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MAESTRÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

Reporte del Proyecto Terminal de Aplicación Innovadora del Conocimiento

Moving from a book based course to Project Based Learning

English Language Teaching Methodology

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an action research project aimed to move from the traditional classroom instruction based on a textbook to Project Based Learning. Hence, I considered Project Based Learning an innovative approach to engage students in the English language in my class, due to the fact that PBL promotes learning as a natural and social process. In this approach students are active participants involved in accomplishing their work. The study took place with undergraduate students from the University of Veracruz in Boca del Río Campus. It examined the students’ responses and feelings when working with projects to learn English in order to find out if this approach would engage students in their learning. The findings from this research evidence that PBL enhanced students’ engagement in the English language, but also resulted in stressful situations for some of them. However, by the end of the seven weeks of implementation they decided to finish the course working in the same way. The responses suggest that PBL promotes active learning and engages students in the tasks they do. Moreover, it seems to have changed the students’ perspective towards the English language in the classroom. According to Aregbeyen (2012), engagement is a crucial factor for students in order to achieve educational success in the classroom and possible to reach whether learning cannot only be seen as an individual practice and the transmission of knowledge, but it has also to be seen as an interactional process.

Key words: Project Based Learning; Engagement; Constructivism; Social interaction.
INTRODUCTION

Education is more than a strategy on how to teach in the classroom. It is a way to understand and organize the human and material elements involved in this evolving process. According to Sandholtz, et al. (1997) the teacher and student’s role has changed in order to acquire knowledge and develop essential skills needed to survive in the XXI century. The concept of student-centered learning has increased in recent years and teacher as facilitator of their own learning process (cited in Burke and Grove, 2003).

Researchers have shown that learners are affected and impacted positively when they participate actively in the construction of their own knowledge. The Vygotskian perspective on second language learning provides a cognitive and humanistic perspective of the social nature of language itself which invites us to think that social interaction is a key element in the construction and essential to endure learning. Hence, when learners are not involved in their own learning process and the teacher does not facilitate it, lack of engagement in language learning is observed.

Some studies have shown (Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006; Cross 2005 cited in Butler, 2011) that student engagement affects student learning and showing persistence. Because of this, I believe that experimenting with Project Based Learning seems to be an alternative to improve engagement of the learners in the English language.

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centered approach that gathers together the new roles of teacher and students (Fried-Booth, 2003). PBL brings the opportunity to work on topics or contents of interest to the students and allows them to interact in a collaborative work. This kind of approach places upon the students the responsibility of their own learning and moves them to use the language as they need it. A research tendency to focus on how the social interaction
in collaborative work has impacted the educational sphere in a wide range through different strategies, and working with projects is a sample of it.

The language center located at Boca del Rio Campus is piloting different books for the English 1 course to find the most suitable option for the MEIF (Flexible and Integral Educative Model) students and the MEIF syllabus objectives. This situation provides an opportunity to implement PBL in my class as an alternative to the official program and, at the same time, engage students in the English language, to work on topics of their interest in order to activate what they already know from their experience in the outside world.

This research paper is divided in five major chapters. The first chapter states a detailed description of the context, the thematic concern, the objective of this action research project and the research questions. The second chapter highlights the theoretical framework. The third chapter describes the methodology section which includes a description of research strategies to collect data and methods applied for the implementation. The fourth chapter presents the findings. In chapter five results are discussed in detail and finally conclusions are presented.
CHAPTER 1
CONTEXT AND FOCUS

This research was carried out at the Language Center in Boca del Rio Campus which belongs to the University of Veracruz, the only public university in the state. The University of Veracruz offers higher education to any person from any community, respecting their linguistic and cultural identity and its Language Center offers General English Courses for general public and for the UV students.

The University of Veracruz has the mission to develop throughout the BA majors autonomous learners (students who learn in an independent way permanently), students with better decision making, able to communicate their own ideas, able to participate in solving everyday problems. At the University of Veracruz, students have the possibility to enroll in any undergraduate and postgraduate programs which the university holds for them. It also offers the students international exchange agreements with some universities in different countries.

In order to prepare competent students to survive in this ever changing world, the University of Veracruz has established a common core in all the majors. These classes will develop common abilities required in each field (such as analytical thinking, critical thinking, communication, and self-improvement) which help and support students’ short and long term success in life, and in daily school life. The classes of English 1 and 2 are part of these compulsory classes since English has been regarded as one of the megatrends for the twenty first century (Nashbitt and Aburdene, 1990) and it has become a major issue for nonnative English speakers all over the world.

As Manzo & Zehr (2006) wrote:

*English is hot in many foreign language schools abroad, and as the trend accelerates, so too has debate over the value of English in a global society. English-only countries steadfastly cling to their strong historical connection to imperialism, and monolingualism at the risk of losing their*
share of the world marketplace. While advocates of English teaching and foreign-language study praise the increasing attention to various programs to teach English, concern is widespread that the efforts are piecemeal or haphazard, or a fad that will wane with changes in governmental leadership. The greatest concern, they say, is the quality and quantity of teachers to carry out those efforts. (p.22)

Most of the students who enter the University of Veracruz come from different parts of the state including small towns, and different types of schools where they were supposed to hold English classes in the last 6 school years: three in Jr. High School and three more in High School. According to this, basic level of English is the ideal condition expected from students before entering the university.

Nevertheless, the reality I face in the classroom is different and students appear to be more interested in passing the course than in learning English to incorporate it in their academic lives. There seems to be a lack of engagement, because of the experiences they previously had.

According to Lenneberg (1967), children’s brain is more flexible to learn languages (cited in Boeckx and Longa 2011), so the early teaching years were crucial to engage them in the language and develop Basic English skills, as listening, reading, writing and speaking.

According to Bomia, et al.(1997), student engagement refers to a student's need, desire willingness, and compulsion to participate and be successful in the learning process promoting higher level thinking for enduring understanding of the English language.

Marks (2000) argued in his research that studies over a span of two decades have documented low levels of engagement, particularly in the classroom, this claim might be due to different factors, for example, according to the UNESCO planning guide (2004) the traditional classroom instruction and teacher-centered is not meeting the learning needs.
Learning cannot be only seen as an individual practice and the passing of knowledge, but it has to be seen as a natural and social process. Furthermore, it should be promoting the student-centered approach, when students are active participants and they are involved in accomplishing their work. These factors promote an active learning, and engage students in the task they do.

