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# Experiences in Professional Development Through Project-Based Language Learning

Florencia Westenskow  
*Brigham Young University*

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Experiences in Professional Development Through  
Project-Based Language Learning

Florencia Westenskow

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Cherice Montgomery, Chair  
Rob A. Martinsen  
Gregory L. Thompson

Department of Spanish and Portuguese  
Brigham Young University

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## ABSTRACT

### Experiences in Professional Development Through Project-Based Language Learning

Florencia Westenskow  
Department of Spanish and Portuguese, BYU  
Master of Arts

Project-based Language Learning (PBL) provides students with opportunities to use the target language purposefully and to interact with culturally authentic materials. Because PBL holds critical benefits for its students, it is important that teachers learn best practices for implementation and how to overcome the challenges that PBL brings. This study focuses on the experiences of 15 world language teachers as they participated in a PBL professional development series developed by the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Findings from this study are based on data gathered from surveys and interviews with a diverse group of educators for the purpose of gaining an understanding of what participants learned and the activities that impacted learning of PBL. Results show that learning about gold standard elements of PBL made the biggest impact on participants' pedagogical beliefs and motivated them to change their practice. Activities that positively impacted learning were those that were active, social, and related to practice. Participants were overwhelmed with the amount of content and needed help making connections between the content and their teaching contexts. Overall, participants' experiences in the professional development series led to a change in pedagogical beliefs and a desire to alter their implementation of PBL.

Keywords: Project-based Language Learning, foreign language, professional development, foreign language education, projects, PBL

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 2 .....	3
Review of Relevant Literature .....	3
Project-Based Learning .....	3
Benefits of Project-Based Language Learning .....	5
Challenges of Project-Based Language Learning .....	8
Conclusion.....	9
Research Questions.....	10
CHAPTER 3 .....	11
Research Design & Methods .....	11
Participants .....	12
Data Sources .....	13
Surveys.....	13
Interviews.....	13
Project Plans.....	14
Online Institute.....	14
Project Blueprint.....	14
Intensive Summer Institute.....	15
Data Analysis Procedures.....	15
CHAPTER 4 .....	17

Findings.....	17
Theme 1: Learned.....	18
Shift in Perspective on PBL.....	18
Shift in Perspective of Self.....	22
Theme 2: Positive Aspects .....	25
Discussions.....	26
Feedback.....	30
Mini-Project. ....	32
Technology Tools.....	35
Facilitators and staff.....	36
Theme 3: Negative Aspects.....	40
Structure. ....	40
Technology Tools.....	42
Content. ....	43
Career Pathways.....	45
Information provided.....	46
Assessment. ....	48
Theme 4: Questions .....	48
<b>Chapter Summary</b> .....	51
CHAPTER 5 .....	53
Discussion & Implications.....	53
Research Question 1: What did participants learn about PBL from the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC?.....	53
Shift in perspective of teachers' role.....	54
Public product and real audience. ....	55

Language aspect of PBLL.....	56
Research Question 2: Which activities/aspects of the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC positively impacted participants' learning of PBLL? .....	57
Active and social professional development activities. ....	57
Research Question 3: What activities/aspects of the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC negatively impacted participants' learning of PBLL? .....	60
Too distant from classroom practice. ....	60
Too much new content. ....	61
Pedagogical Implications.....	62
Limitations.....	63
Recommendations for Future Research.....	64
Conclusion.....	65
References.....	67
Appendix A – Pre-Survey Questions.....	71
Appendix B – Post Survey.....	72
Appendix C – Interview Protocol.....	76
Appendix D – Online Recruitment Email.....	77

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Languages Taught by Participants</i> .....	12
Table 2 <i>Themes and Categories</i> .....	17
Table 3 <i>Changes Made to Final Project Plans from Project Blueprints</i> .....	21



## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

When I first began teaching, I was tasked with developing my own curriculum. After a while, my students became bored with the activities I planned and I realized I needed to find other ways to motivate them. While talking to a colleague about my situation, I learned about the use of projects. As I implemented projects, my students seemed more motivated and engaged. However, I also encountered challenges that I did not know how to overcome. After trying to find solutions to these challenges, I learned that my classroom experience with implementing projects was similar to other teachers' experiences with projects.

Foreign language teachers are always looking for innovative ways to engage and motivate students. Project-based Learning (PBL) is one method that teachers can implement to fulfill those goals (Thomas, 2000). Through PBL, students work together to solve a challenging problem or question within the context of a real world project. As students complete the project, they gain both content knowledge and skills. At the end of the project, students create a public product to share what they have learned with a real audience (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015). PBL is beneficial because it gives students practice with tasks that are found in the real world (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Condliffe et al., 2017; Parker, et al., 2013), and allows them to develop problem-solving skills (Buck Institute for Education [BIE], 2018).

PBL can also be used to teach a foreign language. Students learn the language as they use it to complete a project. When foreign language teachers add the use of the target language and the inclusion of culturally authentic materials to the PBL approach, PBL then becomes Project-based Language Learning (PBLL). Students participating in PBLL benefit from opportunities to use the target language in meaningful ways that promote communication and language learning

(Dooly and Masats, 2008; Goulah 2007; Mikulec and Miller, 2011; Levine, 2004), while also learning academic content from other disciplines and gaining real world skills.

While PBL holds benefits for students, teachers face several challenges when implementing it in their classrooms. One challenge for teachers includes the use of the target language (Allen, 2004; Toyoda, 2000). Teachers are hesitant to implement projects, especially with novice students, because they believe students lack the vocabulary necessary to complete the project (Mikulec & Miller, 2011). Another challenge for teachers is changing their current pedagogical beliefs and practices (Condliffe, 2017; Dooly, 2008). This can be hard for teachers because for some of them, implementing a student-centered approach, such as PBL, requires a change in how they view their role in the classroom (Ertmer & Simons, 2006). Students have also encountered challenges while participating in PBL. For some students, PBL is frustrating because the demands are different than those required in a traditional approach (Condliffe et al., 2017).

In order to overcome these challenges, some researchers have proposed that teachers would benefit from support and training (Condliffe et al., 2017). Although the benefits of PBL are well-established (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015; Parker et al., 2013), and there is a growing body of research on PBL (Moritoshi, 2014; Toyoda, 2000; Dooly and Masats, 2008), very little research has been done on how teachers learn to implement PBL in world language classrooms. This makes it difficult for administrators and supervisors who wish to move their teachers toward a more experiential approach to learning to know how to support them in integrating PBL into their classes. Consequently, this study examined foreign language teachers' experiences as they participated in a professional development series about PBL.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Relevant Literature

As students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century enter college and the workforce, the skills and abilities they need in order to be successful are different than those previously required (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). A critical skill for students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is knowing another language and understanding the culture of the people who speak that language (Theisen, 2011). This places more responsibility on foreign language teachers as they prepare students to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Adams Becker, Rodriguez, Estrada & Davis, 2016).

This is challenging because a traditional teaching approach—an approach that includes memorization, regurgitation, and meaningless drills—does not help students learn the language or understand the culture (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Mikulec & Miller, 2011). In contrast, students learn as they participate in “authentic learning” (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008) and when using the language in meaningful ways (Mikulec & Miller, 2011).

Due to the issues of the traditional classroom and the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers need an improved method of teaching a foreign language that builds proficiency. Project based-Language Learning (PBLL), a variant of Project-based Learning (PBL), is one way to help students to learn the language and understand the culture through opportunities for real language use and the inclusion of authentic texts.

### **Project-Based Learning**

PBL is a method of teaching in which students work together to solve a challenging problem or question. Through completing the project, students gain both content knowledge and skills. At the end of the project, students create a public product to share what they have learned with a real audience (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015).

As a method of teaching, PBL has several distinct benefits. One of the benefits is that it provides an opportunity for students to practice skills and tasks that they will encounter in the real world. These skills include communication skills, collaboration skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and are often known as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (Theisen, Fulton–Archer, Smith, Sauer, Small, & Abbott, 2011). Other benefits include collaboration, authenticity, and motivation (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015; Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Condliffe et al., 2017).

Collaboration is an essential aspect of PBL because the need for students to collaborate is found through every step of the PBL process (Condliffe et al., 2017). For instance, students collaborate with each other as they explore possible answers to a challenging problem or question, provide each other with feedback, make decisions regarding their final product, and discuss progress and ideas. Other instances of student collaboration include their collaboration with outside sources to gather more information and their collaboration with teachers throughout the process of the project. These opportunities allow students to better prepare for the real world by practicing collaboration in a classroom setting (Condliffe et al., 2017).

Another essential aspect of PBL is the creation of a public product that is shared or presented to a real audience. Having a public product and a real audience reflects tasks and processes that occur in the real world and outside of the school setting. Parkert et al. (2013) have identified this as authenticity, because the product is “like those found outside school, in workplaces, laboratories, legislatures, studios, and so forth” (p. 1431-2). This allows students to gain the skills needed to be successful outside of the classroom.

A third way that PBL benefits students is through motivation. Researchers have found that the creation and sharing of a public product with an authentic audience is an important requirement of PBL because it has the potential to motivate students (Blumenfeld et al., 1991;

Condliffe et al., 2017). For most students, the presentation of the product to a real audience motivates them to create something they will be proud to present. Presenting the product to an authentic audience is a different experience than presenting to classmates and teachers that motivates students to invest more in the process and in the product. This is because an authentic audience connects the students to the real world and makes the project feel more authentic instead of like school-related work (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015; Condliffe et al., 2017).

