy that involves a dynamic classroom approach in which it is believed that students acquire a deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems.

Students learn about a subject by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to a complex question, challenge, or problem. It is a style of active learning and inquiry-based learning. It contrasts with paper-based, rote memorization, or teacher-led instruction that presents established facts or portrays a smooth path to knowledge, by instead posing questions, problems or scenarios.

What can our pupils get out of project-based learning?

Projects are designed to build knowledge and develop skills, to incorporate language learning and inter-cultural understanding and to connect learning to the real-world.

Additionally, I have found that project-based learning can have a positive effect on the motivation of our learners, especially those in year 8 or year 9, who can be unenthusiastic at times.

Pupil-centred
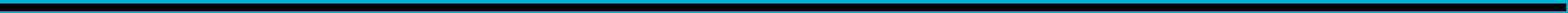
Advantages

Pupil–centred projects hands over control to them. While this can be daunting for a teacher, it is often independence and relevance that are most motivating for our pupils.

❖ Increased motivation, as pupils are personally involved in the project.
❖ Usually combines all four skills.
❖ Autonomous learning is promoted, as pupils become more responsible for their own learning.
❖ There are learning outcomes - pupils have an end product.
❖ Authenticity - tasks are often based around authentic language
❖ Interpersonal relations are developed through working as a group.
❖ Pupils might get help from their parents for project work, involving the parent more in the child's learning.
❖ A break from the normal route is usually welcome from pupils.
❖ A context is established which balances the need for fluency and accuracy.

BUT! They need direction from you

❖ They will need some direction from you, so that it is not chaotic (!), and pupils get the intended outcome from their project.

❖ Opening – to give pupils an idea of what they should be aiming to produce, it is a really good idea to have examples of past projects: a photocopy of a previous group project, a video, etc.

Some possible drawbacks:

❖ Pupils will use English a lot.

❖ Some pupils will sit back and do nothing. If the project is planned carefully, and roles decided at the proposal stage, this is less likely to happen.

❖ Groups work at different speeds. One group may finish the project very quickly and say they have nothing to do. Remind them that it is their responsibility to fill the time allocated to this project, and discuss ways they can extend their project.

Planning

Proposing

After explaining the idea behind the project, I ask pupils to propose a plan:

➢ What they want to include in the project

➢ What form it will take

➢ Who will be responsible for what

➢ An idea of the time it will take to produce each part of the project

➢ Any materials or resources they might need

I would then sit down with each group for 10 minutes to discuss their proposals.

Time

➢ Allocate an amount of time for the project.

➢ Allocate class time to the project. For example, every Friday lesson.

➢ Usually summer term, or around key cultural dates.

➢ Set a deadline

Space

➢ Show pupils the space they will have for the project.

➢ It could be a wall space, or corner of the classroom, so that they have an idea of how much material they should produce, and can plan the layout.

Materials and resources

➤ Provide pupils with materials they might need: card, scissors, glue, paper, etc.

➤ They will probably want to use the Internet to find information for their project. Encourage them to do this at home! If they are doing it in school, make sure they have informed you of exactly what they are looking for, and have prepared a list of information they want to find.

Presentation

➤ Projects need to be seen, read, and admired, so schedule the last project session as a lesson to share their finished projects.

➤ Ask groups to prepare a task for the others in the class to do connected to the project. This could be a quiz with questions, a crossword using the project's vocabulary, or comprehension questions on a video.

Checklist for a successful language project:

★ **Relevant**. Does this project relate to real-world situations? Will pupils use their language skills to solve real problems? Think about real life conversations or producing cultural products that can be used or enjoyed.

★ **Aligned to curriculum goals and learning outcomes**. Will your pupils be working towards your learning goals? Or is this project simply a time filler? Identify your standards and desired outcomes for the project that will be met through classroom time and through homework.

★ **Pupil-centred**. If it's a quality project, then all you have to do is give them some direction and guidance, and send them on their way. Allow students to choose their own topics (within reason) and give them plenty of leeway to exercise their creativity and problem-solving skills. What they come up with just might surprise you!

Checklist for a successful language project:

★ **Rigorous**. When we don't have to work for something, we don't value it. It's the same with learning. Students should find the project a bit of a challenge, but make yourself available to help them so that they don't give up.