A decrease demand for intermediate English courses is observed among MEIF students, reducing their possibilities to get a proficiency level of English. This decreasing demand may affect students’ academic work, academic goals, labor field, and self-esteem when they realize that they have not achieved success in developing English language skills in a proficient level which opens the door to compete and take the advantages offered by the university to their students.

This research project was aimed to move from the traditional classroom instruction based on a textbook to Project Based Learning, in order to engage my students in the learning of English. At the same time, to achieve my students’ academic needs and interests falling down traditional schemas and misconceptions about the difficulties to learn English.

For this particular purpose, I planned an action research project that could bring benefits to the learners and activate the language they have picked up from various sources, such as their course books, TV, songs, magazines, etc. I expected they were able to work with the new understanding of learning by projects and change the perspective the students had towards English in the classroom.

Throughout this research I intended to answer the following questions:
1. What were the students’ responses when working with projects?
2. How did they feel?

Finding out the students’ responses when working with projects and their personal experiences students face in this learning approach, I might help to see how
effective PBL is in my teaching context. Also, it may give me insights to other colleagues in this field. This study is not conclusive, but it may provide evidence of how PBL influences the students’ engagement in the learning of English.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the origins of Project Based Learning, some key concepts, learning theories, and authors’ points of view which support PBL as a possible effective way to engage students in the English language learning.

THE ORIGINS OF PROJECT BASED LEARNING

Teaching methods changed gradually from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle up to get with John Dewey. John Dewey (1922) introduced a pedagogy based on what is functional (it adapts to the child’s interests and needs) and social for children. Dewey acknowledged a social pedagogy that lies in the social function as the most important aspect in the process of assimilation, where members of the community adapt among themselves. Dewey’s idea of socialization was correlated to end-products or things produced since families ensured their existence and satisfied their needs through collaborative work at home (they create together, for instance domestic industries) which he called the life method.

Dewey considered the school more as the place where children could learn about the real life of their community than a place where children were taught isolated lessons. Children put their eyes on the final product, they mixed the artistic and the constructive aspect to express an idea, but the most valuable issue occurred while social interaction took place during this process.

Social interaction allows students to share, exchange thoughts and work together; through social interaction, they discover and give a particular or personal use of the knowledge (the English language in this case), making it meaningful for them. Those reasons made Dewey believe that learning through actions might enhance the interest and the natural attention in class, children may become active and receptive instead of passive. Therefore, children might be more useful, capable and more efficient due to the fact that learning by doing may prepare children for life.
DEVELOPING A METHOD BASED ON PROJECTS

Kilpatrick (1962) was Dewey’s disciple and collaborator who developed the concept of the Project work method and which started to be practiced in the 1980’s. According to Kilpatrick (1962), a project is a useful activity which should conclude as natural as possible. Besides, this activity should be chosen by the student or the group who learns through the process of the activity.

Kilpatrick claimed that education was not an individual process; in contrast with this, it was a process where a person was helped by another or by the community where he or she performed. He added that schools had a huge participation in helping students to develop helpful skills, for instance how to study, how to deduce logically, to become independent and capable to think.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PBL

There are three well known theories of language acquisition: innatist, who gives importance to learners’ innate capacity for language acquisition; behaviorist, who emphasizes that the role of the environment affects learning and finally constructivist, who refers learners construct their own knowledge through meaningful experiences. (Scovel, 2001).

For the purposes of this study, constructivist theories are significant regarding PBL due to the fact that constructivism based on the premise that “we construct our own understanding on the world in which we live” (Brooks, 1999, p.4).

Piaget, one of the pioneers in the field of education, asserts as Dewey, that children learn by doing and that process could engage students to be more participative and active in their knowledge construction (Scovel, 2001). According to Burke and Grove (2003), constructivist theory focuses on open-ended activities that promote higher-level thinking. Hence, learning results from the active involvement in the process of knowledge construction.
Lev Vigostsky was acknowledged as a very important constructivist theorist who contributed on cognition and mental processes. He argued that knowledge construction had better results when children interacted with others in the process. This interaction promotes cooperative work, helps students become involved on the task, improves a deep understanding of content, and ownership of their own learning (Scovel 2001).

Vigotskyian approach states that “children attempt to communicate, and in their attempts, learn a language” (Scovel, 2001, p.21) His work was more focused on the process than the product.

**SCAFFOLDING, A MEANS TO AN END**

Scaffolding has been described as a “process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (Wood et al. cited in Weden 1998, p.110). In addition, scaffolding is a dialectal process that facilitates learning a language. Artiagal (1992) argues that this learning takes place when interaction occurs among speakers. Hence scaffolding is one way student-student or teacher-student interacts to learn (cited in Ellis, 2008).

Scaffolding is a term that comes from sociocultural theory and claims that it is not possible to study cognition without social context since language learning is not an individual-based process. This concept is stand on Vigotsky’s theory of zone of proximal development known as the ZPD. Vigotsky (1978) refers to ZPD, as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determine through adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”(cited in Ellis, 2012, p.235). Bruner (1978) developed the term scaffolding and compared language learning with regular activities a caregiver does which facilitate child’s learning (cited in Foley, 1993).
Scaffolding takes place through PBL since interaction among peers and teacher is the platform where the students perform a collaborative dialogue or instructional conversation. Applebee and Langer (1983) describe the instructional scaffolding which occurs in the cultural and social context and where the child’s learning process is aided by a more language skilful peer who models verbally and in writing which brings language learning. Finally, Long and Sato (1984) express conversational scaffolding as a key of language acquisition (cited in Foley, 1993).

TEACHER’S ROLE

The teachers’ role has been compared to a scaffold; the teacher provides help or support according to student’s needs and the nature of the activity. As the student improves and increases competence, the teacher changes and removes the support (Wenden, 1998). The term scaffolding refers to a structure where the students can stand to do their work. McKenzie (1999) lists some characteristics for teachers when working with projects (cited in Burke and Grove, 2003):

- Provides clear directions.
- Describes the activities purpose.
- Keeps students on task.
- Provides assessments such as rubrics and standards.
- Directs the student to quality resources.
- Reduces uncertainty and disappointment.
- Increases efficiency.
- Creates momentum.

Spitzer (1996) suggests that active participation, variety of resources, the ability to make choices regarding the activity, social interaction, and enjoyable activities in a safe learning environment create a context for learning. These factors characterize PBL, so I consider that this approach might create a favorable environment for
learning English at school. Regarding school, it should be the place to facilitate the construction of knowledge. In order to do this, teacher talk does not have to dominate the class and teachers do not rely just on textbooks.