Although researchers have pointed out distinct benefits of PBL, there are also some challenges. A significant challenge is the lack of consensus on the definition of PBL, which has resulted in challenges for both researchers and teachers (Thomas, 2000). In general, researchers agree on the basic definition of PBL, however, not all researchers agree on the components that make up PBL (Thomas, 2000). Because PBL is similar to other inquiry-based approaches to learning (i.e., experiential learning, problem-based learning), this makes it challenging for researchers to distinguish among the different approaches (Thomas, 2000). Unable to distinguish among the different approaches, limits the generalizations that researchers can make about the effectiveness of PBL (Condliffe et al., 2017). For teachers, the lack of a clear definition makes it hard to find guidance on projects when various classroom practices are being labeled as PBL, but project components and approaches vary widely (Thomas, 2000). This is one of the reasons that the Buck Institute for Education (BIE), a nonprofit organization that provides resources and trainings for teachers interested in PBL, outlined different elements of PBL in an attempt to clarify this issue (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015).

### **Benefits of Project-Based Language Learning**

Project-based Language Learning (PBL) is an approach that builds on the foundation of PBL and offers the same general benefits as PBL, but adds other benefits unique to the foreign

language classroom. The benefits of PBL such as developing language skills and exposure to cultural knowledge are gained because students have opportunities to use the language in meaningful ways as they ask questions, communicate with native speakers to get information, and interact with culturally authentic materials (Dooly & Masats, 2008). A variety of studies describe the numerous ways that students use the language purposefully as they participate in PBL. Dooly and Masats (2008) mention that students use the target language in meaningful ways such as “brain-storming, discussing and writing” (p. 28). As students work towards completing the project they conduct research, collaborate, and exchange ideas by using the language (Goulah 2007). Mikulec and Miller (2011) shared another example of meaningful language use by describing how students used the language to discuss cultural ideas and communicate about their own culture. Levine (2004) described three different projects implemented in German classes. Students completing these projects exchanged information with e-mail pen pals in German-speaking countries. The German-speaking pen pals became experts with whom the students consulted as they worked on the project. These examples demonstrate that the process inherent in working towards the completion of a PBL project creates an authentic need for language use and provides ample opportunities for students to use the language in meaningful and authentic ways.

The processes inherent in PBL reflect tasks that are found in the real world. Moritoshi (2014) concluded that this occurs because PBL creates a “genuine communicative need,” something not normally found in the traditional classroom setting (p. 12). Moritoshi further added that the opportunity to use the language for a real purpose allowed students to use communicative strategies and “was beneficial to students’ language skills development” (p. 12). Researchers also mention the benefits that result from opportunities for authentic and meaningful

communication. Stoller (2006), as cited by Mills (2009), found that using the language for real purposes helps students develop positive attitudes and “increases student satisfaction in foreign language learning” (p. 609). Gardner (1995) observed that when students were using the language for authentic reasons, “they became more relaxed about their use of the TL which led to a noticeable improvement in other communicative areas of coursework” (p. 56). In other words, authentic opportunities for language use have been shown to facilitate both students’ language development and enjoyment.

Another benefit of PBL is the inclusion of authentic materials. Through PBL, students interact with authentic materials, in other words, materials made for native speakers by native speakers. This interaction with authentic texts allows students to gain cultural and linguistic knowledge (Mikulec & Miller, 2011). The traditional classroom curriculum often relies on the use of a textbook, which usually includes materials that have been heavily edited for student use. As a result, textbooks often lack the authenticity students need to develop cultural knowledge and use the language in more meaningful ways (Basar, 2017). On the other hand, while working on a project, students gather new information through authentic materials provided by the teacher, online searches, and interviews.

Various studies have discussed the ways in which students are able to interact with authentic materials because of their participation in PBL. Allen (2004) described how students explored various authentic French texts and websites to research stereotypes about French culture. Allen specifically mentioned that students used French search engines to conduct online searches as well as “French chat rooms, French multiuser, object-oriented domains, keypals, library resources, native informants and USENET newsgroups” (p. 236). In another French class, students learned about French culture through “authentic poetry, music, literature, films, art”

(Mikulec & Miller, 2011, p. 84). According to Mikulec and Miller (2011), the use of authentic materials helped students learn the language and “make connections between products and the culture” (p.84). Although students and teachers seem to benefit from the implementation of PBL, there are also challenges teachers face as they implement PBL.

### **Challenges of Project-Based Language Learning**

Some teachers are hesitant to implement PBL because of the challenges that arise. One of the greatest challenges for teachers is implementing PBL in the target language (Mikulec and Miller, 2011). Teachers are often hesitant to implement PBL with novice students because teachers believe that students lack the vocabulary necessary to complete the tasks using the target language.

Research also shows that even advanced-level students struggle with using the target language without the proper scaffolding (Mikulec and Miller, 2011). Allen (2004) reflected that due to the students’ proficiency levels, a project might be better implemented in a class with more advanced students because although the study participants were in an intermediate class, their “level of proficiency in French limited their ability to use the language effectively in chat rooms and in understanding some authentic materials” (p. 238). Another instance of students struggling with using the target language occurred in an advanced Japanese class, where students struggled with using the language at the beginning of the project when they lacked the vocabulary necessary to complete project tasks (Toyoda, 2000). Toyoda states that students reverted to speaking in “English as soon as they started to have technical problems” (p. 444).

Acknowledging the added difficulty of implementing PBL with novice students, Mikulec and Miller (2011) point out that PBL is still possible with novice students despite their lack of “linguistic knowledge” (p. 85). They encourage teachers to implement projects that



match the proficiency levels of their students. They emphasize the need for teachers to “act as guides” for students and provide the structure they need to successfully participate in projects regardless of proficiency levels (Mikulec & Miller, 2011, p. 85). While teachers may be hesitant to implement PBL due to the language aspect, teachers can scaffold and guide students through the learning process.

Another important challenge faced by teachers when implementing PBL is the connection between teacher belief and practice. Dooly explains that these beliefs and practices are largely due to teachers’ own learning experiences. The majority of teachers’ learning experiences are within that of a traditional classroom setting where the teacher is the main source of information for the students. PBL is often challenging for teachers because it requires them to change this traditional belief about their role in the classroom (Ertmer and Simons, 2006). A change in their role in the classroom is not something that all teachers are willing to do because it also means changing their beliefs and practices about classroom control and classroom management (Kolodner et al., 2003; Grant & Hill, 2006). Dooly (2008) cites many studies that demonstrate how difficult it is to change teachers’ beliefs and practices. In order for teachers to change their classroom practice and implement PBL, something that could be vastly different than their traditional classroom practice, teachers must believe in the benefits of the method (Condliffe et al., 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The research makes it clear that PBL holds potential benefits for students by helping them learn content and promote the skills students need to be successful in the 21st century. PBL also holds potential benefits for language students, such as building proficiency and the inclusion of authentic materials. However, foreign language teachers interested in implementing

PBLL also struggle with many unique challenges, such as using the target language, integrating culturally authentic materials, and changing their current beliefs and practices. Research shows that teachers' practices are impacted by their own learning experiences and that teachers are hesitant to change their practices when they do not see the benefits in doing so.

To see the impacts of PBLL, teachers need training on how to implement PBLL and strategies for addressing the challenges they face. Current research also lacks information about how professional development can help teachers see the potential benefits of PBLL. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of teachers' experiences as they learned about and made plans to implement Project-based Language Learning.

### **Research Questions**

This study investigated this issue using the following research questions:

1. What did participants learn about PBLL from the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC?
2. Which activities/aspects of the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC positively impacted participants' learning of PBLL?
3. Which activities/aspects of the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC negatively impacted participants' learning of PBLL?
4. In what ways is participant learning reflected in the changes they made as they developed their project blueprints into final project plans?

## CHAPTER 3

### Research Design & Methods

The National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa conducts research and projects to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages nationwide. The research conducted by the NFLRC aims to support teachers of world languages in integrating promising practices into their classrooms. The NFLRC obtained a four-year grant to provide professional development regarding Project-based Language Learning (PBL) that is targeted at K-16 instructors of less commonly-taught languages, particularly those who teach in minority-serving institutions and community college settings.

The professional development offered by the NFLRC in conjunction with this grant served as the general context for this study and involved a sequence of three events. The first event was an online symposium that introduced participants to the general concept of Project-based Language Learning and to the Center's initiatives regarding the topic. The second event was an online institute covering the fundamentals of PBL where participants were guided through the creation of a project blueprint, or in other words, a detailed unit plan describing a project participants had implemented or planned to implement. The third event was the intensive summer institute, an on-site, in-person one-week institute where participants received additional training and support in adapting PBL for their own teaching contexts while developing a complete project.

This study took place in the context of the online institute and the intensive summer institute. During the online institute, participants took part in five online modules consisting of three lessons each. Each lesson was facilitated by NFLRC staff and/or guest presenters. The main goal of the online institute was for participants to gain a basic understanding of PBL and

its principles. Participants who completed all of the modules from the online institute and prepared a plan for implementing a project in their own classrooms (known as a project blueprint) received a digital badge. The digital badge made them eligible to apply to participate in the intensive summer institute. The intensive summer institute was an eight-day workshop where participants met with NFLRC staff and facilitators in order to continue learning about PBL. At the end of the intensive summer institute, participants created a project, in this study referred to as the final project plan, to implement in their classrooms.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of fifteen world language educators who participated in both the online institute and the intensive summer institute designed and facilitated by the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. These fifteen participants were chosen by the NFLRC after completing the online institute. The participants included 3 males and 12 females. Their teaching experiences ranged from 3 to 25 years, with six participants working in K-12 settings and nine participants in college settings. The languages taught by participants included Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. The number of participants that taught each language is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Languages Taught by Participants*

<b>Language</b>	<b># of participants</b>
Chinese	4
Japanese	3
Korean	1

Russian	2
Spanish	4
Vietnamese	1

## Data Sources

Data for this study was gathered from pre- and post-institute surveys, interviews with institute participants, and final project plans developed by institute participants. Each of these data sources is discussed in detail below.

