

Developing Romanian and American Cultural Awareness Through Discursive Competences: A Project-Based Learning Pilot Study

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Abstract

This empirical study presents the tools and conceptual framework that enabled me to plan, implement and deliver a Project Based Learning (PBL) pilot test in my course on Introduction to American Studies, intended for 1st year students majoring in American Studies at Ovidius University, Constanta. The presentation of the PBL project follows a chronological approach to the in-class pedagogical sequence, with a specific focus on the evaluative process, mainly articulated around self-assessing strategies. Self-assessment is construed as essential in creating the premises and helping develop metacognitive processes which are presented and analyzed according to Fink's taxonomy of significant learning. Most data were collected through personal classroom observations. The observation method was utilized during the planning stage (where students chose teams, selected project topics, asked and answered essential questions, designed project plans, and created project timelines), the implementation stage, and the assessment stage (evaluating both the project results and the learning activities). In addition to observations, a qualitative analysis of students' projects was conducted. The findings from these observations, along with a description of the students' self-assessment exercises are compiled in this study and point to the fact that by employing PBL as a staple in classes, teachers can create a potent learning environment, suitable for engaged learning, growing and shared experiences.

Keywords: *Project-Based Learning; American Studies; interdisciplinary, social and communicative skills; self-assessment; metacognitive skills*

1. Introduction

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Originating in the 1960s, Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a highly engaging instructional approach whereby students learn by developing and exploring questions or challenges. Cohorts of theorists and practitioners alike embrace different strands of PBL research while pointing to the diversity of defining features and to the great variety of PBL-related scholarship and development activities. Yet much in the same voice, they deplore the lack of a universally accepted PBL model or theory. PBL has been largely credited for enhancing skills like team management and independent work as well as for engaging students in real-world tasks (Bell, 2010).

While looking for opportunities to ensure deeper learning in context and develop skills relating to career readiness, I created an experiment organized around student-designed projects focused on a guiding theme or topic. My project was intended to scrutinize whether PBL enhances students' content understanding and development of skills in the American Studies area. In the context offered by this PBL test, I created self-assessment opportunities for students to check not only their contribution to the final written product, but also offer them glimpses into how they can regulate and improve their learning process. As such, the evaluative strategy focuses on "thinking about thinking," which empowers students to build awareness by monitoring their own cognitive processes and improving the quality and effectiveness of their thinking.

The former part of this study briefly describes different Project-Based Learning theories, while the latter gathers some reflections related to my Project-Based Learning experience, which I conducted for my 1st year American Studies undergraduate students in May 2023. The 12 participants were enrolled for the course called "introduction to American Studies", a compulsory three-hour course and seminar per week. The latter part elaborates on the sequence of teaching activities making up the PBL experience, which was intended as a flexible learning model where all the students can be engaged, in roles they are comfortable with, while being given the freedom to

pursue subjects of interest. The students were strongly encouraged to collaborate either in person or virtually towards developing deep content and interdisciplinary knowledge as well as skills like critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and communication.

The small scope of this study prevents me from making comments related to the extent to which students benefitting from PBL instruction outperform students in traditional classrooms or to the adequacy of PBL in the instruction of humanities in general. Further avenues of investigation might require more comprehensive exploratory studies, able to provide clarity on the stakeholders' needs and opportunities in the context of PBL instructional model. Such a study might be able to offer a systematized taxonomy of good practices in the humanities area. Further research might also shed some light on the effectiveness of PBL as a student-centered approach in an environment focused on high-stakes testing. This paper might fall short of outlining the benefits of outlining the scholarly and social benefits derived from employing PBL instructional methods in the teaching of humanities, but it never nevertheless offers a clear description of a sequence of pedagogical actions which make up a PBL experiment.

While mapping out the outline of the project and well into the implementation stage, one of my themes of reflection and interest was the decision-making process. More specifically, I was interested in finding the right balance between two extremes: allowing students to be the only decision makers of the projects they were about to undertake vs allowing students minimal "agency" in their PBL experience. I finally opted for a balanced solution, which leaned into students as independent researcher and enabled me to act as a facilitator of the master project. Throughout the process, I encouraged the students to design logical, feasible plans, while coming up with equitable workload distributing arrangements.