Dewey (cited in Burke and Grove, 2003) describes the teacher’s true role in the classroom.

*Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced...[teachers] must...have that sympathetic understanding of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning...any experience...that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience [is miseducative]...every experience enacted and undergone modifies whether we see it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences...The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning. (p. 2)*

**LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH PROJECT BASED LEARNING**

PBL is a well-known method that has been currently applied in the educational sphere in its different levels and the results of which have been satisfactory besides the noticeable initiative, social interaction and cooperation. PBL model lies on Dewey’s theory, and consist of the spiral development cycle which involves solving a problem [thoughts], let their thoughts run [action] to rebuild their thoughts or construct a new knowledge [reflection] (Díaz, 2010).

Researchers from different universities have experienced PBL and in general they have reported that PBL enhance engagement. McMaster’s medical school in Illinois was a pioneer introducing PBL to improve their practical knowledge in the different disciplines (Barrows and Tamblyn cited in Lai and Tang, 1999).

On second language learning field, the Bangalore project was considered as an innovation in foreign language learning which sought to show the outcomes of students who received the normal instruction against those who worked under PBL learning. The results showed how the methodology of the experimental group
performed better than the control group (Rea-Dickins and Germanine, 1996). Previous researchers on PBL showed that its characteristics engage students in active and meaningful learning.

The following list regarding PBL was gathered from different researchers as Fried-Booth (2003), Cunningsworth (1995), Rogers (2002), and Mckenzie (2000 cited in Burke and Grove, 2003) and provides a wide view of advantages that facilitates the students’ learning process:

- Student-centered.
- Tangible ended-products.
- Students’ Involvement in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum. Not imposed.
- Students’ learning experience in and out of the classroom.
- Authentic materials, real world environment, and informal learning.
- Responsible for their own learning.
- Independent and active participants.
- Confidence and self-esteem increased after reflecting on students’ talents and creativity.
- Classmates’ enthusiasm benefits students.
- Collaboration among peers.
- Organization, careful, and detailed attention to planning the project is demanded.
- Thinking skills are enhanced (students hunt, gather, infer, and synthesize information).

**PBL AND ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING**

In summary, the PBL approach seems to constitute an effective strategy to promote engagement. Engagement is defined by Natriello (1984) as the willingness to
participate in routine school activities, pointing out the learners’ attitude within a school context (Chapman 2003). Also, Astin (1984) defines student engagement as “The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (cited in Butler, 2011). It is what the learner does which defines engagement of involvement in learning. Indeed, Pintrich and De Groot (1990) define engagement as students’ use of cognitive, meta-cognitive and self-regulatory strategies to monitor and guide their learning process. They focus on the types of cognitive strategies students use and their persistence with difficult tasks by adjusting their own learning behaviors (cited in Butler, 2011).


*Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities... The second component of student engagement is how an institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduated. Student engagement is characterized as participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes (p.2).*

In this report, the term engagement is used as the learners’ disposition to construct knowledge and become responsible for their own learning, as a result of working actively and cooperatively with peers through social interaction, besides the willingness to continue studying the target language for their future professional development.

Engagement is a key element in learners’ academic success as it is for institutions as well. Hence, learners’ engagement should be part of the concern and an important topic to consider and research in our workplace. It is said that learners’ engagement is an observable and measurable behavior which data is valuable information to know the learner perspective on the academic activities that are held in the
institution. As a result of this, it is essential to do effective planning, and develop strategies to tackle disengagement (Butler, 2011).

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2006), the interest of some universities for knowing the factors that affect learner engagement has increased due to the fact that “engagement is considered an indicator” that contributes to the higher education improvement. In addition to this, in 2002, the National Staff Development Council (cited in Burke and Grove, 2003) reported that student engagement is achieved when they are responsible for their own knowledge construction, and develop problem-solving strategies to work collaboratively. In consequence, Meeuwisse et al. (2010) concludes that the relationship with fellows is crucial in this academic progress of learning.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

I decided to carry out an action research project in my class experimenting with Project Based Learning as an approach to engage my students and cover the syllabus for English 1 course rather than through traditional classes based on a course book. My research questions were related to find out the students’ responses to the class and to know how they felt working with projects.

Statistical data of enrollment at the UV showed that most of the students at the Language Center campus Boca del Rio take English compulsory, but after finishing the mandatory courses, they do not enroll in the next intermediate levels, which are offered as elective classes. This situation, as well as the fact that teachers were piloting different course books that best suit their teaching and students’ needs, lead me to implement PBL and the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in my English class.

The study of most educational phenomena, because of the social and cultural nature of the settings in which they happen are more likely to result in better understanding if approached from a qualitative, naturalistic perspective. This study is manly qualitative because the teacher, acting as a participant observer and interviewer, gathered the information from the natural setting where the phenomenon occurred (Burns, 2010).

Qualitative research describes and interprets the social and cultural life of those who participate: in other words, the problem, the current situation. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the reality of a situation, not just knowing what happens, but how and why. With this type of research, the participant observer tries to understand the context of study through the actions and thoughts of the participants involved. In addition, qualitative research aims at understanding and making sense of experience from the participants’ viewpoints (Merriam, 2009).
**ACTION RESEARCH**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is one of the six most prominent research traditions that are appropriate for educational research, and is the path I have chosen to follow in order to carry out this project. A key feature of Participatory Action Research (PAR) is that the researcher directs the action within a participatory community with the goal of improving performance in a specific area of concern (Burns, 2010). The relationship I set up with the participants in the class and the interaction with them helped me to answer my research questions, helped me to interpret their actions and thoughts, thus taking into account context, holistic perspective and culture: all the elements of qualitative research.

PAR can be compared to a spiral or cycle due to its stages or moments following each other. According to Hughes, I. and Seymour-Roll (2000), PAR features are characterized by four stages of action research, reflection, planning, action and observation. After observation the action is reviewed and the plan is rated through the reflection to make changes where needed, hence the comparison. The scientific validity of the findings of this action research project based on the PAR paradigm comes from the relation between action and reflection. Although this research tradition is also firmly case-based, it represents a move from descriptive-interpretative stance to an interventionist position, where a key aim of the research is to understand better some aspect of professional practice as a means of bringing about improvement.