**Surveys.** Pre- and post intensive institute surveys were used to collect information regarding participants' definitions of Project-based Language Learning (PBL), the extent to which they were familiar with the key concepts and principles of PBL, and the degree to which they may have previously implemented PBL in their classes (see Appendices A & B). The surveys included both Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions and were administered at two different times. Surveys were administered online through the NFLRC's website after participants participated in the online institute and after the intensive summer institute. The surveys provided information about the participants' perspective on PBL and their integration of PBL into their teaching practices before and after the institutes.

**Interviews.** During the last two days of the intensive summer institute, on-site interviews were conducted with 12 participants (see Appendix C for interview protocol). Because participation in the interviews was voluntary, only 12 of the 15 individuals attending the intensive summer institute were interviewed. The purpose of these interviews was to identify the ways in which the institutes contributed to the participants' understanding of PBL. In addition, the interviews were used to identify the factors that supported and/or limited the participants'

learning of PBL. Participants were asked about their experiences during the institutes and the ways in which these experiences contributed to their understanding of PBL. Additionally, participants were asked to analyze their understanding of PBL and how this understanding changed. They were also asked to identify the ways in which their learning of PBL impacted their teaching practices and beliefs regarding language learning. The interviews aided the researchers in identifying potential rationales underlying the changes in the participants' perspectives and practices regarding PBL.

**Project Plans.** Participants completed a project blueprint after the online institute and a final project plan after the intensive summer institute. The project blueprints were plans that participants created for implementing a PBL project in their classrooms. The final project plans were a finalized and more detailed version of the project blueprints. In this study, the project blueprints and the final project plans were compared and examined for evidence of change.

**Online Institute.** Before starting the online institute, participants determined how they planned to complete the 15 online lessons—by participating in webinars facilitated by NFLRC staff or by using the self-paced version of the materials. Once participants finished the modules, they filled out a post-institute survey.

**Project Blueprint.** Next participants completed a project blueprint by filling out an online form where they provided a URL to an online document containing their project blueprint, along with an electronic application to attend the intensive summer institute. Then, the two facilitators of the intensive summer institute reviewed the applications and rated the project blueprints using a rubric. Based on the applications and review of the projects, the two institute facilitators made recommendations to the NFLRC regarding which participants should be invited

to attend the intensive summer institute. The NFLRC staff made final decisions based on the Center's strategic priorities and the parameters of its grant funding.

**Intensive Summer Institute.** During the intensive summer institute, participants participated in an on-site, in-person institute. The institute began with a two-day, differentiated, community-based PBL experience held at the Hawaiian Plantation Village. Participants also attended a variety of facilitated professional development sessions on topics such as using career pathways as tools for integrating language, content, and culture; finding community project partners; managing project logistics; scaffolding language use; and assessing language and content learning. They had opportunities to develop their project plans and materials during the institute, and were given time to receive feedback from colleagues, institute facilitators, and NFLRC staff. After the institute, participants completed their final project plans and submitted them to the NFLRC's Project Repository.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was analyzed only for those participants who participated in both the online institute and the intensive summer institute. Participants' responses to open-ended questions and interviews were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Analysis Method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). To start this process, the interviews were transcribed and the interviews and surveys were printed. The transcripts were read various times in order to identify the major ideas. While reading the transcripts, comments that answered the research questions and comments that were repeatedly mentioned were highlighted and coded with notes in the margins. These codes later became categories that were organized in an Excel document. An Excel document was made for each theme and the comments were organized according to the themes within each category. This process was repeated and concluded when the categories created answered the

research questions. Afterwards the data within each of the categories were compared in order to identify themes and patterns, which were then used to make inferences and draw conclusions.

The purpose of using the Constant Comparative Analysis Method was to identify patterns in the rationales that participants gave for the changes made as they developed their project blueprints into their final project plans. In addition, the Constant Comparative Analysis Method served to identify changes in teaching beliefs and practices that participants described during their interviews.

Each participant's project blueprint and final project plan were compared to identify common elements. After viewing each participant's blueprint and plan, a checklist was created with the common elements. The elements in each blueprint and plan were then analyzed to identify if any change had taken place. The data from the surveys and interview were reviewed to search for participants' comments that might explain the changes participants made as they created their project plans. The themes that resulted from the data analysis will be discussed in Chapter 4.



## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

Data collected from surveys, interviews, project blueprints and final project plans generated findings that were categorized into four major themes: what participants learned during the institute, aspects that positively impacted participant learning, aspects that negatively impacted participant learning, and questions participants had at the conclusion of the institute. The four main themes and categories are illustrated in Table 2. The names of participants have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 2

*Themes and Categories*

<b>Major Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>
<b>Learned</b>	Shift in Perspective on PBL
	Shift in Purpose of Language Learning
	Shift in Perspective on Self
<b>Positive Aspects</b>	Discussions
	Feedback
	Mini-Project
	Technology Tools
	Facilitators and Staff
<b>Negative Aspects</b>	Structure
	Technology Tools

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Content

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Career Pathways

---

Information Provided

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Assessment

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## Questions

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### Theme 1: Learned

This section discusses what participants learned about PBL throughout the professional development sessions. Two recurring ideas emerged from the data that reflect participant learning, 1) a shift in the participants' perspective on PBL, 2) a shift in the way participants viewed themselves and their roles as teachers.

**Shift in Perspective on PBL.** When asked about their learning, most participants mentioned the gold standard elements of Project-Based Learning (elements needed for high-quality projects) as defined by the Buck Institute for Education (BIE). Although many participants had designed projects for their students before the institute, most were not fully integrating the elements of high-quality PBL when they came to the institute. Participants commented on their past experiences with implementing projects and how their definition of a project had changed with the knowledge gained through the institute.

*Ashley: Before I took the online course I had a very general understanding of what Project-Based Learning meant but did not realize what a gold standard project was or what all of the specific elements were. So I would say that while I was doing projects before I took the course, they were not technically considered PBL gold standard projects. Since taking that course, which was just in January of this year, or at least*

*having those gold standard elements in mind, I have planned my future projects, at least having those gold standard elements in mind. I guess it has affected the way I think about my curriculum.*

Learning about the gold standard elements caused a major shift in many of the perspectives of the participants. Participants' perspectives about PBL and what a PBL project entails changed to include the gold standard elements. As a result of their learning, participants began considering how they could implement the gold standard elements to create high-quality projects. The one element participants repeatedly mentioned was the public product, this element includes two important aspects, the public product and the presentation of the product to a real audience. It seems that participants' experiences with these two aspects caused them to want to change their classroom practice to include these aspects in future projects.

***Valeria:** The institute opened my mind. Everyone knows how to do a little project, after the online training, online workshop, we knew a little more about it, about a real audience. But in this summer institute you realize that it has to be really authentic to motivate the students. As my brain is thinking about different projects for different subjects...I will take a lot of care of being authentic, it will have to be a world issue and motivating for the students. I have to put on that hat of the student and think, "Would I like this?" And it has to be a real product. I am more kind of focusing on an authentic product and motivating for students. It needs to have a real audience too, so that you are doing something to show someone that would understand it. So the audience is something that I didn't pay attention to before but I will make sure, the real audience.*

***Zhi Ruo:** I think the big change is the intercultural competence; I didn't know it was that important. My background is in linguistics so I was like the students just learn like a*

*module, template, I didn't think that it was very important for them to connect with real, native speakers. I think that makes my teaching more interesting for the students and they really like to participate... I think that student motivation is really important, and they really enjoy taking Chinese because they not only learn language patterns but they are talking to real people.*

It is evident that the institute helped participants recognize the value of authenticity found in the public product and real audience. Participants now identify authenticity as important because of its power to motivate students. Their comments suggest that a public product and an authentic audience are motivating to the students because they are opportunities for students to use the language in meaningful ways. Participants' comments regarding their learning also suggest that by the end of the institute, they recognized that knowledge of the gold standard elements had changed their perception of PBL and believed that it would impact their pedagogical practice.

Participants demonstrated their change in perspective through their project submissions to the NFLRC's Project Repository. After the intensive summer institute, participants made significant changes to their original ideas in the project blueprints before submitting their project ideas to the NFLRC's Project Repository. Some participants changed their project idea completely, and as a result, changed one or more of the elements listed in the table below. Others kept the same idea, but changed some of the elements to transform their projects into high-quality projects or better reflect their teaching contexts. On average, most participants changed between five to six elements in their projects. Most of the elements that participants changed were items found in the product square, such as the driving question, audience, purpose, product and community partner. As shown in the table below, Ashley did not make any changes when

she submitted her project idea to the NFLRC’s Project Repository. Only 7 out of the 15 participants submitted projects to the NFLRC’s Project Repository. The changes made by these participants as they transitioned from their project ideas to their project blueprints are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

*Changes Made to Final Project Plans from Project Blueprints*

Participant	Aspect of Project that Changed						
	Driving Question	Audience	Purpose	Product	Community Partner	Entry Event	Context
Brittany	X	X	X		X		X
Ashley							
Hui Yin	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Hae				X		X	
Yu Yan	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Valeria	X	X	X	X	X		
Diego							X

In interviews and post-surveys, participants identified the changes they made and plan to make as a result of learning about the gold standard elements. Their comments regarding what they learned and how it will impact their teaching practices demonstrate the change in participants’ perception of PBL. Participants’ comments during interviews and the post-survey indicate that participants value the gold- standard elements, such as public product and authentic audience, because of their power to motivate students and connect them to the community. Moreover, this shift in perspective and newfound value in the gold standards has motivated participants to change their practices to benefit their students. For a few participants, their context changed and this affected other aspects of their project ideas. On the other hand, not

many of the participants changed their entry event or the teaching contexts for their projects (i.e., the grade level or school).

