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**JALT2020**

### Communities of Teachers and Learners

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November 20–23, 2020

## [JALT PRAXIS] YOUNGER LEARNERS



### Mari Nakamura & Marian Hara

The *Younger Learners* column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editor at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

Email: [younger-learners@jalt-publications.org](mailto:younger-learners@jalt-publications.org)

## “Our World” Project-Based Learning for Mixed Levels

Diane C. Obara

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In 2014, after eight years of teaching at universities in Japan, I took on a position at an institution well known for its high percentage of international students and those who had studied overseas. Realizing I needed some new approaches, I recalled my past challenges working with mixed-level students in Ohio. One method that I quickly pulled out of my “teaching toolbox” was project-based learning (PBL). The Buck Institute for Education (2018) defines PBL as “a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge.” Students work on the project from a week up to a semester, and then demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating a public product or presentation for a real audience. As a result, they develop deep content knowledge, as well as the 4Cs: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication.

Around that same time, I was also growing tired of traveling long distances to take my own children to English literacy classes held at international schools on the weekends. Starting local community classes is always a popular option for NES parents, but since my main motivation was for my own bilingual children to be learning, I had to make sure

that I did not get pulled into the *eigo asobi* content that the mainstream market often demands, and could instead stick to my intended curriculum design and objectives.

Just as I had applied PBL to my mixed-level college classes, it seemed like it would be an efficient methodology within this context, too. Students can take on different roles and responsibilities, such as managing, writing, or video-editing, that require varying levels of linguistic ability. Those with more vocabulary and fluency can handle more communicative tasks, while students at lower levels can do work that requires less language but is still valuable for the project to be a success.

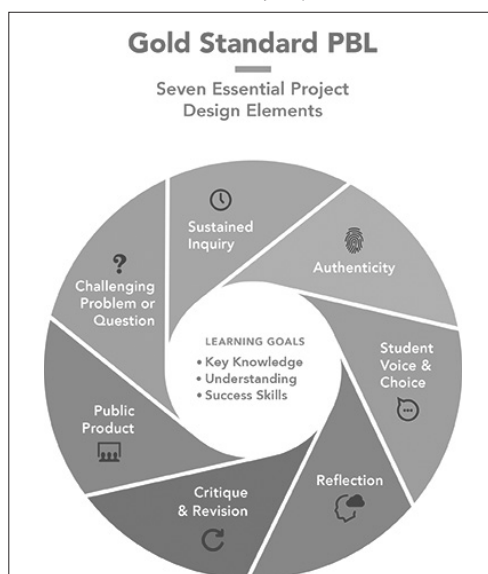


Figure 1. Seven Essential Project Design Elements (2018, Buck Institute for Education).

The following are four of the projects that students worked on at my school (Lambchop's Project English) in 2018. With each project, we considered the above model and elements for design. We were using the National Geographic Learning series *Our World* (2014) textbooks in the class, so the projects were mainly extension activities related to those chapters. We selected these projects based on their authenticity and application to our "local" world, as well as the flexibility for all students to be able to participate easily and equally. At the beginning of each project, we talked about a scenario, either imagined or real, and created a driving question.

### Project #1: A Local "Child's View" Map (with video restaurant reviews and park descriptions)

**Scenario:** A new child has moved into the neighborhood. Their family wants to know some favorite local spots to play and eat out.

**Driving Question:** How can we help this child and their family get to know our local neighborhood?

**Idea and Authenticity:** The students decided to make a local map, from their perspective of being local children. They liked the idea that the map would be focused on only their ideas, without a lot of extra unnecessary information.