2. A short literature review

Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffitt (1997) and Thomas, Mergendoller, & Michaelson (1999) consider that the projects embedded in PBL experiences are complex tasks, premised on challenging questions or problems, which motivate students to engage in intensive design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; they give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously and produce realistic products or presentations. Kokatsaki et al. (2016) focuses on students' autonomy, collaboration through communication, constructive investigations, goal-setting, and reflection. Blumenfeld et al. (1991) describes PBL as a comprehensive model of teaching and learning intent on engaging students with real-world practices and problems by placing them in realistic, contextualised problem-solving environments. Blumenfeld considers that there are two main components of a PBL approach: a driving question and activities focused on delivering solution to the driving question. The driving question rallies around it project activities and needs to be either real-life experience or closely simulate it. The questions are preferably designed by students and the answers reflect the multiple choices on the part of the students; in the process of designing questions (with minimal intervention on the part of the teacher), the students construct knowledge. If Thomas (2010) defines PBL as "learning around projects", Han et al. (2015) focuses on PBL experiences as interdisciplinary, student-centered activities intent on completing a project outcome. Krajcik et al. (1994, 488-489) elaborates on the need to incorporate technology in PBL instruction: "Using technology in project-based science makes the environment more authentic to students, because the computer provides access to data and information, expands interaction and collaboration with others via networks, promotes laboratory investigation, and emulates tools experts use to produce artifacts". The final products (e.g., a model, report, videotape, or computer program) reflect students' engagement

with the driving question and are representative of their state of knowledge and competences.

Biesta (2009, 38) considers that PBL design meets three purposes of education: “qualification”, ‘socialization’ and “subjectification”. Carter (2019) elaborates on Biesta’s goals and subsumes skill development, knowledge and disposition (to qualification), individual and social skill (to socialization) and self-identity awareness (to the last goal, subjectification). As such, students develop a pro-active, participatory presence in their own life and social environment. Exposed to educational situations in which PBL opportunities feature frequently, students become empowered agents of their own becoming.

Some practitioners lament the difficulty of establishing a distinction between various PBL models and “discovery learning”(Bruner, 1990), "intentional learning" (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1991), "design experiments," (Brown, 1992) or "problem-based learning' (Gallagher, Stepien, & Rosenthal, 1992). After all, assigning projects to students is hardly a novel approach and much of the present-day PBL strategy derives from the earlier theoretical ideas and practical insights proposed by Lev Vygotski, Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget. It is also legitimized by “learning by doing” and John Dewey, a theory streamlined in the project-based learning initiated and developed by William Kilpatrick and by a long history of teachers having long exercised their in-class privilege of asking students to “do projects,” or of incorporating "hands-on" activities, like field trips and laboratory investigations.

The versatility of the concept notwithstanding, one cannot discount the unique features that make PBL a distinct learning experience. John W. Thomas (2000) discusses five criteria that set apart PBL approaches from other theories: centrality, driving questions, constructive investigations, autonomy, and realism. Such criteria help distinguish between project assignment as part of traditional instruction and PBL as central didactic approach. The first

criterion, centrality, underlies the prerequisite of construing projects not as a mere part of the curriculum, but as *the curriculum*; projects as the main teaching strategy rather than supplementary practice; projects as main knowledge rather than an extension of the knowledge which students gain in the classroom. The driving question (which becomes meaningful through constructive investigation, accomplished by independent inquiry processes) provides the content focus and engages students with the concepts of the course. Indeed, by means of PBL projects, students are immersed in collaborative learning experiences, which provide ample opportunities to bounce ideas off each other. According to the principle of sustained inquiry, the learner is in control of the learning process. This latitude reflects in their ability to choose the learning content and the pacing of content acquisition (Helle, Tynjälä and Olkinuora, 2006).

In PBL settings, students are encouraged to develop their own voices and negotiate concepts, and in so doing, they enhance their social and communicative skills. The PBL experiences are student driven, which makes the learning conducted in PBL instances more flexible than the “inert” knowledge acquired in more traditional contexts (Boaler, 1998; Bransford, Sherwood, Hasselbring, Kinzer, & Williams, 1990).

The criterion of realism goes hand in hand with the prerequisite of project authenticity. As such, the driving question needs to belong or at least simulate “the real world”. Ideally, the activity and equipment used in the development of the project should be authentic and the impact of project results needs to be measurable in real-life. Learning can be maximized if the learning context together with the instructional material resemble the real-life context; conversely, learning is minimized if the context in which learning occurs is strikingly different from the context in which the learning is used (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989).