**Shift in Perspective of Self.** As participants discussed implementing PBL, many mentioned a shift in the way they view their role within PBL. These shifts also included their view of their role in the classroom, their beliefs for what they want their students to learn, and how they perceive their contribution to the institutions in which they work. For example, participants commented on the change brought on when learning about scaffolding a project and providing support for students.

*Hae: I tried, meaning I did projects with my classes for several years but PBL institute kind of inspired me in a way that I learned how to, or that I should scaffold students through the learning, it is not just dumping the project on students towards the end of the semester for them to finish. I got the idea that we should guide them through and that language learning should take place in the process of completing the project.*

As stated in Hae's comment, learning takes place for the students as they participate in the process of the project. Her comment also indicates that PBL is a process for language teachers, as her perspective has changed to reflect that PBL is not just about assigning a project. This suggests that language teachers may not fully understand their role in the process of PBL and projects.

Hae's comment was not the only comment to highlight possible misconceptions about PBL and language learning and teaching.

*Niko: I've learned so much how to facilitate activities, tasks, and managing a group.*

*Amber: I learned a lot not only about PBL, but also about how to teach and scaffold, and model thinking, etc.*

**Brittany:** *One of the many things I am weak at is scaffolding. I am inconsistent with it, in some activities I will scaffold extensively and then other activities I will just say go and do this complicated thing. Of course, my students always come back and surprise me with fantastic work regardless of how poor my instructions are. I will definitely be including more scaffolding; I am feeling more confident that I even know how to do that.*

These comments show a change in participants' professional perspectives that now includes a recognition of the need to scaffold and guide their students through the learning process. The emphasis that was placed on scaffolding during the institute seemed to help participants shift their thinking from focusing exclusively on the final product toward recognizing the opportunities for learning that are also present in the processes inherent in a PBL project.

In another instance of shift in participants' view of their role in the classroom, one participant commented that he views himself as a designer of learning experiences.

**Diego:** *As an educator, designer, I think now I see myself as a designer of the learning experience. Rather than just an instructor, the person that is at the front of the class. I've gone through a few changes throughout my whole practice and I know that it is best for the students and for myself part of that enriching part of being a lifelong learner. The students see that it is not just they but I myself as the teacher.*

This comment by Diego suggests that his participation in the institute has shifted his perspective on his role as a teacher and has helped him to think about how his teaching practices can benefit his students outside of the classroom. Another participant also identified how her participation in the institute has shifted her pedagogical practice.

**Ashley:** *But knowing that and believing in PBL's pedagogy and its mission and its effectiveness has really challenged me to step up and take those steps because I think it*

*will most benefit my students. It makes me a better teacher, it makes me a more aware teacher, or at least it is starting to make me that way, I think it is helping me to think bigger, more than just what I do I need to do to get through this semester. What will my students really take away from this, what skills, what life skills will they take, what kind of language and culture am I giving them that is something they can connect to and take with them when they leave my classroom.*

Ashley's comment indicates that her experience in the institute is improving her teaching in various ways. Her comments suggest that she is realizing that more is possible when it comes to language teaching, she is noticing things that she did not notice before, she is thinking beyond the classroom and considering how what she is teaching will benefit her students outside of the classroom.

Participants' comments indicate that the institute changed their beliefs about learning. Their new perspective has led them to consider the ways student learning will impact students outside of the classroom. Participants also view their role in student learning in a different way, they are more aware about how they can change their teaching practice to help students learn.

The change in participants' perspectives has also impacted their perceptions of their roles within their institutions. Participants plan to share the knowledge they gained while participating in the institute with others at their institutions.

***Ashley:** I will lead a 1.5 to 2 hour workshop at my home institution upon my return in which I will discuss elements of gold standard PBL projects. I will likely share certain resources/protocols that we learned as well.*

***Hana:** I plan to submit an abstract for panel on content-based teaching with my colleagues in Massachusetts.*



*Michael: I am going to work actively to train my teaching team to implement PBL in our curriculum, and will encourage them to take part in BIE workshops as well as next year's NFLRC webinars.*

It seems that participants have different plans as to how and where they will share their learning, however, they are all focusing on sharing it locally. Participants also plan to share a variety of aspects from the institute; these include the gold standard elements, resources and protocols, a content-based focus, and encouragement to participate in more learning. This implies that these are the aspects that the participants value the most and feel they are most relevant. These responses also suggest that participants' experiences during the institute were positive enough that they plan to continue to invest in PBL and to encourage others to learn more about it.

Participants' knowledge of gold standard elements has changed their perspective of PBL. As participants discussed what they learned during their participation in the institutes, two reoccurring themes surfaced 1) their shift in their perspective of PBL and 2) their shift in their perspective of their roles as teachers.

Participants' comments reflected a shift in their view of their roles that caused a change in their pedagogical beliefs and practices. Their experiences at the institute led them to consider things they had not previously thought about, such as viewing themselves as designers of learning activities. Comments made by participants suggest that they are willing to change their current practice by letting go of the traditional classroom setting where the teachers is the holder of all knowledge. Additionally, their comments indicate that the content presented at the institute was valuable enough that participants felt compelled to share their learning, and also encourage

## **Theme 2: Positive Aspects**

The second major theme focused on the aspects of the institute that participants recognized as helping them learn about PBL. Participants felt that the opportunities for discussions with both facilitators and participants had contributed to their learning by helping them think critically about their projects. They also appreciated giving and receiving feedback because it allowed them to see their project and ideas from a different perspective. Additionally, participants agreed that the mini-project was important because it was a powerful example of PBL and the transformative power of an immersive experience. Moreover, the technology tools presented were seen as both practical and applicable to their classroom contexts. Lastly, participants felt that the institute was a worthwhile experience because the facilitators and staff addressed the whole participant-cognitively, affectively and socially.

**Discussions.** When asked about the positive aspects of the intensive summer institute, many participants identified being able to share their ideas with fellow participants and institute facilitators. One of the ways that participants were able to share their ideas was through discussions. Most participants mentioned the various opportunities for discussions as positive because the exchanges helped them work through their questions and provided opportunities for participants to receive support from facilitators.

***Discussions with participants.*** Participants commented that discussions with other participants helped them think critically about their project.

*Ashley: I enjoyed hearing about the projects of other participants as hearing their ideas and thinking critically about their projects helped me think about my own.*

*Lan: But I really like the exchange with other teachers. Which in the one hand has forced myself to think harder than when I just follow the YouTube video clips and do some homework after that.*

It seems that interactions with other participants impacted participants affectively and cognitively. Participants enjoyed interacting with other participants and these interactions helped them think reflect and think critically about their projects and project ideas. In addition, participants felt that they learned when they were able to share their ideas with participants that had different perspectives because they were from different institutions and/or taught a different language.

*Natalya: I particularly enjoyed and learned from discussing my ideas with my colleagues from various language units and educational institutions. Discussing a college level project with a middle school teacher turned out to be the most insightful experience at the Institute.*

These feelings reflected in the data indicate that participants valued both sharing their ideas and listening to the ideas of other participants. It is evident that sharing their own ideas helped them work through their questions and issues.

**Diverse groupings.** At least one participant mentioned the importance of diversity.

*Brittany: As students do, we immediately chose seats in the workshop and stuck to them the entire time. Subsequently, every single time the coordinators said 'turn to the person sitting next to you,' we were talking to the same person. I found it much more helpful to get feedback from multiple people. Thus, I would recommend either forcing people to sit in different seats (also something I do with my students every few weeks to switch it up!) or else making a conscious effort to limit the 'turn to your partner' activities.*

However, other participants suggested that receiving feedback from multiple people needed to be balanced with feedback from groups working in similar contexts.

***Ashley:** Working with one core small group/partner throughout the week might help us dig deeper with our projects as those group members would know our projects really well, and vice versa. Working with group members who are in the same stages of the project, or who have similar projects to our own (with regard to language, topic, and/or language proficiency level), might also be helpful.*

***Natalya:** Maybe, dividing the group into high school and college instructors in some activities would have helped us focus specifically on our own institutional contexts.*

***Lan:** I would suggest that teachers with the same interest (from college/ high school), or same language teachers could have more team work time. In my opinion, we can come up with better discussion if we sit together then we have random pair work or group work. By saying this, I do not mean the diversity dynamic did not work. I have learnt a lot from other language teachers, and I got to know them better, but I really had a productive time with my team member who I could share so much both the challenges and efficiency as college teachers that I wish I had more time with a group like that.*

Although participants felt that it was important to share ideas with various participants, one common theme that also surfaced in their comments was the importance of consistency and relevance. In other words, as much as they valued exposure to diverse perspectives, they felt that what helped them make the most progress with their projects were opportunities to discuss them with a consistent group of people who were working in similar contexts, and therefore had similar needs and concerns.

Other responses also support the idea that participants felt that discussions were a positive aspect of the institute. For example, when asked what the NFLRC could do better, two

participants provided feedback suggesting a negative outcome when time was taken away from group collaboration.

*Valeria: Having groups to share our project ideas more often.*

*Hui Yin: We had more time in each group/pair sharing so we were not significantly cut off in the middle of a conversation or didn't have the chance to hear everyone in the group.*

From these responses, it is evident that participants highly valued their discussions with other participants for three reasons: 1) the discussions helped them think critically about their projects, 2) participants learned from sharing ideas with colleagues with diverse perspectives, and 3) the discussions with colleagues working in similar contexts facilitated project progress.

**Discussions with facilitators.** Some participants noted that in addition to discussions with colleagues, having time to discuss their project with the institute facilitators and NFLRC staff was also helpful in developing project ideas.