According to Shen and Huang (2007) an action research (or PAR) begins with the reflection on some aspect of the practitioner-researcher’s work that leads to possible lines of intervention (see Figure 1), then once the nature of the intervention has been decided a plan is developed and implemented within the context of ‘professional practice. The implementation is monitored by the practitioner-researcher and when analysis leads to a better understanding of relevant process, this is used as the basis for further reflection, which may indicate the need to plan further intervention.
**Fig. 1.** Concept flowchart for collaborative action research project (cited in Shen and Huang, 2007)

**SETTING**

This action research project took place at the Language Center of the University of Veracruz in Boca del Río, where I am currently teaching. The Language Center offers English classes from Monday to Saturday. The students are able to choose the timetable of his or her course.

The English classes took place in a large and comfortable classroom with air conditioning and good light. It was equipped with enough chairs, desks, a desk computer, a projector, a whiteboard, an interactive board and a CD player. Classroom conditions were generally good enough. There was only one situation
which impeded me the use of some e-sources, the connection to the internet was too slow and sometimes it was not possible to work with the material I had prepared.

The classes were held twice a week; they were on Tuesday and Thursday from 12:15 pm to 3:15 pm. Students were comfortable in the classroom where we spent three hours working and learning together in a very nice atmosphere. There was a good rapport among the teacher-researcher and students.

PARTICIPANTS

The subjects of study in this research were twelve undergraduate Mexican students enrolled in English 1 course at the UV where they were taking an English 1 course for the first time. Thus, they were taking it due to the fact that this class is mandatory for the students when pursuing a major at the University of Veracruz. Their age ranged between 19 to 30 years old, ten of them were women and two of them were men. All the women, except one were studying in the first semester of pedagogy. The other woman was studying engineering systems and she was in the second semester. One of the men was studying metallurgic engineering and he was in the fourth semester; the other man was studying business management and he was in the first semester.

Two of them belong to nearby towns of Veracruz and travel home each weekend, the rest live here in Veracruz with their families. All of them came from public institutions and have a poor English background, at the same time, most of them do not like English at all, they referred to their previous English experiences as book or teacher centered classes. All of the accounts that they gave about their previous English education reveled experiences that were detrimental. Overall their only interest was to pass the subject and moved on to the next semester.
DATA COLLECTION

In qualitative research, specific and detailed data is collected through different instruments. In this section I will present the instruments applied in this project and how they were used to collect data. All the instruments applied were in Spanish since I wanted participants did not feel limited to understand or express the information required. This information was very useful to compare and contrast at the beginning and at the end of this project, hence to register how participants were impacted on their feelings and the responses they had when working with projects in the English class.

The instruments I used in this intervention were:

- **Statistics.** I collected information on the number of students enrolled in the compulsory courses of English 1, 2 and 3 in order to analyze the trend of students continuing with their studies when it is no longer an official requirement.

- **Questionnaires/Surveys.** These involve participants’ perceptions. Burns (2010) uses the same description for both terms and explains that one of the advantages they have over interviews is that they save time and facilitate the organization of the information. According to Burns (2010), questionnaires are used to get three different kinds of information: factual or demographic, behavioral and attitudinal. For this research, participants had to share information about their previous experiences (factual or demographic) specifically about previous English classes; they shared what they did in the past (behavioral) mainly what they used to do in their previous English classes and now writing the logbook, they shared what they did in classes, and finally participants answered questions were they had to express their opinions (attitudinal) about the classes held within this new approach.
Two surveys with closed-ended items (appendix A and B) were applied to the students’ throughout the seven weeks to collect information concerning their perspectives of how their development was done. The limited choice of answer was mainly Yes/No and a third option was added when I needed to know if they had another option.

An open-ended questionnaire (appendix E) was applied in order to find out very concrete information. I was interested in finding out the students’ perceptions about advantages and disadvantages they saw in this new experience of working with projects in the English class. According to Burns (2010), open-ended questions provide the participant a free-ranging of possibilities to respond besides the opportunity to express their feelings that were difficult to register in the surveys. Because of this, open-ended questionnaire was very helpful for my research.

- Field-notes
  According to Wallace (1998), taking field-notes in the professional practice is considered a good habit but difficult to keep on due to the fact that when teaching there is not enough time to write at least the students are in a group practice or any other activity that the teacher could take advantage of it to write some notes. Nevertheless, it is a very useful practice since it promotes reflection and it results on efficiency. In fact, Wallace points out that the registers can be used for two main things; the first one, to reflect on general instant self-evaluation of a lesson and the second one, to focus on a particular aspect of teaching and learning, which it was my case.

  For this research project, field-notes were very useful to reflect on the functioning of group work, students’ response while they were working in the class, the most common difficulties among the participants in order to look for new ideas to help them, the work done, homework given, ideas that work well, students’ ideas, and personal feelings I experimented in the class. The style was descriptive telling what happened in the class. Another
characteristic of field-notes is that this instrument is flexible, easy to implement than others (Wallace, 1998).

- Student’s log-book

The student’s log-book (appendix D) was used to collect important data about the students’ reflections about their own learning, to identify the areas they needed to improve and write their impressions about how they felt in class. This procedure was one of the most valuable since it allowed the students register the way they felt after every work session. They followed the COL (Comprensión Ordenada del Lenguage) model which answer three main questions: What happened? What did I feel? What did I learn?

In order to answer these questions, the students had to make a self-observation to answer the questions related to their own thoughts, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and feelings were during the class. According to Burns (2010), the aim of the daily log is to construct an ongoing record of daily or weekly events.

The students expressed what they used to do in class, and reflected on that which promoted meta-cognition processes. The question what did I learn?, allowed the student to be aware of the construction of their own knowledge and how this knowledge was constructed. Besides, in this log-book they used first person to write and that made them responsible of their findings due to the fact that many of them wrote their areas they had to improve (Campirán et al., 2000).

- Diagnostic Test.

This test was used to determine the students’ level of English. It was applied at the beginning of the course in order to know the English background they
had to set an appropriate starting point for the projects. According to Hughes (2003) placement tests give information that will help to identify learner’s strengths and weaknesses. They are usually given to a student entering an educational institution to determine what learning needs to take place, to have students in the correct course or working on appropriate activities. The placement test results I administered are categorized in three levels. From 0 – 17 items, the student is placed in level A1; from 18-29 right items, the student is placed in A2 and from 30 to 39, the student is placed in level B1 according to the Common European Framework.

The Common European Framework (CEF) created a common basis since there were different educational systems aroused in Europe, to unify the criteria for the elaboration of language syllabuses, cultural context, and levels of proficiency. Language is measured in the receptive and productive skills. From this, language skills are listening, reading, speaking and writing.

