

BOOK REVIEW



Review of *Project-based language learning and CALL: From virtual exchange to social justice*

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Project-based language learning and CALL: From virtual exchange to social justice

Thomas, M. & Yamazaki, K. (Eds.)

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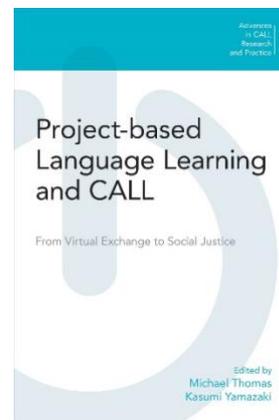
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The integration of project-based language learning (PBL) in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has received growing attention for its potential in promoting a student-centered pedagogy, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Stoller, 2002). More recently, researchers have been exploring how PBL in CALL environments can be utilized to equip language learners with the critical knowledge and skills they need to navigate global issues and contribute to positive social change in their communities (e.g., Turula et al., 2020). The book *Project-based Language Learning and CALL: From Virtual Exchange to Social Justice* aims at providing diverse perspectives on PBL through the discussion of critical literature reviews of PBL in CALL environments, approaches to PBL design, and empirical studies addressing the use of PBL for teaching languages online. The book is comprised of eleven chapters divided into three parts. The first part consists of an introductory chapter followed by two critical literature reviews, while the second and third parts report on empirical studies that focus on PBL for the development of language learning, intercultural competence, and critical awareness of issues of equity and social justice.

In the introductory chapter, Thomas and Yamazaki extend an invitation to CALL researchers and practitioners to reconceptualize the role of education within a context of rapidly changing digital educational technologies and global socioeconomic circumstances. They propose that the increasing opportunities for social interaction and collaboration offered by these technologies today have expanded pedagogical approaches in CALL to include more complex multidisciplinary learning contexts in which foreign language learners address critical global issues such as social justice, equality, and diversity. The editors also discuss how PBL emerged from task-based language learning (TBLL), highlighting some affordances and challenges when moving from simple tasks to projects. They also emphasize the need for more research to better understand learner experiences with PBL in virtual environments.

Part I includes two chapters dedicated to reviewing research and theoretical approaches to PBL in telecollaboration and interactive virtual environments. Chapter 2 by Benini and Thomas, titled “Project-

based Language Learning, Virtual Exchange, and 3D Virtual Environments,” is a critical literature review of how each of these virtual learning spaces contributes to language teaching and learning. In light of the changing roles of teachers and learners in CALL environments, Benini and Thomas discuss the potential of these three collaborative learning environments in developing multimodal and intercultural competencies in addition to other relevant 21st century skills. The authors start their discussion with an overview of the current research trends and issues explored in each of these three virtual environments followed by an evaluation of their affordances (e.g., promoting learner autonomy and creativity, motivation for learning, critical thinking, and collaboration) and challenges (e.g., readiness for technology use, task design, working autonomously, and socio-institutional limitations) faced in the teaching-learning process. The chapter concludes with a discussion of current projects with multimodal approaches applied to language and intercultural learning settings, focusing on effective practices and areas of research in each.

In Chapter 3, Bangun and Alfaifi explore current theoretical models, frameworks, and approaches that guide research on PBL in business English telecollaborative projects, focusing on those conducted in Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. The chapter presents a systematic review of common PBL processes and activities implemented in business English telecollaborative projects, highlighting the role that telecollaboration plays in promoting critical thinking and collaboration skills among participants. In their discussion, the authors emphasize the impact of cultural differences on metacognitive skills development. Moreover, they urge business English educators who promote telecollaboration in collectivist cultural contexts to be familiar with learners’ metacognitive diversity and the pedagogical philosophies practiced in teaching metacognitive awareness. Based on their critical review, the authors propose a PBL process for business English telecollaboration projects in both countries.

Part II comprises five chapters and focuses on exploring the potential of different CALL-mediated projects for language development. In Chapter 4, Morgana describes the effects of a multimodal video project and the extent to which PBL can support the achievement of linguistic goals in the school curriculum. The study was conducted with lower-secondary students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic who were encouraged to use a variety of technological tools in planning and recording their videos (e.g., Google Drive Apps, Canva, Animoto, and Movie Maker). Analysis of the qualitative data reveals that students managed to improve their pronunciation and presentation skills, language awareness of relevant vocabulary and expressions, and ability to learn autonomously with confidence. Similarly, a comparison between pre- and post-project scores, based on the desired linguistic objectives, shows that students’ linguistic ability and communication skills increased. Drawing upon these findings, Morgana argues that PBL allows for language-focused activities and calls for exploring the development of linguistic skills in long-term PBL projects.

In Chapter 5, Nami looks at how PBL in synchronous learning environments in a higher education writing course can enhance Iranian students’ consciousness and knowledge of academic writing ethics. The same ill-structured and well-written text samples were shared with students in the experimental online course and others in the conventional one. In the latter, the instructor used the texts to highlight examples of effective and ineffective strategies in academic writing while they were integrated as a source for PBL tasks in the experiment group. Results suggest that unlike conventional online instruction, the PBL approach provided students with opportunities to practice and develop their technical writing skills needed for enhancing originality in their writing in addition to paraphrasing, correct referencing, and plagiarism avoidance strategies. Moreover, the discussion the instructor facilitated among students to have them share their project outcomes helped them construct multiple perspectives through feedback. Nami concludes the chapter by highlighting the importance of redefining writing instruction considering PBL and synchronous online teaching along with the need for including training on PBL for teachers. The author also emphasizes the need to explore writing development in collaborative PBL, examine the potential of PBL for improving writing skills in other instruction mediums (i.e., blended and face-to-face learning), and gain instructor and student insights into PBL in future projects.