3. Method

The present work is a case study with a predominantly descriptive objective. The study results from the application of a PBL pedagogical strategy implemented to an Introduction to American Studies Course, integrated in the curricular plan of American Studies, BA, at the Faculty of Letters, *Ovidius* University, Constanta. Most of the data was collected using personal observations in classroom. The observation method was applied during the planning stage (observing students choosing teams, selecting project topic, asking/answering essential questions, designing project plan and creating project timeline), during the implementation stage as well as during the assessment stage (evaluation of the project result and of the learning activity). In addition to observation, I used a qualitative analysis of students' projects. The results of my observation, corroborated with a description of students' self-assessment exercise are systematized in this study. Prior to the in-class implementation of the PBL project, I carefully perused the existing PBL practices and designs, necessary aspects of elements to become part of the PBL design, as well as tools and frameworks I might need to employ for students' use, to help them with the planning, implementation and delivery of the project. I have also considered the criteria for low and high-quality projects.

4. Analysis

4.1. Course content and student experiences

The course selected for the development of my PBL experiment was "Introduction to American Studies", which engages students in the critical and interdisciplinary study of United States cultures in contemporary, historical and transnational contexts. It examines the concept and idea of "America" in its global, national, community and individual systems of values and introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, by considering texts from fiction, film, history, visual culture and popular culture. The ongoing

construction of “America” will be therefore analyzed as a social, cultural, political, and economic process fraught with complications, contradictions, and contestations, rather than a definitive and stagnant concept. The course follows closely various scholarship trends as well as different scholarly interests and eclectic areas of study that have formed and informed American Studies since its inception. Starting with the Myth and Symbol School of the 1950s and moving into the 1980s when discussions revolved around the cultural construction (and deconstruction) of categories like race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and the body, the course also considers the more recent engagement of the American Studies with popular culture studies, urban studies, transnational studies and eco-criticism.

There are two hours per weeks assigned for this course and one hour for the seminar. The course brochure which becomes available to students upon enrolling provides information on the syllabus, objectives and competences, bibliography and grading requirements. As part of the grading system, their understanding of American culture is reflected in the construction of a piece of original scholarship which incorporates critical terms and methodology and culturally appropriate ideas and comments. In it, the students need to demonstrate a critical understanding of American cultural practices and their complex inter-relationships with national and global structures. They need to identify the cultural influences that have shaped American social formations in the area of history, literature, politics, and religion and demonstrate an understanding of the various theoretical and interdisciplinary methods used by scholars within the field of American studies.

The quality indicators against which their essays are graded are listed in the evaluative section of this study. The experiment started in the first week of May 2022 and ended five weeks later.

4.2. The PBL pilot test

While devising the project and predicting and preparing project-related activities, the students were communicated the requirements of

PBL learning, in the form of guidelines for carrying out the project. In the first seminar, I outlined the main “rigors” of the PBL approach and chose the essential research topic. To this end, I discussed the need for student autonomy, the freedom of choice, unsupervised work time, responsibility, collaborative learning and reflection; I made my students aware of the fact that the product needs to have a real-world context and application and that the results of the project need to be shared with an outside audience. I also instructed students to engage real-world problems, use firsthand investigation, be sensitive to different cultures and make culturally appropriate comments and analyzes. The students were also referred to the explicit assessment criteria according to which their essays are graded².

a. Prompts for reflection

I encouraged students to analyze forms of cultural difference (as understood through ideas of representational and aesthetic politics, as well as through the practice and production of knowledge) in the

2 Following students’ perusal of grading criteria, a short frontal discussion reinforced useful concepts. Critical thinking² (construed as a high-order ability to analyze information from multiple sources relate it to personal readings and observations and formulating opinions and supporting it with relevant evidence), clear identification of the method, the presence of literature review, unequivocal elements of logical consistency and use of concepts of high explanatory power. The argument of logical consistency (Woolwine) rests on the internal reasonableness drawn from data gathered from a multiplicity of sources which are put to use in such a way that the reader is left with a new interpretation of the material being reviewed’. Rather than dismissing ‘flat-out self contradiction’ or “ambiguity”, a logically consistent argument allows for or accommodates interesting contradictions or arguments with embedded ambiguities, which give richness and depth of meaning to divergent problems with dilemmatic solutions. The explanatory power of a hypothesis or theory lies in its ability to effectively explain the focus of the topic. While revolving around the “why” questions, a hypothesis of explanatory power brings out the rationale for the study. The clear identification of the method as well as the presence of a literature review to identify the significance of the study and describes how the study contribute to the extant sources in the field were major indicators of high-quality essays.