In this evaluation, my students just answered the first section of the test and the highest level reached in that level could be A2. The label that a student receives when is placed in level A1 or A2 is of a Basic User of the language. According to the council of Europe of reference for languages, a basic user level A1 can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases, aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/her and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. At A1 level, students can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

- Interview

The interview (appendix F) had the intention to gather information about their feelings towards working with projects in order to assess if the PBL approach was effective for the students or if I needed to modify the activity
if necessary in accordance to the Action Research characteristics (planning, action, observation, and reflection). Interviews and surveys have the characteristic of getting immediate response.

Interviews vary depending on the purpose, and the kind of information required. As Latorre (2004) points out, interviews can be structured and semi-structured and one of the major advantages of the semi-structured interview is its adaptability (Bell 2005), the opportunity to follow ideas, probe responses and investigate feelings. The interview is described by Moser and kalton (cited in Bell, 2005) as “a conversation between interviewer and respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent” (p.135).

According to Latorre (2004), this instrument allows the researcher to describe and interpret social facts that are not observables. Latorre suggests considering some points in order to plan the interview. For instance, to set the objective of the interview, how to order the questions, how long it will take, to choose the sample to be interviewed. The information may be registered without making interpretations.

- Participant observation.

Observation notes were taken mostly during class, sometimes I took pictures (appendix G) of the board because there was no time to write at the moment but they helped me to recall later. Through this technique I got involved with them and I had the opportunity to work with each one and help each one differently, according to their needs. Among some of the less committed students I could observe how they felt pressured as more involved students would complete their project activities in the classroom meanwhile they got behind because of their poor involvement. Teacher-researcher evaluates through the observation the success of the process,
and she can compare the stated objectives against the observed effects (Tan et al., 2010).

- **Student’s finished product.**
  A collection of different ended-products (appendix I) were gathered in order to prove to themselves their progress in the English language since ended products are a main characteristic of Project based which is the approach I was using for this course.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

The work began by understanding the students’ background in order to structure the PBL. Looking at the statistical data of the admission department of the UV, I found that the percentage of students that enrolled to English 1 and 2 was far greater than the number of students who enrolled to English 3. One of the reasons why this occurs is because students are obligated to attend English level 1 and 2 but are not required to enroll in English level 3. To try to understand why this occurs I performed a number of surveys in which the most relevant questions were:

Do you like to study English?
Do you like to work in teams?
Have you ever worked with projects?

And found that the teaching approach that they had previously did not promote learning neither engagement in the English language. The traditional teaching method failed to place a desire to learn English in the students and even motivated them to drop out of English language classes.

After knowing the students perspectives on traditional teaching methods I proposed to them to embrace the idea of working with projects to cover the official syllabus for the English 1 course. Most of them already knew what it meant because
this method is already in use in their respective fields. At least the students who study pedagogy related this approach to theories they were learning at that time.

The first implementation started with some activities which finalized in an “Address Book”. It was the first project in which the students covered the first topics related to the structure of personal information questions, the use of the verb to be, vocabulary related to the topic, numbers, wh-question words, the order to be followed when making questions, etc. The activity took three sessions in which the students were interacting among themselves to finish the first project.

In this first project the students had the opportunity to be very creative in the way they presented their final product; they were very varied and very well done. This first project was individual and besides to learn grammatical structures, they had the opportunity to interact and know each other. They had to practice as many times as students were in class asking the same questions which covered personal questions when you meet someone for the first time. They practiced writing, reading, speaking and listening in an everyday context.

By this time, I realized the need to create a platform to share information, for instance videos and links to websites where they could practice the topics covered in class.

The second project started in the fourth session. I asked the students if they would like to create a magazine where they could write about topics that interested them mainly related to their academic fields. They choose the sections to be included while I wrote on the board their ideas. At the end they decided to have the following sections: Editor’s biography, UV section where they included information about the university, the benefits they have, for instance scholarships for exchange programs and they included a sample of the application form, some of them included a teacher biography and others made an interview with a professor.
This magazine project was done in teams, they chose the way in which the team would be made up. This project took longer than I expected. They had to search out of class; they brought information to the classes and shared it to write simple paragraphs which were corrected by everybody. The work did not progress steadily at first, some of the students failed to do the independent work. For that reason, I rearranged the teams so the advanced students could help the others. This would be in accordance to the second loop, from the original idea programmed on the chronogram.

In this project they used real information, interacted, searched, synthesized the information, they gained vocabulary related to their academic fields, all these covered the rest of the syllabus of the program that was considered for the first midterm exam. They were practicing simple present tense, making questions, the use of the verb to be, prepositions, etc.

The considered seven weeks to implement were used with these two projects. The second project challenged the students much more than expected. But in this way they were able to discover their strengths and weaknesses each one of them could work independently and to use the blog to improve their short comings.

In order to know if this innovative idea to learn English through working with projects is worthy, the process of evaluation took place since the very beginning; through the use of observation notes taken during class. I created a check list based on the characteristics mentioned above in the literature review where some researchers pointed out behavioral characteristics observed when engagement takes place in the students’ academic life which were recorded in the field notes.
DIAGNOSTIC TEST

I applied an Oxford diagnostic test in order to ascertain a proper starting point for the class. The results showed that only one student out of 12 belonged to A2 category and the rest to A1. Students are placed in level 1 if they get 0 to 17 correct items; they are placed in level A2 if they get 18 to 29 right items (see Figure 2). Although the scale incorporates a B1 level that has 30-39 right items none of the class students managed to obtain this score.

Figure 2. Chart of the number of students belonging to the different Oxford diagnosis test.
THE FIRST SURVEY

At the beginning of the semester, I decided to apply a survey to find out how interested the students were in the learning of English in order to determine their feelings towards the learning of English (see Figure 3).

From the applied survey, it was noticed that in spite of having previous English experiences, students were willing to find less traditional ways of learning as a means to increase their knowledge of the English language. Another fact that stands out is that nearly all have had previous experiences working with projects in other subjects. And that their dislike towards English classes seems to be a lack of engagement to learn English.
A SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The purpose of the interview was to know the students’ opinion (see Table A) regarding the innovative approach they were experiencing in the course. The interview took place in the classroom and up to that moment, the first project was already finished and we were starting the second project. We were in the middle of the seven weeks and I considered the right moment to know what they though in order to reflect and modify to start a second loop in case it were necessary.