*Amber: Conversations with other participants and facilitators really helped me to refine my project.*

*Ashley: Conversations with facilitators and participants helped shape my ideas for future projects.*

*Natalya: Another valuable experience was the opportunity to sit down with our wonderful facilitators and brainstorm ideas for my project.*

Project ideas were not the only topic of discussion with facilitators, at least one participant valued support received for other concerns.

***Michael:** For me, as a returning PBL Institute participant, simply having time to sit and talk with Co-Leaders about PBL projects I have designed and am currently designing, as well as other issues we face in our school.*

As participants were able to talk with facilitators they felt listened to and that the issues they faced were addressed by someone with more experience with PBL.

***Niko:** Also, the leaders are great, they listen to our concerns, and give me lots of insightful questions so that I can think a little bit more or help me to guide my thoughts or shift my way of thinking, hopefully in a better way.*

***Diego:** Definitely that is part of the reasons for coming here and you get the opportunity to have a one of one conversation with the experts in the field.*

***Brittany:** I cannot stress enough how helpful the staff was. They were always willing to help and offered incredibly useful feedback.*

From the data, it is evident that participants perceived their discussions with the intensive summer institute facilitators and the NFLRC staff as beneficial for three main reasons: 1) participants valued the direct access to expertise, 2) the discussions led to project development and refinement, and 3) facilitators' questions helped participants think critically about their pedagogical practice.

**Feedback.** Another way that participants were able to share ideas was through the activities that required them to give and receive feedback on their project ideas. During the intensive summer institute, participants were asked to give and receive feedback on their projects in a variety of different ways. These include gallery walks, where participants posted their idea on a small poster and then participants walked around, reviewed the ideas of others and wrote comments with feedback on the poster or on sticky notes and stuck them to the poster. Another

activity was the Critical Friends Protocol where small groups of participants stated their ideas quickly, responded to questions, and received oral feedback using the scaffolded instructions they had been given. Participants seemed to value the variety and frequency of feedback opportunities provided and the type feedback they received.

**Feedback from participants.** Participants mentioned that it was helpful to receive feedback from multiple people and in various ways.

**Lan:** *I learned from the various ways we got feedback from other participants and workshop facilitators.*

**Brittany:** *I found it much more helpful to get feedback from multiple people.*

**Niko:** *My most valuable experience was being able to share my product square infographic with my peers and then being able to receive feedback for my thought process, final product and audience; but especially designing a project in which my language learners would find interest and authentic care.*

Three main themes were apparent in participants' comments regarding feedback, 1) participants enjoyed the many opportunities to receive feedback, 2) they valued feedback on both their thinking process and on the product the thinking produced, and 3) they felt that feedback helped them gain a better understanding of the learner perspective.

Many participants also indicated that they were able to provide and receive more valuable feedback during the structured activities designed for providing feedback.

**Brittany:** *Additionally, I really appreciated how you structured how to give feedback.*

*Though most participants didn't seem to actually follow your guidelines, I think the ones that did gave really valuable feedback (and not just 'this is good' or 'this won't work').*

*Ashley: I liked the structured activities and the way we received and gave feedback on projects.*

Both participants mention that the feedback was more valuable when participants followed the guidelines provided by the facilitators. The structured feedback activities were valued because they helped participants receive feedback that made a difference in their project. It seems that participants were able to learn from the feedback when it was carefully structured, was given by participants and institute staff, and addressed the product and process. The opportunities to receive and give feedback extended beyond their own project plans because participants gave each other feedback as they worked on the mini-project.

**Mini-Project.** Participants mentioned various aspects of the mini-project that positively impacted their learning of PBL. These include that the mini-project was an immersive experience, it provided a community connection, and was an example of PBL.

**Immersive experience.** Participants indicated that the mini-project was an immersive experience that helped them see PBL from the student perspective.

*Hui Yin: The immersive learning experience helps me learning by doing it!*

*Amber: The mini-project was a great way to really put us in the shoes of students and give us a common immersive experience.*

*Hae: In the end, it was a great immersion experience to learn what PBL is about.*

*Zhi Ruo: It helped me to think and feel as a student, very precious experience.*

Before the intensive summer institute, many participants had a conceptual understanding of PBL, but after the mini-project many felt that they had a better understanding of how to implement PBL. The mini-project was an immersive experience that allowed them to see PBL in action and recognize the student perspective. These comments suggest that the mini-project



changed participants' perspectives to acknowledge that student learning can be impacted through an immersive experience. This experience also helped them to see how students might feel and what support students might need as they participate in a project.

**Community connection.** Other reoccurring comments that participants made in regards to the mini-project were comments addressing the connections to the community.

**Mateo:** *It helped me get the "bigger picture" of implementing PBL and knowing how it would ultimately benefit the Chinese community at large visiting the Hawaii's Plantation Village (HPV).*

**Lan:** *I found it the perfect way to learn how to keep close to the community and turn the learning experience into a useful product to the community.*

**Brittany:** *To me, the best possible way to start off intensive summer institute was the way you did: with a Project-Based Language Learning project. It makes total sense to me. The best way to understand PBL, after all, is to actually do it. I really, really enjoyed this activity. I thought the scaffolding was great, the Jia Jia story became a reference that we could all use throughout intensive summer institute (and have a good laugh) and it immediately connected us to the Hawaiian community.*

Through the comments it is evident that the mini-project helped participants feel connected to the community of Chinese speakers in Hawai'i. This connection led participants to realize that authenticity has the power to motivate students. In other words, through participation in the mini-project participants recognized the importance of having an authentic audience and an authentic product as they implement PBL.

**Example of PBL.** More importantly, the participants found the mini-project to be beneficial because it allowed them to experience PBL first-hand and thus provided them with concrete examples of scaffolding.

**Lan:** *I was really impressed with the way our workshop facilitator, Richard, led the workshop and the mini-project, with Chinese language experience. It has been the great example of how we could execute and teach language through our project-based learning. I could see how the teachers should use the target language and keep students practice and work together in the target language. I particularly found the mini-project helpful and very educational.*

**Ashley:** *It was nice to see a project done for a novice level learner.*

**Valeria:** *It really helped self-experiencing a PBL project. Now I know what makes a project a good project.*

**Yu Yan:** *It put me in a learner's shoes. It helped me see areas students need help with, and by seeing how Richard scaffolding us all the way, I learned how to scaffold my students.*

**Michael:** *I think the design of the Hawaii's Plantation Village activity book was really powerful to get participants to take full part in a PBL activity, to model the power of this pedagogical approach.*

The mini-project was valuable in helping participants see how to incorporate language learning with learning content in a community-based setting. Experiencing PBL helped participants gain a better understanding of how they could scaffold their students through a project regardless of students' proficiency levels. The mini-project not only provided the participants with an example of PBL but it also allowed them to see concrete examples of scaffolding for novice students.

**Technology Tools.** Participants commented that the technology tools presented positively impacted their learning because they recognize technology as something that was applicable to their pedagogical practice.

***Brittany:** I also think you integrated new technologies into the intensive summer institute quite well. I plan on using some of the tools (Flipgrid, Canva) in my own classroom, and they were all explained thoroughly and clearly.*

***Hana:** I think that one of the great advantages of this institute and two years ago is that we get so many new technologies, like software that Karen always introduces us to a bunch of new ones. So I have some idea of using some of that technology outside of the PBL portion to my language courses.*

***Diego:** Right now the one that caught my attention was Flipgrid that Susan showcased. Because I definitely see it, in a closed environment within the classroom where students can post what they are doing and it can be a checking throughout the different stages of the project and see how it is. That way also students can see how other students are doing and how their project is coming along. Definitely, the resources that have been provided are useful, I haven't tried all of them but at least you have the option and then you decide which ones fit in.*

***Natalya:** I got to try a number of useful online tools that can be used in PBL (Decision Wheel, Canva, etc.), which was the most useful and practical part of the Institute for me.*

It seems that participants value technology and are interested in implementing it in their classrooms. The comments indicate that participants not only valued being introduced to new tools but they also appreciated the opportunities to explore the tools and find ways to use them.

**Facilitators and staff.** Participants mentioned that each of the facilitators and staff members contributed to the institute in unique ways.

***Yu Yan:** The teamwork of the faculty and staff was outstanding. You complemented each other so well to give us such an amazing experience academically, leisurely, and in every sense of it. Thank you so much for making this possible. You guys rock!*

***Hui Yin:** Karen is organized and affirmative. I also love how Gary efficiently and effectively took care of the logistics. Susan is very kind in supporting us, and Richard is sharp and intelligent. Juan is friendly in giving us a warm welcome and learning experience. Da-Xia is very caring and makes sure that we have what we need. The whole faculty/staff team is just great.*

***Natalya:** This should be at the top of this box - GARY IS FANTASTIC! And the food was excellent and the personal attention he gave each of us during the Institute was phenomenal. His friendly demeanor and his willingness to speak with us and provide information about various places in Oahu made this Institute twice as great it would have been if Gary were not there for us. Same applies everyone else at NFLRC. They truly went the extra mile to accommodate our needs in all possible ways. Not only did I learn a LOT, but I also felt at home for the entire duration of the Institute. The NFLRC staff did an excellent job providing appropriate facilities (rooms, etc.) for this Institute.*

These comments demonstrate not only how the facilitators and staff made the participants feel but also that they were able to address many aspects of the participants as individuals. It seems that each facilitator and staff member played a role in reaching the participants in all aspects- cognitively, affectively, and socially. Participants' comments reflect that some of the aspects that

contributed to their positive experiences were physical aspects with no direct connection to their learning, such as the food provided and the information about sightseeing.

**Cognitive aspects.** The facilitators addressed participants' cognitive needs through the sharing of pedagogical expertise. The facilitators taught by example as they guided participants through the thinking process and modeled teaching and scaffolding techniques. This was helpful for participants because they modeled practical skills and techniques.