★ **Fun**. There must also be an element of fun. Something about it must spark and hold student interest so that they enjoy working on it. Perhaps it incorporates a favorite activity (like sports, music, drawing or video games). Or perhaps it addresses an aspect of culture that intrigues them (like food, celebrities or holidays). You know your students better than anyone else, so find that something that translates into fun for them.

The project – have clear guidance and guidelines

IMPORTANT!
Be clear about the linguistic goals of the project.

➔ Make sure that you decide on a core set of target language items and plan carefully for their recycling.

➔ I always give a list of key words/grammar that must be used in the project.

➔ Emphasize language acquisition as the main goal of the project

Some ideas for projects...

Food

★ Menu - pupils can do some independent research on some typical Chinese dishes.

★ Pupils can plan a script and practise a role-play scenario as if in a real restaurant. Some pupils will be waiters, and some will be customers.

★ Then, you could set up the class to look like a restaurant with some fake RMB, and practise the dialogue they have prepared.

★ Pupils could perhaps bring in some dishes they have prepared, and after the activity, can state which dishes they liked, and which dishes they disliked.

★ Write an ingredients list and a recipe, and then make the dishes.

Presentation projects

★ Pupils present on: their country, town, city, house, family, room, best friend, school.

★ These can be ppt presentations, video presentations, bringing in photos to share around the class, etc.

★ Group wall displays.

★ Designs for cities of the future.

★ Bulletin board display.

★ Poster display.

★ By using items such as images, photos, videos, maps, ads, pupils can be encouraged to create stories, poems, comic strips, drawings, etc.

Performance projects

★ Debates

★ Theatrical performance

★ Fashion show

★ Oral presentation

★ Song

Writing based projects

★ Letters

★ Brochure

★ Menu

★ Travel itinerary

★ Make a leaflet with common phrases for tourists to use if they get lost/get ill/etc. This is good for practising thematic vocabulary.

★ A collaborative story – this can be done on Google Docs, for example.

★ A diary/blog

Hands on projects

- ★ Create a board game.
- ★ Design a video game.
- ★ Design a website.
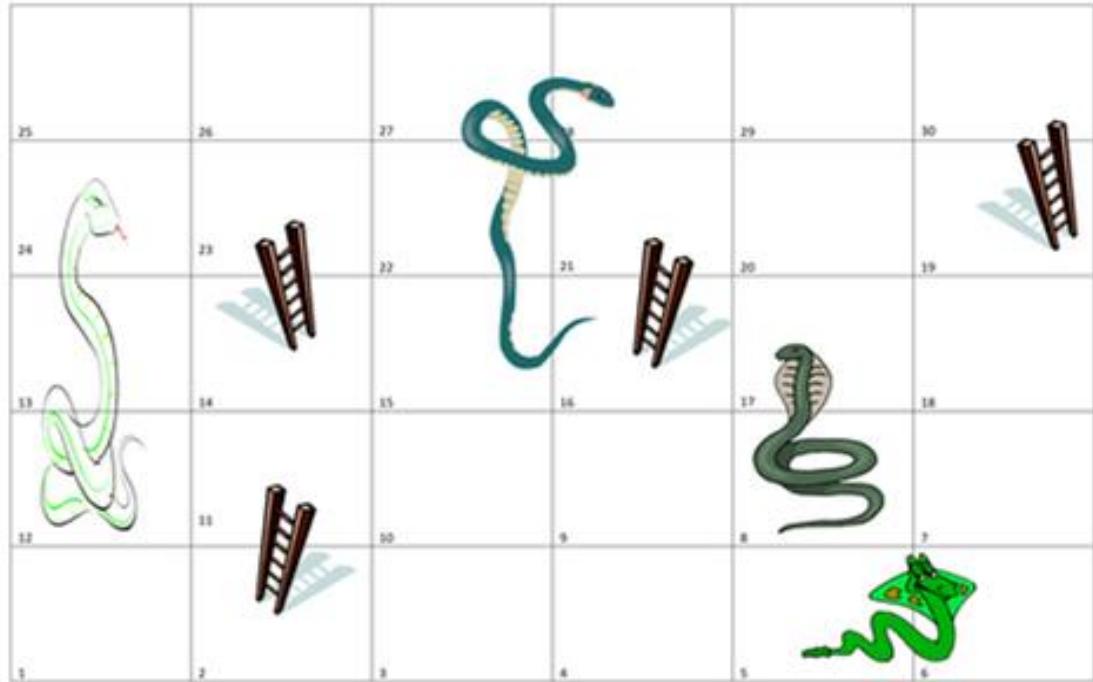
Journalism projects

★ Having pupils take on the role of a journalist can make sure of all four language skills.