They made positive comments about the PBL approach but they mentioned some difficulties which I took into consideration when doing the second project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE COMMENTS</th>
<th>NEGATIVE COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Classes are pleasant and I have fun.</td>
<td>• I have suffered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I learn fast.</td>
<td>• It was complicated at the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I practice a lot in class.</td>
<td>• There is lack of pronunciation practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is a lot of interaction among peers.</td>
<td>• I do not understand when the teacher speaks English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We use ICT tools in the classroom.</td>
<td>in the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I use available and real material for my class and I do not waste a book as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usual.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It promotes research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It promotes autonomy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning is my responsibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It’s cheaper than other methods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’m aware of my weaknesses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table A.** Students’ opinion about PBL English classes.
A QUESTIONNAIRE

The open-ended questions contained two main questions related to the advantages and disadvantages they encounter working with projects. Their responses were classified in two categories according to the students’ answers as it is shown in Table B. The answers are presented according to the times answered per student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS’ ANSWERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s cheaper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find more interesting topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lot of interaction in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn English and I learn of other subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I learned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes are enjoyable and fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can practice more than before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see how the theory is applied to practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned as I wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned to structure some information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I put on practice research skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disadvantages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It seems there is not an order, everybody works by their own and do what they want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is lack of time to develop all the activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is stressful, there is a lot of homework and there is not enough time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt we ran in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is too much information to process in a short time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical problems with the computer to watch videos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I needed a book to watch drawings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B. Students’ opinions on PBL English classes.
FINDINGS OF THE SECOND SURVEY

One week prior to finishing the seven weeks considered for the implementation of this research project, I applied a second survey in order to obtain feedback regarding the use of projects as learning method. This survey was made up of 10 questions and I only show some that caught my attention, for instance an interesting finding is presented in figure 4. One of the aspects that I observed in the previous survey was the lack of willingness of the students to continue their study of the English language. But in survey number 2 I assessed the importance that they thought knowing English would have in their professional life and found that they all agreed on the fact that English was important for their personal and professional life.

![Figure 4 Part 1 of the second survey.](image)
A feature that characterizes Project Based Learning is the process of learning through social interaction. Because of this reason, I decided to examine if this aspect of PBL resulted in a satisfying experience. And in order to determine this, I incorporated the following question to the second part of the questions of survey number 2 (see Figure 5) and found that it is indeed a favorable trait of the learning method.

Figure 5. Part two of the second survey
After having developed the class under the PBL approach, I found the majority of the class (see Figure 6) favored PBL but not all of them, around the 40% still considered that another method will be better but only 27% still favor book-based learning.

**Figure 6.** Part 3 of the second survey.
Another relevant result obtained in the survey was that the feeling of the students towards continuing their English education was in completely reversed with regards to the feelings at the beginning of the semester. I found that through the use of PBL unmotivated students can become enthusiasm about learning (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7. Part 4 of survey number 2](image-url)
Having found in survey one that the students lack interested in continuing with their English education in survey 2 (see Figure 8) I decided to try and find a possible reason for this phenomenon and so I asked them if they had any interest in studying abroad and found that they do not have any interest in this type of activities. Additionally, I kept relevant notes of this issue and found similar results.

Figure 8. Part 5 of the survey 2
I wanted to discover if their willingness, which is a behavioral characteristic of engagement, determined by perspective had changed because of the use of PBL. And I found from the results that the majority of them had experienced a change in perspective.

Figure 9. Part six of the second survey
And so when I compared their willingness to work (see Figure 10) just like in the previous figure (see Figure 9), I found that after these seven weeks students’ attitude was modified in a way that they decided to keep working on the English language beyond the course. Additionally, in my field notes I also found the desire to move on immediately to the English 2 course in order to continue with their learning process.

**Figure 10.** Part 7 of the second survey.
THE STUDENT LOG-BOOK

The logbook was an excellent instrument where the students registered three main things at the end of each session. They had to answer: What happened? What did I learn? And what did I feel?

I classified their feelings in positive and negative ones (see Table C) in order to answer one of my research questions for that was how the students felt when working with projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE FEELINGS</th>
<th>NEGATIVE FEELINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Satisfaction because they saw they improved their English language skills.</td>
<td>1. Stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Capable to do it but requires effort.</td>
<td>3. Shamed for not being able to meet certain requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Motivated because of the peers’ help.</td>
<td>4. Concern when they missed a class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hope.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Confidence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Happiness in the class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table C. Students’ feelings when working with projects
STUDENTS’ QUOTES

The quotes were classified in two categories: positive and negative feelings. Some positives are described below:

What did I feel? Me sentí o sentí bonito al entregare a mi profesora mi revista aprendí que todos y cada uno tiene capacidades para hacer un proyecto. (bolsa)

2) What did I feel? Que deba practicar la estructura de las oraciones, y la aplicación de his, their.

What did I feel? En esta clase me sentí mejor, al ver que no se me dificulta mucho, y eso me agrada.

What did I feel? A veces estaba un poco incómoda porque me sentía mal, pero me puse de acuerdo con mi compañera de equipo para trabajar en nuestro proyecto. Me sentí aliviada cuando la teacher nos aclaró nuestras dudas.

2) What did I feel? Senti que debo practicar más la conversación, y abarcar más información del glosario. Me siento contento porque sí estoy aprendiendo.
They started to become independent.

What did I feel?
Me sentir feliz, debido a que entendí casi todo.

What did I feel?
Esta vez estuve tranquilo, y estaba un poco confiado porque había repasado los ejercicios del blog.

What did I feel?
Sentía un poco de pena ya que había nueva compañer er de clase, pero cuando empecé a hacer mi address book y preguntarles sus datos se me quitó, y al final sentí que ya las conocía.

What did I feel?
Estuve contento durante la clase, fue divertida.
Negative feelings, but made them reflect.
2) What did I feel?

¿Qué aún debo practicar el vocabulario de objetos en casa y estaciones del año?

Me sentí nerviosa al llegar a clase, pero no comprendía la actividad que estábamos realizando debido a que faltó la clase pasada.

What did I feel

Algo nervioso, no se porque, tal vez porque no tenía idea del tema. Pero luego me sentí mejor cuando supo como se decía y escribía la hora en inglés.

2) What did I feel?

Sentí mucho estrés a la hora de formular las preguntas, me cuesta mucho trabajo estructurarlas siento que tengo la idea pero me vence el estrés y no logro concentrarme.

What did I feel? Me sentí un poco inseguro, ya que todos mis compañeros o la gran mayoría paso a exponer con lámina y yo no.