**Hae:** *Presenters definitely showed their expertise. Overall, it was well organized.*

**Amber:** *Watching Karen and Susan teach and scaffold things for us or make their thinking explicit helped me realize how helpful those things are for students. You chose great facilitators! I learned a lot not only about PBL, but also about how to teach and scaffold, and model thinking, etc.*

**Niko:** *I think that you did such a great job having us experience PBL. I felt that the whole institute was like a PBL project, the participants as students and facilitators as teachers. I've learned so much how to facilitate activities, tasks, and managing a group.*

**Brittany:** *I really appreciated Karen walking us through her thought process in real-time. If she was unsuccessful at, say, getting our attention, she was able to immediately break down, "See, here's what I did wrong, I didn't scaffold this so now you guys are confused and talking to each other to clarify instead of doing the activity." It was really great to have those meta-moments.*

These comments make it evident that participants were not only interested in theoretical expertise but also pedagogical expertise. Participants were able to learn pedagogical principles when the facilitators modeled effective strategies, such as making their thinking explicit, practicing classroom management strategies, and scaffolding.

**Affective aspects.** Facilitators provided for the affective needs of participants by providing help and support. The following are comments participants made that demonstrate how facilitators and staff made them feel.

**Hae:** *Facilitators/organizers were so approachable and helpful!*

**Lan:** *I feel supported 200% from preparation to the completion of the workshop.*

**Brittany:** *I cannot stress enough how helpful the staff was. They were always willing to help and offered incredibly useful feedback.*

**Yu Yan:** *I felt like I was supported all the way by faculty and colleagues.*

**Ashley:** *Logistics were well organized and all instructors/facilitators responded quickly and thoroughly (both in person and via email) throughout the intensive summer institute experience. All of the instructors/facilitators were extremely helpful and kind in general. I feel like I learned a lot and have grown professionally. I'm looking forward to implementing new strategies and projects in the future! Thank you!*

It seems that how the facilitators and staff members made participants feel contributed, in some part, to the participants' perception of helpfulness. It could be that so many participants commented on feeling supported because they normally do not feel supported in their professional learning. The comments also indicate that participants felt the need for support, this suggests that the tasks seemed challenging enough to require additional support. Overall, the comments make it evident that support enhanced participants' professional learning.

**Social aspects.** Two main aspects of the intensive summer institute seemed to meet the social needs of participants, the opportunities for interaction and the inclusion of the weekend. During the institute, participants had opportunities to interact with each other, staff, and facilitators during breakfast and breaks. During these times, the NFLRC provided participants

with refreshments and foods authentic to Hawai'i. Many participants mentioned these opportunities as beneficial because they were socially engaging.

***Hae:** Food was great!*

***Zhi Ruo:** Food is irresistible!!!*

***Diego:** Food, and setting a weekend in the middle of the Institute. Facilitators and scheduling. Thank you!*

Additionally, the intensive summer institute was structured to start on a Wednesday and end a week later. As a result, participants were able to take a break from attending sessions on Saturday and Sunday. Participants appreciated being able to take a break from the sessions to explore the island during the weekend.

***Valeria:** It was great to have the weekend to do a brain break.*

***Hana:** It was good to have a weekend during the institute*

***Zhi Ruo:** Definitely keep the weekend in between!*

***Brittany:** I absolutely loved having a weekend included and strongly recommend keeping that format next year.*

The institute was structured in manner that allowed participants' to have their cognitive, affective, and social needs met.

The opportunities to interact with other participants and facilitators were among the aspects that positively impacted participant learning of PBL. They valued the opportunity to discuss their ideas and projects with participants and facilitators because it helped them think critically about their projects and led to project development. Another opportunity to interact with others that participants valued was the opportunity to receive and provide feedback.

Participants also valued the immersive experience of the mini-project, they felt that the mini-

project helped transform their understanding of PBL from theoretical to concrete. Additional aspects of the institute the participants valued include the technology tools presented and that facilitators and staff addressed the whole participant.

### **Theme 3: Negative Aspects**

The third reoccurring theme found in the data analysis included the aspects that negatively impacted participant learning about PBL. One of the aspects that participants mentioned as an aspect that may have gotten in the way of their learning was the structure of the institute. Participants mentioned various instances when they felt the need for more structure and scaffolding. Among these comments, participants mentioned they wanted more time spent exploring the technology tools and more time to processing the content presented. Moreover, participants were left wanting more information regarding the career pathways, the final project submission, and assessment.

**Structure.** When asked about aspects that negatively impacted their ability to learn about PBL, participants reported the division between individual work time and general group activities. Participants expressed frustration at having to alternate between individual work time and group activities throughout the day.

***Natalya:** I also think that we could have done more work on our individual projects if that part of the Institute was structured a bit better.*

***Michael:** I think everything was done very well; my only suggestion is that some of the activities we participants were tasked to do could have been planned out more in advance so that they could be run more seamlessly.*

***Zhi Ruo:** Switching between general activities and individual work time was somewhat challenging, and sometimes interrupted my thought process.*



**Brittany:** *Additionally, it was somewhat disorienting to rapidly switch back and forth between specific activities and general 'work time.' I personally would have liked structure.*

As a way to address this frustration, one participant suggested changing the structure to include a distinct division between individual work time and the group activities.

**Ashley:** *Perhaps structuring the day so that we were exposed to general activities/resources in the morning, for example, and then having time to work on our individual projects (either independently or with our "core group") in the afternoon would help us mentally be prepared to switch gears in our thinking.*

Other participants felt that they could have benefited from more structure during individual work time.

**Brittany:** *I personally would have liked structure. For instance, after the rubric presentation, it would have been nice to say 'okay, now spend the next 45 minutes beginning work on your rubric for your project.' Obviously we're all adults and if we need to work on something else we will, but it would have been nice to have a signpost of what you suggest working on.*

**Hana:** *It seems to me that there is too much "your own" time. Sometimes I did not know what to do (although it seems that the other people know what to do).*

**Amber:** *I felt that perhaps we could have spent more time focused on our own projects in those early days, and particularly on getting alignment in our product squares. For me, I realized from the feedback on my initial product square that I needed to go back to the drawing board, which I think I had time to do on Day 3 or 4. It would have been great if that was brought forward somehow, as it was difficult to create scaffolding tasks for an*

*authentic text (and do some of the other activities) when my project focus was still up in the air.*

Comments made by participants suggest that they wanted more structure and guidance when it came to their individual projects, managing their time, and transitioning between activities. It seems that the content was new to the participants and they were not sure how to apply the content from the activities to their own project during individual work time. In other words, participants wanted more structure and guidance in order to verify their uncertainty about applying the concepts they were learning about. In addition to expressing the need for more time to process the new content, participants expressed frustration about switching back and forth between content presentations to individual work time. This implies that participants may have wanted longer blocks of time to work without being interrupted.

**Technology Tools.** Because there were many technology tools and resources presented throughout the intensive summer institute, participants did not always have the opportunity to use them all extensively. Participants expressed the desire to spend more time working through the various technology tools presented. Some felt they needed more time because of their lack of experience with technology.

*Niko: Because I am not very good at technology in general, I felt a little difficult to complete the tasks and I wished more time to work through it. However, I wasn't too bothered by that in the end because there is so much to learn and so much information to go through, there wasn't enough time to worry too much.*

Others mentioned that it would be beneficial to be given time to use the tools in order to work on their project.

***Hae:** So many great resources were introduced during sessions, but some sessions seemed more like lectures. It would be more helpful if participants could have time to work on our project by using these resources.*

It seems that because participants feel that technology is important, they valued the presentation of technology tools and resources. They also felt that they would have benefited from spending more time exploring the tools and using them to further their projects.

**Content.** For some participants, the amount of content presented at the intensive summer institute was overwhelming. Although they felt that the content was valuable, participants commented on the overload of information presented.

***Amber:** While the input and resources in the first few days were interesting and useful, I felt there was a lot of input and what was lacking was time to process and think about how they fit in with our project or into our classes more generally, but I'm glad I have those resources and can explore them in more depth when I need to.*

***Michael:** Both two years ago and this year, I sometimes feel that we are presented with too much content - most participants need to work and reflect upon the nuts and bolts of getting their projects started, finding an effective entry event, developing a project square, etc., so some of the topics on making career connections or assessment, though important for Gold Standard BIE, often felt like too much to take in.*

These comments indicate that because participants perceived the content as important, they wanted to spend more time to process and apply it.

Others mentioned the execution of specific activities that they did not find as helpful in learning about PBL.

**Brittany:** *Yu Yan's rubric presentation was not particularly effective. The SLOs of her SLO activity were not entirely clear; why make SLOs on a class level utilizing incredibly specific criteria from a career pathway? Her examples of good rubrics also did not seem to actually be great examples. I would reexamine the rubric presentation and, in fact, day; it's such an important aspect of PBL and I felt that I left with, somehow, a worse understanding.*

**Natalya:** *One segment devoted to planning group work was somewhat useless, particularly, because the materials presented to us were more applicable to a business situation than to a class of language learners who meet 2-3 times a week for one hour and then do not see each other outside of class. Last but not least, I did not like the movie and the fact that we all had to watch it at the end of a long day and then discuss it with some random folks coming from other academic disciplines. I personally did not learn much from this movie. This is a unique context of a charter school, and the things they do at that school cannot be replicated in other educational contexts.*

**Hana:** *For example, today's presentation on making a boat, I have no idea why that part was included in PBL, because for me it was not PBL at all. It was more of a counterexample of PBL from my point of view; this is not a type of project that you should do. It was more task based, the task is building the boat. I did not understand what was that for, why it has to be in English for ESL. It was more like English speakers learning Marshall language, building the boat to learn the culture and do something with the native people, I would understand. But this is the ESL class in Spokane, Washington. The purpose was totally unclear to me, it was more like see this is a wonderful task-based learning but this is not PBL. I thought that that was the presentation but it might not be,*

*I mean Karen said they didn't follow gold standard, so I didn't understand the purpose at all.*

These comments indicate that participants felt that the activities were not helpful because they were unable to apply the information presented in the activities to their classroom contexts. It also seems that participants wanted more examples that clearly demonstrate the aspects of PBL they were learning about, the comments indicate that counter-examples were not effective because participants were unable to interpret them on their own.