American and Romanian space respectively. While providing opportunities for students to examine the task, I refrained from fully explaining the topic. I chose this approach in order to create the sense of dilemmatic expectations, so that students zoom in on divergent research issues. In so doing, I helped my students brainstorm ideas intended to explore project topics without overtly suggesting different possibilities myself. The students were encouraged to ask essential questions to “illuminate” the general research topic. Such questions were intended to make students understand the focus of the project and determine derivative research questions, subsumed to the overarching research topic. In the lively conversation that ensued, the students came up with possible research topics intended to exemplify and investigate the cultural differences between Romanian and American cultural practices and behavioral dispositions.

Subsequently, I screened a video about various constructions of the self (“Our Cultures, Our Selves” produced by the Department of American Studies, Stanford, part of SPARQ project conference). The after-listening discussions focused on the socio-cultural differences of people living in different world regions. In the video discourse, people were described as “molded” / constituted by the culture they are born into, with an existence determined by a system of values embedded to the native collective culture. The discussion centered on the dichotomy East -West and the differences exhibited by people living in individualistic societies and communal oriented ones respectively³.

³ The Independent/Western self was portrayed as an individual fully aware of one’s uniqueness. Separate from society, in as much as one is a part of it, they are fully conscious of one’s agency and ability to influence society and determine one’s own trajectory in the world. Tradition, history and place determine one to the extent to which they allow such contingencies and circumstances to influence them. On the other hand, the interdependent self, dominant in the Eastern world is relational and connected. One’s sense of uniqueness is largely obliterated by the sameness one shares with others. If the Western self is keen on influencing others, the Eastern Self feels the need to adapt and adjust. The latter is very much rooted in one’s larger

The discussion to follow the listening activity was intended to offer my students multiple opportunities to reflect on the main concepts by transforming them into more “graspable”, substantial discursive units. I facilitated the process of reflection and directed learners to develop a thorough understanding of the concepts, of their manifold aspects, problematic dimensions and observable actions that concepts can be broken down into. The follow-up activities provided ample space for discussion. After warning the students of the caveat of overgeneralizations, I encouraged them to employ when necessary theoretical inference and empirical generalization as useful strategies for developing explanations of the relationship between different variables necessary for enhancing, processing and decision-making. The discursive activities up to this point enabled the students to create inquiry frameworks in order to decide upon the final research topic. The inquiry process started with brainstorming sessions, in which different themes were bounced back and forth and students agreed or disagreed on them. Based on their responses in this stage, I encouraged students to form groups. My intention was for students to be aware of other students’ answers and use their critical thinking skills to select like-minded group members, with similar values and ideas. The proposed themes were further refined until some general in-group consensus was achieved. There were instances during the thesis formulation stage when the students formulated too general research aims and too broad objectives. After mentioning this deficiency in a few words, I refrained from formulating better focused aims and more narrow objectives, and I asked instead students to spend more time on the task and come up with better components of their research problem.

family/dynastic tradition and is keenly aware of one’s belonging to a hierarchical system, in which one is ranked, subordinated or superordinate to others.

The 16 students formed four teams, each one with three students per group. They chose the following research topics:

Team 1-Funeral Traditions and Arrangements in the United States and Romania: a Contrastive Approach

Team 2-Nuptial Celebrations in the United States and Romania

Team 3-Patterns and Celebrations Around Food in the United states and Romania

Team 4-Volunteering: Similarities and Differences in the American and Romanian Spaces

As the discussion progressed and the final “title” achieved its final form, the students from each group broke down the task into smaller units. I encouraged students to make decisions about the research corpus and create a project timeline and state the activities, deadline and assign roles within the project. In the process of designing project timelines, students created role charts and assigned roles within groups. In most groups, the task of identifying and selecting the research corpus was jointly undertaken by most members in each group. The in-group discussions designated the students in charge of creating the final product (essay and power point presentations) and presenting the product in front of the class. In broad lines, the main activities proposed were: identifying suitable bibliography (online and printed materials), processing bibliography, developing content, revising and editing content, creating power point presentations, presenting the material in class.