What did I feel? Me preocupe y me ganaron los nervios porque pensé que la maestra me iba a poner al frente cómo no he hecho nada, si prepare mis discursos pero en español y obviamente no tenía traducido mi papelería hubiera sido todo.

What did I feel?

Me sentía un poco nervioso porque no sabía cómo comenzar mi biografía, aunque ya habíamos un ejemplo en el pizarrón.
I found that through the use of Project Based Learning a change in the willingness of the students towards learning English modified the effort that they were willing to place which resulted in a desire to continue studying English even after it was not an official requirement. After having been working under the PBL they decided to continue with higher level English courses.

Working under the PBL approach students expressed more positive feelings than negative ones and I found that negative feelings that they express are mainly related to the fact that they are not accustomed to work in this manner.

One of the disadvantages that I found from using PBL is that some of the projects might take longer time than expected to finalize as happened in both projects 1 and 2, because the students had to adapt to this new working approach.
This chapter refers back to the results of each of the forms of data presented in the previous chapter.

The statistics from the admission department of the UV show that most of the undergraduate students do not enroll in English 3 after finishing their mandatory English courses. This may mean that students are not really engaged in learning the language for different reasons. One these reasons could be the teaching methods used in class.

Another problem that I observed through the application of the Oxford diagnostic test is that the majority of students failed to obtain high level scores which force the class to begin at a remedial level; even though they have taken six years of English courses (Jr. High School and High School). The poor test performance and the possible lack of engagement in my students motivated me to try to find a solution through an alternative approach.

Based on the theory of PBL I set out to develop two projects that would require the students to implement their problem solving skills through the construction of an “Address Book” and a “Magazine” which complies with Dewey’s theory of learning by doing.

One of PBL characteristic is to engage students in active and meaningful learning by the use of real material and student-centered classes. This tends to increment the participation of the students because they find a connection between real life situations and class work.

However, PBL also requires to take into account the students when planning and to get them involved from the very beginning, so I applied a survey (see Figure 3) where I asked them if they had already worked with projects in other subjects and if
they agreed on working with projects during this course, moving us from a book-based course to Project Based Learning.

Three weeks after the course began, I applied a semi-structured interview and found that a shift had taken place in the way students viewed their English class (see Table A).

Results from the semi structured interview show that students seem to be happy with the methodology applied in class, they had more positive comments than negative ones. For example they described the classes as funny and meaningful because they said they learnt through the practices and interactions held in each class.

The learning environment was different since they were working in groups, the involvement in class and the active participation allowed them to learn in a meaningful way to what they were not accustomed. Some of them started to complain because of the time the class projects were demanding in order to complete the activities which together conformed the final product.

They realized that the learning responsibility fell mainly on them. The realization of this made them uncomfortable so they made an effort and realized that they were gaining more than in their previous English courses. They became more reflective to take personal decisions in and out of class since they identified their weaknesses and strengths.

The next instrument applied was a questionnaire (see Table B) where the students expressed freely the advantages and disadvantages they saw when working with projects. First of all they pointed out to the affordable materials against the prices of the English books which is a concern for parents and teachers when starts a course. Therefore, from the very beginning they were ready to work since they did not depend on a book; the only material I required from them was the glossary and the English syllabus for English1 course which is available on the web site of the UV.
Furthermore, they liked the opportunity they had to choose the topic to work in (see Table B); PBL is a student-centered approach which takes into account students’ interests and needs so they decided to intertwine topics from their academic field to complete the projects and cover the English syllabus. According to Cordoba and Lepper (1996), students’ engagement with the topic to be learned increase when they have the opportunity to make choices, so the possibility to choose gives the students a feeling of autonomy which has a positive effect on interest and engagement.

In the PBL classroom, students were in control of choosing the information anywhere they wanted. There seems to be a correlation among autonomy and engagement also detected when the students are in charge of their own learning. Also, social interaction was considered an advantage for the students (see Table B) due to the fact that scaffolding was mainly provided through their peers to develop and complete the projects. By this, the students highlighted the importance of the interaction when learning a language since cognition process and social context cannot be seen separately as Vigotsky, Bruner and other researchers claimed as explained in chapter 2.

As the students were learning from others, some of them started to look for external aids as the use of dictionary instead of asking for everything, they started to be more independent. When working with groups they were engaged in discussions and searching which developed communicative skills, and confidence to talk in front of others.

According to the overall disadvantages (see Table B), students suggested that working with PBL required more effort, more time to spend in and out of the class, which some of them consider it to be more stressful. In my opinion, they compared the work they did meanwhile they held English classes in the traditional approach to this innovative approach where they felt were working more but learning. They were constructing their own knowledge and experimented how the learning process required a physical and psychological energy from them.

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In sum, the questionnaire provided positive evidence on students’ perspectives about PBL and findings fitted with engagement features expressed by the students and mentioned in the literature review. For instance, willingness to participate, learners’ attitude to work, involvement in learning, attendance, persistence, time and effort in the classroom activities to complete an ended-product.

The results of the second survey (see Figures from 4 to 10) indicate a significant switch in comparison to the first one (see Figure 3) which suggests that PBL may be able to engage the students in the English language.

After the seven weeks of implementation students’ perspective changed on some aspects, for instance they have the willingness to continue with their English learning process by taking the next English course immediately. They do not want to lose continuity and at the beginning of the English course, even when they knew as most people that learning English opens doors; they were not considering to persist studying English over a long period of time.

The factors that apparently were involved in the switch of students’ responses to the English class when workings with projects were:

- The social interaction (see Figure 5) which implied share of knowledge, exchange of thoughts, discover, compare, work cooperatively, peer assistance, among others that occurred in the process of this interaction which led to a meaningful learning. Because of this, Vygotsky focused more on the process than in the product.
- The implementation of a student-centered approach as PBL (see Figure 6) where students and teacher assumed different roles in class.
- The completion of ending-products (see figure 9), to live the experience of a meaningful learning and be aware of their capabilities to get involved in their own learning process changing their attitude to the English language and developing cognitive, meta cognitive and self-regulatory strategies to guide their learning process (Pintrich and De Groot cited in Chapman 2003).
It is possible that these factors mentioned above were the main cause of the engagement rather than the idea of traveling abroad for fun or academic reasons (see figure 8) which I considered could be a common interest among the students to get engaged in the language. Besides, those factors show the way participants responded when working with projects which was the first question of this action research project.