**Career Pathways.** Although this year's focus for the intensive summer institute was the inclusion of career pathways into PBL, at the conclusion of the institute many participants commented on the lack of content on career pathways.

***Natalya:** One critique would be about this year's focus on career pathways. I felt that more could have been done with this innovative twist in PBL. The facilitators did not seem interested in having us develop units specifically targeted a one career skill or sets of skills. Instead they took a very general approach to professional skills. Also, some materials could have better adapted to this year's theme. This year's materials were very similar to last year's online institute modules. I expected more NEW content - more specific content.*

***Hana:** I expected more on career pathway connection.*

Some participants indicated that they left the intensive summer institute without knowing how to integrate career pathways into PBL.

***Hana:** Also, another thing is that I really thought that this institute, the current one, was how to integrate Career Clusters, but so far there was a very small portion of it and I still don't understand how. The Career Clusters, I didn't know about the existence at all, so I*

*thought that was the reason that I thought I should come back a second time because it was not mentioned at all the first time. I spent a good amount of time with Yu Yan yesterday individually but I still couldn't understand why they featured Career Clusters for this institute.*

To address this issue, one participant suggested including more examples of how to use career pathways.

**Hui Yin:** *Maybe we could have had more examples.*

A few participants mentioned not understanding the purpose for integrating career pathways into PBL.

**Brittany:** *I like using the career pathways to craft my project but I'm not convinced it's entirely necessary.*

**Michael:** *I've perhaps used references to career pathways less in my project designs simply because of the age group I am primarily dealing with (MS students).*

It seems that prior to attending the intensive summer institute, participants were interested in learning about Career Clusters and recognized them as important. However, these comments suggest that after the intensive summer institute, participants struggled with connecting career pathways to their classroom contexts and did not see it as relevant. This may have been due to the fact that many participants seemed to come with their own ideas about how that content would be addressed during the institute.

**Information provided.** On the last day of the intensive summer institute, participants were given instructions about submitting their projects to the NFLRC's PBL Repository. The PBL Repository is a website where intensive summer institute participants from all years can share their project ideas and instructions for implementing the project. When asked if they had

received adequate information prior to the intensive summer institute, participants commented that they would have benefited from receiving information about the PBL Repository earlier in the intensive summer institute.

***Brittany:** I didn't particularly know what to expect in terms of working on one final project. Though it would have been nice to start the process sooner. I felt like we received information relatively late.*

***Yu Yan:** It was adequate. I just did not know we were not going to revisit the project blueprint.*

To answer this concern, two participants suggested providing instructions about the PBL Repository submission sooner in the intensive summer institute.

***Yu Yan:** If you had showed me the final product expected of us on day one of the workshop, I think I would be more confident to venture into new topics instead of playing safe.*

***Ashley:** I would have liked to know how to upload my project to the repository earlier in the week. It was challenging not to know what we were building toward (in format and project elements) until the last day.*

It seems evident that participants wanted to submit their projects to the PBL Repository and would have liked to receive the information regarding it sooner in the intensive summer institute. The timing of receiving the information impacted participants' project plans, it seems that some participants would have applied the information they were learning differently if they had known the goal of the final result. Others would have been more inclined to take risks and try new project ideas. Facilitators might consider providing this information towards the middle of the intensive summer institute.

**Assessment.** At the conclusion of the intensive summer institute, some participants wanted to learn more about the assessment portion of PBL.

*Brittany: We could have spent considerably more time in the intensive summer institute on assessment.*

*Niko: I sometime wish that we could discuss more about assessment.*

*Mateo: We could have discussed more about assessments for implemented PBL.*

These comments indicate that participants left the intensive summer institute with questions and concerns about the assessment portion of PBL. Facilitators may want to provide follow-up sessions or address these questions before the end of future institutes.

After interviewing and surveying participants, it seems that they wanted more guidance and concrete examples when it came to applying new content to their classroom contexts and their projects. It also seems that participants struggled to see the value in the new content presented when the information seemed too distant from their teaching contexts. For instance, they struggled with the career pathways and left the institute wondering if the career pathways were truly relevant. They also wanted more information regarding the final project submission and more about implementing assessment in PBL. The lack of this information impacted participants' ability to integrate the new content they were learning into their project ideas and prevented them from trying new ideas.

#### **Theme 4: Questions**

During the interviews and post-surveys, many participants presented questions about PBL that were not addressed during the institute. These questions indicated that there remained a level of uncertainty with participants about implementing PBL. Many participants wondered



about the sustainability of PBL in a world language classroom because of the numerous requirements of high-quality PBL, one being the authentic problem and audience.

**Brittany:** *I have a lot of questions about PBL. Part of it feels to me like it is really unsustainable. I wonder how if we are teaching in the same community, year after year, semester after semester how will we find new real world problems to be solved. I mean I am not so naïve to think that all problems will be solved but it seems like a lot of work to build an archive of projects that can't be repeated. If you've addressed the problem, then you've addressed the problem, so I think that is sort of difficult.*

Others questioned the sustainability of PBL because of the workload for the teacher.

**Ashley:** *Even though I want to be doing PBL the whole year, it feels very unsustainable because it is so much to think about, so many moving pieces. It is a lot of work so I just wonder, is there a teacher out there who is doing PBL, every day, every year in all of her or his classes?*

Participants also raised concerns about the continuance of student learning after completing the projects and moving onto additional language courses.

**Hae:** *...language programs are not ran by one person, there are other instructors, and students move from one level to another. We need some kind of consistency and coherence so it should be a collaborative process among instructors. We need mutual understanding or common understanding among instructors to make it happen otherwise, I don't know how it can be really helpful for students. I tried to implement PBL but then what is next for my students?*

**Brittany:** *I also think, I hadn't really heard about PBL before the institute, so I feel like an island in my dept., if I am the only one doing PBL, how will students build on the*

*lessons they get from the projects if I am the only one doing it. How do we ensure that they haven't forgotten the skills they gained through the project? Which I guess is an ongoing issue, I guess if you are using a different style, how do you ensure continuity in their education?*

Additionally, participants had questions about different aspects of implementing PBL. For instance, participants wanted more information about implementing PBL with novice learners and how the target language should be incorporated.

***Ashley:** Adapting projects for novice learners, that question become even more relevant because they have such little language and even Spanish speakers in whatever field we are investigating it would be difficult for them talk with them because they (students) don't have all the language skills they need or the resources that I might I pull may not be easily adapted for Spanish novice.*

***Hae:** Through the presentations, they showed the examples from previous participants. Showed how it can be done and something that has been done, inspired me...I still wonder about the feasibility of PBL, especially for lower level classes. The idea of projects, we watched the movie last week, and it was pretty inspiring but it still left me puzzled about the language component. I guess we can do a small project and we can modify the final project in a way that lower level students can do.*

***Niko:** I think I would like and I wish I would have more conversation or discussion about the language portion. How we can incorporate language into PBL. I think I have a better understanding about PBL, I think. But with the language portion, what are the important points that we sort of need to remember or learn? I know it varies depending on level and on language and so forth, but I believe there is some common learning that we can learn*

*together. I haven't really seen that portion, even though we have experienced with the Chinese activity. But I still need more guide, not as much guide but more discussion about language portion.*

It seems that some participants believed that it is possible to implement PBL with novice learners despite their low levels of proficiency; however, they were still not sure about the 'how'. Even after seeing examples from other teachers, participants wanted more information about scaffolding the language and how they could implement PBL with novice students. Participants needed more help recognizing ways that activities could be adapted for novice students and more details in how to scaffold the language.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described participants' responses to surveys and interviews regarding their experience in the intensive summer institute. Participants' responses were categorized into four main themes: what participants learned during the institute, the aspects that positively impacted participant learning, the aspects that negatively impacted participant learning and questions participants had at the conclusion of the institute.

Participants came into the institute believing that they had been implementing PBL projects in their classrooms, that they had designed effective project ideas during the online institute, and that they understood the gold standard elements of PBL. However, data from the interviews and post-institute surveys revealed that by the end of the intensive summer institute, participants felt they had developed a better understanding of gold standard PBL, and had identified gaps in their attempts to implement it prior to attending the intensive summer institute.

At the intensive summer institute, participants identified activities that both helped and hindered their learning of PBL. The activities that participants identified as being helpful

included opportunities for discussion, opportunities for feedback, the mini-project, the presentation of technology tools and the facilitators and staff. Similarly, participants identified activities that seemed to hinder learning; these included the structure, content load, the focus on career pathways and lack of information provided about the final project plan. Both the positive and negative experiences contributed to participant learning.

Participants' experiences in the intensive summer institute seemed to change their pedagogical beliefs and practices in numerous ways. Participants planned to include the gold standard elements as they implement PBL, to help students gain skills needed outside of the classroom, and to change their role in the classroom. Although participants left the intensive summer institute with a better understanding of PBL and plans to change their classroom practices, they also left wondering about the feasibility of PBL and the importance of some of the content presented. Participants' experiences raise questions about how professional development can provide the experiences participants need to change their practices and how to address the challenges they face as they implement PBL.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion & Implications

#### **Research Question 1: What did participants learn about PBL from the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC?**

One focus of this study was to understand what participants learned about PBL after participating in the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC. When asked about what they learned, most participants mentioned the gold standard elements, the elements needed to implement high-quality PBL, as defined by the Buck Institute for Education (BIE).