★ Create a narrated tour of their school, the history of their school.

★ Radio programme

★ Interview classmates, native speakers, other Chinese teachers/assistants..

★ Class magazine/newspaper.

Music projects

★ Make a CD cover

★ Invent a band with names and biographies of the band members. This can be extended to then do interviews with each band member around the class.

★ Write a review on a gig/concert they went to.

★ Design a poster advertising a gig/concert

★ Record a song/rap – pupils can use a song and write their own lyrics. I sometimes use these backing tracks for raps…
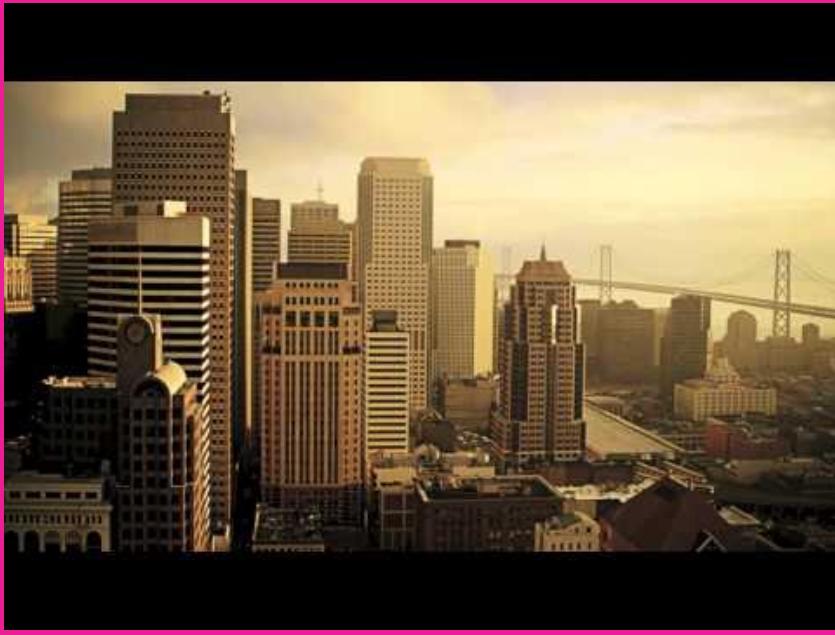
A video project from my class this week...

Discussion

How can project-based learning be adapted for different classes and abilities?

Which projects would work well for KS3, GCSE, IB, Pre-U?

Over to you...

Design a project based assignment for a class you teach

- → What do you want pupils to get out of this project?
- → What year group is the project for?
- → What is the timescale for the project? How much class time would you give?
- → What language (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) do pupils need to use.
- → What materials/resources do the pupils need?
- → What would a good project look like?

Conclusion

Why Use Project Based Learning in the Classroom?

➤ Students remember it. Projects use different skills, like analysis, evaluation and creation. The difference from 'normal' lessons makes it more memorable.

➤ It's more engaging for secondary school students. Project based-learning gives students the opportunity to use real-world topics, which is immediately more engaging for pupils.

➤ It teaches life skills. Students take responsibility for their learning success and acquire problem-solving skills.

➤ It's real. Project Based Learning provides authentic opportunities to work with language and culture.

➤ It's fulfilling for students and teachers. Instead of worksheets and rote memorization, students finish their projects with a sense of accomplishment and purpose—for pupils and teachers.

Further reading

https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/Y13-2001

http://www.iiisci.org/journal/CV$/sci/pdfs/EB193TO16.pdf

http://www.leia.org/LEiA/LEiA%20VOLUMES/Download/LEiA_V3_I1_2012/LEiA_V3I1A09_Diem.pdf

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7542&context=etd

谢谢！