**Process:** The entire process took about four ninety-minute lessons. Students brainstormed their favorite places to eat and play, including two noodle shops, two family restaurants, two small local parks with distinguishable features (a swan-shaped slide, monkey bars), the local library, a shrine, and a gym with a climbing wall. After brainstorming, the students created their map. In the second lesson, they wrote descriptions for each location using vocabulary from the nature and food chapters (two and eight) of *Our World*, student book 1 (2014). This writing activity was in the form of a cloze exercise on custom-made worksheets in storyboard form of the shots we planned to film. Students drew stick-figures of themselves and caption bubbles saying their lines, such as: "This is my favorite restaurant in my neighborhood, *Big Boy*. My favorite item on the menu is the cheese hamburger. These hamburgers are so juicy.... The best part of this restaurant is the salad bar. It has...." For homework, students practiced reading their descriptions. As expected, during this lesson, the ELLs brainstormed out loud in Japanese while coming up with ideas; however, with the teacher and the bilingual children modeling in English alongside them, they could hear helpful examples

and finish their individual writing more quickly. The guided worksheets helped to focus and control the output for everyone. Finally, in the last two lessons, the class walked around the neighborhood and filmed short videos at each site on the map. The students acted as mini-reporters, giving descriptions such as locations and directions from the station, menu items, costs, services, and uniqueness. For the parks, they spoke about the route from the station, types of playground equipment, feelings, and advice. Filming works particularly well with mixed levels because it allows for multiple attempts to record. Advanced students can walk around and speak fluently on camera without using the worksheets as a guide. However, for lower level students, the teacher can practice with the worksheets on the spot a few times, and then record. In the end, the video makes it appear that everyone has spoken for about an equal amount of time.

### Project #2: A Local Newspaper

This second project was an extension of the work in the first project; however, the driving question was about how to get to know the local people better, not only the places. Since our school was in the same building with some small businesses, and the students had become friendly with those people, we decided to make a local newspaper. Students interviewed a professional potter, a physical therapist, a hairdresser, the owner of the building (who also ran the corner store), and myself (teacher and school owner). Since the focus of this lesson was mainly WH questions and how to conduct interviews, it was ideal for working with bilinguals and ELLs

because the vocabulary was limited. In addition, the interviewees all answered with short answers in Japanese, so when it was time to translate, it was easy and natural for everyone. The other benefit of this project was that it involved many other skills, such as typing, layout design, and editing.

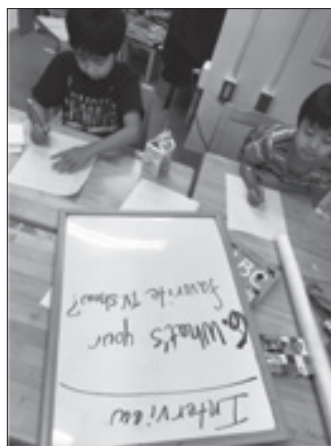


Figure 2. Students brainstorming for an interview.

### Project #3: A Tourism Video (Nature Guide)

**Driving Question:** How can we teach our international pen pals more about our natural world in Chiba?

**Idea and Authenticity:** The third project followed on from the second chapter (nature) of *Our World*, student book 1 (2014). We wanted a project that applied those concepts and used that vocabulary. Over the years, we had also developed pen pal relationships with children in the U.S., Australia, and Vietnam, so we created a project to share our natural environment with them.

**Process:** This project took three lessons, but it could have been expanded. On the first day, the students brainstormed and decided to make a “Nature Tour” video of the neighborhood. Surprisingly, within a ten-minute walk from our school, mixed in among the houses, there are several farms, greenhouses, and community gardens. Being July, many of the vegetables and flowers were in full bloom. It was a great opportunity to apply the vocabulary from the textbook to describe our local environment. In that first lesson, the students made a storyboard, which included blocking out shots, such as close-ups of the different vegetables (eggplants, tomatoes, corn) and flowers (roses, cosmos, etc.). They also imagined a few of the descriptions for those scenes. Being short on time, we did not write everything down. We also had a lot of recording to do. On the second day, we filmed. Students took turns interviewing and recording. For many shots, we came up with the English on the spot. As the teacher, I controlled the language, such as the vocabulary and length of speaking, based on each student’s ability. We practiced the lines several times and then recorded short segments one by one. In the final lesson, the students created the project in iMovie, adding titles and captions. Since they had also created “time warp” shots in between some scenes, they added special spinning effects to look like they were being transported through time and space.

### Project #4: A Lemonade Stand

**Scenario:** The students are always hungry during the after-school lessons. They also needed new art supplies to complete their projects.