Most of the topics selected veered toward interdisciplinarity and merited the exploration of connections between the course on American Studies and Social Sciences. For instance, in the case of the project called “Funeral Traditions and Arrangements in the United States and Romania: a Contrastive Approach”, students employed ethnographic analysis to obtain a description of socio-cultural configurations at work in the Romanian and American space respectively and produce details related to human environment. Other projects were created in the overlapping space between humanities

and sociological analysis. The project “Volunteering: Similarities and Differences in the American and Romanian Spaces” focused on a comparative description of types of volunteering behavior, as expression of national and local participative culture. They were able to make meaningful connections across content areas, rather than thinking about each subject area in isolation.

The students were encouraged to examine the task from different angles, using a variety of resources, differentiating relevant from irrelevant information. While my students worked in teams, I made note of their contribution toward the success of the collective project and of their work in general on a progress chart.

b. The evaluative experience

During the evaluative event, I considered two main aspects: assessment of project results and assessment of the process by means of which the results were obtained. In the Project Result Assessment stage, the students presented their final products in English. Each student team conducted a self-assessment of their own projects. The students took turns in measuring their own writing performance (in terms of writing traits and strategies) and analyzed not only their contribution to the development of the team project but also the final product, as it emerged from their collaborative work. The indicators⁴ according to which the students were required to evaluate their projects are listed below:

1. well-constructed argument
2. compositional structure
 - a. effective introduction
 - b. focus of the main body
 - c. strong conclusion
3. inclusion of relevant non-digressive information

⁴ These indicators are part of the curricular description; students become familiar with them upon starting the course via course brochures

4. breadth-presence of relevant details
5. depth of knowledge
 - a. familiarity with extant literature on their topic,
 - b. critical theory
 - c. use of methods
6. clarity
7. critical thinking
8. style and mechanics (complete sentences, punctuation etc)
9. personal insight
10. presence of evidence, examples
11. use of sources

The essays were considered indicative of students' ability to organize, explain, analyze and evaluate ideas. Certain aspects of the essay demonstrated the ability to differentiate facts from opinion and inclination to challenge assumptions. Some projects were developed by looking exclusively at already existing/published materials, while others preferred a combination of case study (an in-depth study of one person, group, or event) and literature case study. The shortcomings ranged from inadequate referencing to plagiarism issues. Some students did not include a thesis. When this flaw was pointed out to them, they responded that they considered they stated their argument explicitly, and it could be easily gleaned from the context. Some failed to develop logical arguments to support claims or carry out their plans systematically, as they tended to present data and state conclusions without describing the link between the two. Some students found it difficult to sustain thoughtfulness throughout the research process and work while managing complexity and time. Some projects consisted of oversimplified information rather than in-depth investigations of concepts. In some other cases, the problem statement was not adequately outlined. Few projects clearly stated the objectives which the research papers aimed to achieve or the extent to which their

research added to the existing knowledge; some of them lacked an explanation as to why their research was worthy of pursuit.

Some research projects offered irrelevant information for the research topic, which came in the form of anecdotal information or unnecessary background information. I encountered several instances in which the students chose to undertake a project because it closely followed their interests, although it was only loosely connected with the curriculum. Some other students had difficulty in generating meaningful scientific questions, and tended to pursue questions that were based on personal preference rather than questions that were warranted by the scientific content of the project. Two out of four projects showed a low level of critical thinking skills, in the sense that some students found it hard to take a stand and defend it with logical and coherent arguments delivered in an appropriate line of thinking. There were some cases of inadequate grammar (misuse of verb tenses, misused or omitted prepositions, spelling mistakes and poor lexical choices). As part of the second evaluative stage, the students evaluated their own projects and offered their assessment of their team's work. As such, the students were encouraged to reflect on readings and experiences, formulate queries, and express opinions with supporting arguments. Students' feedback came in the form of short reflections, by means of which students articulated the strong points and the shortcomings of their research projects. Self-assessment relies on students becoming independent learners with strong critical analysis skills. The repetitive use of this type of assessment renders students more acutely aware of their skills and less prone to underestimating or overestimating their written products. The inclusion of active reflective practice (King & Stevahn, 2014) is critical for high-quality evaluation, as it allows evaluations and student alike to process the success and challenges. Metacognitive skills (reflection, self-assessment, summarizing and synthesizing information) are instrumental in creating successful evaluative experiences. (Nietfeld & Shraw, 2002; Thiede, Anderson, & Therriault, 2003). The processes

embedded in such skills provides opportunities for students to focus on the learning experience, break it down into sequential components and examine in depth their positive and negative input into the task. The three components of a metacognitive-based assessment are: a description of the experience, in-context examination of the experience and estimating/determining the importance of the experience in the near/distant future.