In the second question, I wanted to know how they felt. The findings suggest that students had more positive feelings than negative ones (see Table C). I would like to highlight the negative feelings since in my point of view they were not as negative as the participants though. On the other hand, negative feelings promoted students’ involvement in an active participation and persistence. One issue that came up was the suggestion by one of the students to use a textbook to facilitate the learning process. This may mean that for some of them a book could represent a comfort zone where the teacher or the book provides the knowledge reducing the students’ responsibility to work on the construction of their own learning.

Equally, the students felt stressed because they said there was too much information, what might confirm they paid attention in class, listened to their classmates’ doubts, asked for some clarification on grammar issues of language, exchanged information, and took notes etc. It tends to show they were expectantly to see what would happen, in short, they were active participants and put a lot of effort to truly understand the topic which meant they were engaged in the English class. On the other hand, there was only one girl who dropped out of the English 1 course, I did not know the reason, but it is common to find some kind of resistance to change.

In conclusion, feelings and students’ responses when working with projects in my English class at the Language Center of the UV were generally positive which is encouraging for those teachers who try to find the change that makes a difference in their students towards learning English at school.
Conclusions and Implications

The history of education in our society has evolved. The one constructed based on the needs emerged in the XX century is completely different than today’s expectations. Standardized teacher-centered classes were innovative in those days, but not anymore. According to a planning guide from the UNESCO (2004), it is said that after three decades of educational research, researchers are focused on learning rather than teaching hence conceptions about learning process have changed.

Based on Vigostskyan theories learning is conceived as a natural and social process where the students learn better when they interact with peers, teachers and others (Scovel, 2001). This interaction takes place while they work collaboratively in interesting and meaningful tasks in the classroom. Also, learning is seen as an active process, the students get involved to construct and adapt new knowledge, one suitable way to do it is through solving real problems or working on original ending products where the students use some tools they already have from their previous experiences. Furthermore, learning might not be just lineal; learning is seen as an integrative and contextualized process.

Pribram (1991) claims that whether information is presented as a whole, it is easier to assimilate which promotes cognitive connections for learning (cited in UNESCO 2004). This new perspective of learning is based on the idea that students are already equipped with knowledge, skills, cognitive abilities, curiosity and previous experiences that may enrich the new learning processes.

This study was an action research project and it was planned to explore what students responses and feelings were when working with projects and find out whether PBL engages students in the English language. After the traditional approach was implemented for English 1 course, PBL provided a learning centered environment for the students where I was able to observe students participating, interacting, putting effort, persisting, and choosing while
working with projects to learn English. According to some researchers these responses define engagement.

I was seeking to explore students’ responses and feelings when working with projects and findings suggested that PBL increased students’ engagement and that the benefits were especially for those who expressed their dislike for the English language at the beginning of the course since they did not consider English language learning an achievable goal and they changed their attitude towards English classes.

The students who enjoyed English became more confident when writing and speaking; In addition, they provided more scaffolding to help peers to organize their ideas and improve their language accuracy. I was able to observe how they enjoyed the class and the freedom of working by themselves.

In sum, it appears that PBL provided an effective learning environment that engaged students in the English language. However, there were some of them who showed poor writing compared to others, but this experience motivated them to persist and consider studying English more time in the future.

The time designed to carry out this action research project was not enough to have a complete picture of the students’ responses during the whole semester. The implementation took seven weeks and the data collected from the last project was not included in this paper which would require more time to what was allowable for the scope of this paper.

Further research is also needed to examine the effects of a PBL in consecutive English courses, larger groups, and different timetables. Nevertheless this experimental study might require much more time and length to find solutions in some other aspects such as listening practice. After all, Confucius said this “I hear and forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand”
References


Ming Yueh Shen, Y. H. (s.f.). Collaborative Action Research for Reading Strategy Instruction: A case in Taiwan. Taiwan R.O.C.


## Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY 1</th>
<th>GRUPO:</th>
<th>FECHA:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARCA LA RESPUESTA QUE SE APEGA A TU REALIDAD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ¿Te gusta el inglés?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ¿Te gustaría seguir estudiando inglés al término de tus cursos obligatorios 1 y 2?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. En tus cursos anteriores de inglés, ¿El maestro dirigía la clase basado en un libro?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ¿En tus cursos anteriores de inglés, ¿Has trabajado con proyectos alguna vez?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ¿Has trabajado con proyectos en alguna otra materia diferente a inglés?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ¿Te gusta trabajar por equipos?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURVEY 2</td>
<td>GRUPO:</td>
<td>FECHA:</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marca la respuesta que se apegas a tu realidad.</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ¿Consideras que el inglés te va a dar mayores oportunidades para tu vida personal y profesional?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ¿La interacción con tus compañeros ha sido útil en tu aprendizaje?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ¿Si tuvieras la opción de volver a iniciar este curso, lo harías por proyectos o te gustaría llevar un libro?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ¿Este tipo de clase por proyectos te ha dado la oportunidad de aprender sobre temas de tu interés?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ¿Después de que termines los niveles obligatorios 1 y 2, piensas continuar con los siguientes cursos de inglés?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ¿Estás interesado en irte de intercambio a otro país por medio de tu universidad y estudiar un semestre o un año fuera de México?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ¿Crees que tu perspectiva del inglés ha cambiado ahora que has aprendido inglés por proyectos?</td>
<td>a) pienso lo mismo que antes</td>
<td>b) ahora me interesa menos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ¿Estás dispuesto a continuar estudiando inglés aunque te cueste trabajo y a veces te sea difícil?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. ¿Estás interesado en obtener un buen trabajo y ser competente en el campo laboral?</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONNAIRE</th>
<th>GRUPO:</th>
<th>FECHA:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTESTA HONESTAMENTE, RECUERDA QUE NO TIENES QUE ESCRIBIR TU NOMBRE.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Te gustaría que el siguiente curso de inglés fuera
   a) por proyecto
   b) usando libro
   c) Mixto

2. Menciona puntos fuertes o ventajas que has encontrado en esta experiencia de aprender inglés mediante proyectos.

3. Menciona qué desventajas has encontrado en esta experiencia de aprender inglés mediante proyectos.

4. Si volviera a empezar el curso escogerías nuevamente este grupo, sabiendo que no se trabajaría con un libro.

### Appendix D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s log-book</th>
<th>FECHA:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What happened?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did I feel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did I learn?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW</th>
<th>GROUP:</th>
<th>DATE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ¿Cómo te has sentido trabajando por proyectos para aprender inglés?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ¿Qué es lo que te ha gustado?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ¿Qué es lo que no te ha gustado?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ¿Qué cambios consideras necesarios para que tu aprendizaje sea mejor?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix F
Appendix G

Students’ ended-products