**Driving Question:** How can we help raise money for the school to buy supplies?

**Idea and Authenticity:** The final project idea came after the chapters dealing with food and money. Students brainstormed fundraising ideas such as a bake sale and garage sale, but decided on a lemonade stand for this entrepreneurship lesson.

**Process:** This project took two classes and one three-hour Saturday afternoon activity. In the first lesson, students created advertising signs, read the recipe, made the lemonade, and practiced counting money. They discussed the different roles for the day, such as cashier, salesperson, juice presser, mixer, server, cleaner, and shoppers. With this project, English was used mostly in the planning stages, with guided worksheets for reading the lemonade recipe and talking about money. On the day of the sale, there was actually little speaking, other than shouting, “Lemonade. Fresh-squeezed lemonade for sale. One hundred yen per cup!” Finally, they raised about 4,000 yen from this small event, and they decided to spend the money on snacks for their lessons.



Figure 3. Students setting up the lemonade stand.

For mixed levels, projects that creatively apply the content from their textbook are a great way for students to work together. The integration of content and language applied in this way allows them to create something greater than they would have been able to do alone. After each one, we reflected on what was done well and what to improve for the next time, be it making stronger questions (e.g., asking teachers, “What’s your favorite lesson to teach?” rather than “What’s your favorite color?”) or writing longer scripts. With projects like these, the children learn so much more than language. They learn teamwork, planning, how to use video cameras, word processing, and video-editing. They also learn basic communication skills and how to conduct interviews. Ultimately, the use of these skills, the creation of meaningful projects, and the attention to the essential elements of project design result in tangible memories for students at all levels.

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Currently an adjunct lecturer at Rikkyo University, **Diane C. Obara** has spent the past sixteen years working in higher education with students from around the world, both here in Japan and in the US. Some of her proudest teaching moments have been applying the theory and lessons from the classroom to a local context through project-based learning and watching the children's minds grow.



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## [JALT PRACTIS] BOOK REVIEWS



### Robert Taferner & Stephen Case

If you are interested in writing a book review, please consult the list of materials available for review in the Recently Received column, or consider suggesting an alternative book that would be helpful to our membership.

Email: [reviews@jalt-publications.org](mailto:reviews@jalt-publications.org)

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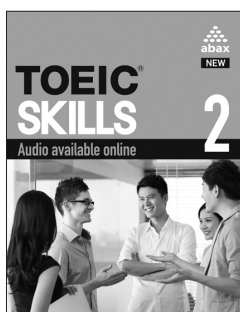
This month's column features Philip Steven Olson's review of *NEW TOEIC Skills 2*.

## NEW TOEIC Skills 2

[Anderson, J., Graham-Marr, A., Howser, R., & Sato, A. Tokyo: ABAX ELT Publishers, 2016. ¥2,450. ISBN: 9781896942919.]

Reviewed by Philip Steven Olson, Seikei University

**N**EW TOEIC Skills is a three-level TOEIC test textbook series developed to guide students through the new TOEIC test, revised in May 2016. Level 1 of the series is targeted at a TOEIC score of 300 to 450, level 2 at 450 to 600, and level 3 at 600-750. The aim of the textbook series is to help EFL students in university or busi-



ness contexts improve their TOEIC scores, ideally, in the EFL classroom setting in Asian countries in which simple English structures are used for instruction (Anderson, 2016).

Each textbook in this series has ten units, which are divided into *Section A* and *Section B*, and each of these ten units focuses on a topic that matches topics found on the TOEIC test. Each section is further divided in two parts: *Focus on the Test* and *Focus on Language*. The *Focus on the Test* parts are TOEIC style questions, and *Focus on Language* focuses on vocabulary, listening phonology, and grammar instruction. It includes speaking activities in the sections *Pairwork* and *Let's Talk*.

All student listening material is online, accessible via a password provided. The students have access to the audio scripts in the back of the textbook. The website for student access provides no extra material for practice. Teacher support is available on the same website also with a password. There is no separate Teacher's Book. As with the student materials, the extra support for the teacher is also lacking, merely containing the textbook audio tracks, mini TOEIC tests, and answer keys. The website in English for teacher support could also