Xie’s study (Chapter 6) looks at how two digital projects in an advanced content-based Japanese language

course support scaffolded language learning. Results suggest that both the voice-dubbing and video introduction to Japanese culture increased students' motivation and interest in Japanese language and culture, provided students with practice opportunities, and helped them develop their multimodal competence. However, the projects were found to limit opportunities for language learning, negotiation of meaning, and interacting skills. Xie explains that the integration of various assessment methods (e.g., instructor assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment) along with accessible and user-friendly technological tools is essential for effective PBL implementation.

Chapter 7 promotes a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in PBL through which language learners acquire language skills and other subject content at the same time. Cinganotto starts the chapter by explaining the conceptual framework of Pluriliteracies Teaching for Deeper Learning (PTDL) whose four dimensions of co-constructing knowledge, languaging for demonstrating understanding, learner mindset, and mentoring learning help teachers interpret and implement CLIL methodology. The author also discusses the use of PBL and technology in each of the model dimensions to enhance the desired learning outcomes in the school curricula. The second part of the chapter illustrates the implementation and teacher evaluation of CLIL by discussing some digital PBL projects in Italian schools (e.g., city tours and virtual galleries) where the target languages were used to creatively explore and present other subject content. Comments suggest that PBL with a CLIL approach is rewarding for both teachers and students because it decenters the teacher as the originating source of knowledge and offers space for student collaboration and autonomy.

The final chapter in Part II explores the implementation of PBL in the form of ePortfolios in an intermediate French language course. Chism and Faidley specifically look at the potential of ePortfolios in building strong online learning communities and supporting construction of linguistic and cultural knowledge. The descriptive quantitative and qualitative data analysis shows that students appreciated the use of ePortfolios rather than a traditional textbook to support their deep learning. Moreover, they highlighted that collaborative group work through *Weebly*, the website used to generate ePortfolios, increased their sense of community, social interaction skills, and intercultural awareness. Constructive feedback that students shared to improve future iterations of ePortfolios included communicating project expectations more clearly and adjusting the timeline for module completion and content density to allow for more scaffolded language and culture learning.

Part III, which is the last part in the book, contains two chapters addressing social justice and an epilogue. Chapter 9, titled "Transcultural Language Learning Through a Cinema and Social Justice Teletandem Program," reports on the design and implementation of a PBL telecollaborative project that took place across three different cycles of the 2018–2019 academic year, connecting postsecondary students in Mexico and in the United States. Following an action study methodology, Hernández Alvarado and Brinckwirth implemented a series of language tasks and a final project at the end of the teletandem project. Students in each country selected a film they did not discuss in class to address social justice issues (e.g., illegal immigration, human trafficking, and marginalization of indigenous peoples) and collaborated to prepare film summaries. The summaries took the form of film critiques in Mexico and film narrations in the US to help students develop linguistic and cultural knowledge. The teacher researchers used mixed methods to understand the efficacy of their telecollaboration project design, recurring implementation challenges, and the efficacy of their proposed solutions (e.g., evaluation questionnaires, student journals, and artifacts posted on the LMS). In addition, they identified ways to improve the effectiveness of telecollaboration implementation in future iterations of both courses using researchers' observations, students' VoiceThread reflections posted on the LMS, and video-recorded sessions. The findings suggest that a PBL teletandem model assisted students in developing their speaking skills and pronunciation, as well as learning new language expressions and idioms when collaborating with their partners. Similarly, students found the final project to be a unique opportunity to learn about social issues in the partner country and clarify their cultural stereotypes and assumptions.

Chapter 10 by Anderson and Macleroy examines the cross-curricular *Critical Connections* project through

which students of different age ranges in Algeria, Cyprus, Luxemburg, Palestine, Taiwan, the UK, and the USA expanded their language learning and use of technology to create and share digital bilingual stories with a wide audience in their school communities, film festivals, and on the project's website. The students' digital stories varied in genre to help students address several social justice issues (e.g., environmental issues, fairness, and belonging) and activate their critical thinking and creativity to address these issues in their communities. Anderson and Macleroy propose a holistic model to integrate digital media in language and culture learning, which recognizes the linguistic repertoire and semiotic resources of students as valid resources for ownership of learning and student agency.

In the Epilogue (Chapter 11), Thomas reflects on the ten chapters of the book, arguing that the increase of abnormal circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic must lead to reconsideration of current approaches to language pedagogy and the inclusion of more critical interdisciplinary planning for language education. The chapter also calls for continuous assessment of the role of digital technologies and PBL in addressing the principles of language-and-culture learning and equipping students with the critical skills they need to navigate pressing critical social issues in a post COVID-19 world.

Overall, this book is a valuable resource for CALL researchers and practitioners interested in PBL as most chapters include samples of course syllabi, PBL activities, and technological tools that can be helpful in PBL design and implementation for language learning. Additionally, the empirical studies employ a variety of research methodologies with a focus on mixed methodology to understanding PBL in the context of CALL. Mixed methods approaches can lead to more robust discussions in CALL research, but they are still scarce in the field (Hartwick, 2018). Thus, this book is an exemplar of effective use of mixed methods research design in addressing affordances and challenges of PBL in CALL environments. Although exploration of PBL is established within Western discourses of autonomous and collaborative learning, the volume introduces perceptions and practices of PBL in CALL within a variety of foreign language education contexts, including K-12 and higher education, less commonly taught languages, and non-Western cultures. If CALL research is to promote more equity and inclusion, future research should expand the investigation of PBL in CALL in these contexts. With only two out of eleven chapters in this volume addressing social justice and equity in CALL, more work needs to be accomplished in these areas. In closing, this volume is a valuable contribution to CALL research. It is well-suited for researchers and instructors interested in experimenting with PBL approaches in different CALL environments and language learning contexts.

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