Their insights during the Project Result Assessment stage voiced their interest not only in the content presented (the project results) but also in the process, in the development of the project. Some questions voiced the students' frustrations at the difficulties encountered in their own collaborative experiences practices.

I used Fink's (2003) taxonomy of significant learning outcomes to organize the students' reflections into clusters of insight.

a. Foundational knowledge : Understanding and remembering

"The project made me realize that coming up with just a few requires some reflection and takes a bit of work"

"I realized how little I knew about anthropology and its methodology. how to evaluate a text".

"I have never thought that assessment is an integral part of learning".

b. Application

"I found it hard to distinguish between Romanian and American funeral rituals."

"It was fairly easy to formulate a working hypotheses".

"The most difficult part was to interpret the data".

"The easiest part was to organize the works cited list".

"It was relatively easy to categorize the working hypotheses".

c. Creative Thinking

"The most rewarding part was to create the presentation slides."

"I liked developing the project plan".

"I found it fascinating to sketch the plan".

"It was difficult to refine the idea plan".

d. Managing complex projects

“It felt easy to assign tasks to team members”.

“I found it easy to communicate with the other team members via different communication platforms”.

“I found it easy to summarize the main ideas to sketch the concluding part”.

e. Integration

“I was able to compare the quality of the bibliographical resources”.

„Contrasting the Romanian and American paradigms felt like a doable thing”.

„I didn’t like that part of my workload was to draw the comparison between...”

f. Human Dimension

The followings are a list of responses given to the question” What did you learn about yourself and about the others during the process?

“I’ve become aware that I lose my temper quickly when challenged by team members”.

“The most fulfilling part was my opportunity to mediate between opposing points of view”.

“Being able to interact with my colleagues was a rewarding experience it itself”.

“I felt motivated by other people’s positive reactions to my idea”.

“While contributing to the project, I have become more confident and more willing to assert myself”

Due to the success of this part of the pedagogical process, I plan on turning self-assessment strategies into a staple in regular class interactions. When this type of evaluative interaction becomes a repetitive occurrence, the students become more acutely aware of their skills and less prone to overestimating or underestimating their written products.

5. Conclusions

The implementation of the PBL procedures requires a change in teaching practices away from covering content teaching to students

conducting investigations. My students had the opportunity to work across disciplines and employed technologies to create and negotiate content. Despite the limited scope of my experiment, its findings nudged me towards substantially reconsidering my go-to choices and dispositions toward classroom structures, activities and tasks. They got to design their research path and tested their networking abilities; here were also benefits in terms of students coming together as an active student community, more attuned to each other's intellectual need and social affinities. One of the most conspicuous advantages of PBL was the amount of social learning. My students practiced communication intensively (in-person and mediated by technology), negotiation and collaboration. They were encouraged to reflect upon the purpose and possibilities of learning and urged to set realistic, clear goals. In the act of designing the process for reaching a solution, they used self-assessment and reflection skills, group participation and leadership skills, and critical thinking. Moreover, there was a hard to miss creative energy among students which lead to increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes for all.

In the long term, I am confident that the students benefitted from becoming more attuned to each other's intellectual interests and coming together as an active student community. A more extensive use of PBL-related instructional approaches in the second and third years might be an efficient way to engage learners with projects intended to clarify their interest or develop their expertise in pursuing a certain topic as final dissertation topic. The results also call for a more systematic approach to PBL experiences, in the sense that a clear inventory of tools, methods, techniques as well as designing procedures might offer a more streamlined approach to lesson planning. Not intended as a rigid framework which offer a step-by-step instructions on PBL implementation, carefully curated educational designs may as a clear code of good PBL practices to enable teachers to have practical, successful, repeatable lesson experiences which encourage inquiry and learning by engagement.

The goal of sustainable education in tertiary education and beyond needs to factor in the need to refocus and rechannel educational practices. While advocating participation in the community, teachers need to firmly commit to new pedagogical models, which creatively combine learners' interests and goals and stakeholders' engagement with project management. By employing PBL as a staple in classes, teachers can create a potent learning environment, suitable for engaged learning, growing and shared experiences.

Ethics Statements

The studies involving the 16 undergraduate students were approved by "Ovidius" University, Constanta, Romania. The participants provided their informed consent to participate in this study.

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