At the intensive summer institute, the NFLRC addressed the lack of a universal definition of PBL by presenting the gold standard elements. The gold standard elements provided a definition of PBL, but more importantly, they created a roadmap for participants. They served as a guide because they clearly identified concrete components a project should have in order to be considered high-quality PBL and provided a process for participants to follow.

During the interviews, most participants commented on how their definition of PBL had changed. They discussed their previous implementation of projects and how those projects did not include the gold standard elements. Participants remarked that after learning about the gold standard elements, they not only had a better understanding of PBL, but also had plans to implement the gold standard elements in future projects. In other words, learning about the gold standard elements was transformative for participants because it changed their understanding of PBL, and thus affected their classroom practices.

As participants discussed the gold standard elements, they repeatedly mentioned the public product and real audience. It could be that participants mentioned the public product and real audience, two aspects that comprise one of the eight gold standard elements, because these

aspects seem to be the aspects that have the biggest impact on classroom practice. Because learning about eight gold standard elements means a lot of new content, participants may have selected those elements they thought would impact their practice fastest or most powerfully and focused on just those. These two aspects could also have been mentioned more than the other elements because they are also part of the Product Square that participants refined throughout the institute.

**Shift in perspective of teachers' role.** Learning about the gold standard elements seemed to shift participants' view of their role in the classroom. Teachers' beliefs guide their classroom practice and these beliefs are in large part influenced by "personal experiences, vicarious experiences and social-cultural influences" (Ertmer, 2005, p. 32). Ertmer also adds that in order for teachers to implement new methods, teachers need to believe that the method will lead to student learning; it is not enough for them to be informed of the benefits.

When participants commented on their perspective shift, they mentioned that they no longer viewed themselves as the holders of knowledge, but instead as designers of learning activities. Other comments participants made reflected their realization that not everything has to follow the textbook or a syllabus, and that students' choices can influence the outcome of projects. Participants also recognized that there is a bigger purpose to their classroom than teaching a language, they wanted their students to gain skills and knowledge that would impact them outside the classroom. This suggests that participants' experiences in the institute were effective in leading them to change their pedagogical beliefs about the curriculum, their role as educators, and what they want for their students. One experience that was effective in changing participants' beliefs was the mini-project. The mini-project helped participants experience the gold standard elements and it made them see a project from the perspective of a student.

Research on professional development states that teachers' beliefs and practices are highly influenced by their learning experiences (Dooley, 2008). If professional development on PBL aims to change teachers' beliefs about their role in the learning process, professional development should include activities that give teachers experiences as students and demonstrate different approaches to curriculum and the role of educators.

**Public product and real audience.** The perspective shift in participants' view of their role led participants to consider the changes they could make and the changes they felt would be most beneficial for their students. The gold standard element that seemed to stand out the most among participants was the public product. This element includes two aspects: the public product and the presentation to a real audience. These two were the aspects participants mentioned repeatedly and recognized as the factors that would motivate students. Many of the participants reflected on the activities they had implemented in the past and commented that they had realized that those activities were not motivating. This potential for motivation provided by the authenticity of a product and audience is verified in current PBL research (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Condliffe et al., 2017). Other comments reflect that participants have begun considering the perspectives of their students and the ways they can motivate students. Participants' comments regarding motivation suggest that motivating students is a concern for foreign language teachers. Professional development in PBL should address student motivation by helping participants recognize how to engage students through PBL.

Participants mentioned the PBL examples of other teachers shared throughout the institute inspired them because the examples showed them that it is possible to have a public product and a real audience. Because these examples were helpful in helping participants see how they could implement these motivational aspects, future professional development should

include positive examples that demonstrate how participants can implement these aspects within their classroom contexts.

**Language aspect of PBL.** Another way that learning about the gold standard elements was transformative for participants was that it changed their view of language learning. Participants mentioned that PBL is a process for students in which language learning takes place as students complete the project. The product, although important, is not the purpose of PBL. They mentioned that previously, they had not considered PBL as a way for students to learn the language. It seems that prior to the institute, participants had different ideas about what PBL entails, however, a concrete definition of PBL helped them gain a better understanding of the language learning process within PBL.

Although participants commented on shifting the way they view language learning, very few participants made comments regarding the language aspect of PBL. Some comments were in regards to the mini-project presentation in Chinese led by one of the facilitators and the fact that the mini-project was a great example of a project implemented with novice learners. Only three participants mentioned that they left wondering how to implement PBL with novice learners. The fact that not many participants mentioned the language aspect is surprising considering that the participants are all language teachers and that the purpose was to learn how to implement PBL in a language classroom.

The lack of comments regarding language might be due to teachers' beliefs about using the target language. The amount of classroom time spent in the target language is such a big part of a teachers' beliefs and embedded practice, that they might not have considered changing how they address the use of the target language. It seems that their experiences at the institute made them realize that it is possible to implement PBL with novice learners. However, they also



might not have considered more of the language aspect because they are not planning on changing their current classroom practice. This suggests that their experiences in the institute may not have been enough to encourage this thinking or change in practice.

The fourth research question asked: In what ways is participant learning reflected in the changes they made as they developed their project blueprints into final project plans? The changes that participants made are consistent with the results from Question 1. The gold standard elements seemed to stand out the most to participants as they worked on their project plans.

The gold standard elements provided clear guidelines for participants as they planned a project for their students. Because of the transformative impact that these elements had on the participants' definition of and understanding of PBL and the possible implications on their classroom practices, all teachers interested in implementing PBL would greatly benefit from learning about the gold standard elements.

### **Research Question 2: Which activities/aspects of the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC positively impacted participants' learning of PBL?**

Another focus of this study was to understand which activities positively impacted participants' learning of PBL. Because the purpose of the institute was to teach participants about PBL, it was important to understand what activities participants felt were effective in helping them learn about PBL. Researchers agree that professional development is most effective when it is "active, social and related to practice" (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 703).

**Active and social professional development activities.** Four examples of interactive activities were discussions, presentations of technology tools, the visit to the Hawaiian Plantation Village, and opportunities for feedback. The participants mentioned that having discussions were valuable because they helped them consider aspects of their projects they had not previously

thought about. Other comments reflected that discussions were opportunities to meet face-to-face with experts and other teachers interested in PBL, and emphasized that the face-to-face aspect was not possible through the online institute. These discussions were opportunities for participants to actively interact with others and discuss the content in relation to their classroom practice. The fact that these discussions were connected to classroom practice seemed to help participants work through and solidify ideas.

Most participants considered the technology tools presentations as practical and useful because they were able to practice using the tools and see the possible applications as they developed their projects. Another example of an effective activity facilitated by the NFLRC was a visit to the Hawaiian Plantation Village. Many participants mentioned that this was a positive experience because of the student perspective it provided, the connection to the community, and that it helped them recognize the value of PBL. It seems that this experience helped participants have a better understanding of PBL and recognize how they could apply similar attributes to their classroom in order to help their students have positive experiences. Facilitators implemented gallery walks and the Critical Friends Protocol as a means for participants to provide and receive feedback. These activities made it possible for participants to participate in professional development with activities that were active, social, and related to practice.

This study adds additional support to Webster-Wright's (2009) idea that professional development facilitators should consider all participants' needs. Some aspects of the institute mentioned by participants as positively impacting their learning of PBL included the way facilitators and staff made them feel, the scheduled breaks, and the inclusion of a weekend. Participants' comments regarding the support and help received from facilitators and staff, suggest that how the facilitators and staff made them feel was just as important and impactful as

the content presented. This could be because the way that facilitators and staff made them feel also lowered their affective filter, which made it possible for them to get outside of their comfort zone to learn about PBL.

Similarly, the participants identified the scheduled daily breaks as a positive aspect. During these breaks they were provided with food, given the opportunity to socialize, and the chance to take a break from the content. It could be that by not having to worry about food, they were able to concentrate on the content presented. It could also be that by having the chance to interact with others in a non-threatening setting, their affective filter was lowered and they felt more comfortable asking questions and participating in the workshop.

Many of the participants mentioned that they appreciated the weekend break in the middle of the institute. Most of the participants were visitors to the island and spent the weekend sightseeing. The weekend seemed like a much-needed break from the institute because it provided participants with a brain break and time to process the information presented. It may have been that addressing their needs outside of learning freed up more cognitive space for them to focus on the learning tasks because they were not worried about things like how to work in time for sightseeing.

It appears that participants valued activities that addressed many of their physical needs, not only the activities that involved learning. These activities were just as important to them as the activities that addressed their social needs, provided active learning, and contextualized input. Because of the impact that addressing the participants holistically had on participant learning of PBL, facilitators of future professional development workshops should factor in the needs of the whole participant. Although research clearly states that professional development is effective when it is “social, active and related to practice” (Webster-Write, 2009, p. 703), more

research is needed that addresses other needs of teachers participating in professional development.

**Research Question 3: What activities/aspects of the professional development facilitated by the NFLRC negatively impacted participants' learning of PBL?**

This study also focused on the activities and aspects of the professional development that negatively impacted participants' learning of PBL. The aspects that did not contribute as much to participants' learning of PBL are just as important to consider as the aspects that helped participants learn. The aspects that were not as effective at helping participants learn about PBL can provide useful feedback for facilitators as they prepare for future institutes. Generally, the comments regarding the aspects that negatively impacted participants' learning of PBL seemed to be about activities with content that was too distant from the participants' classroom practice and where too much new content was presented.

**Too distant from classroom practice.** Previous studies on professional development in the field of education have shown the need for professional development to be related to practice, and not just based on theory (Webster-Wright, 2009). In other words, the content has to be contextualized. It is not enough for the content to be related to practice; the participants also need to be able to see how it fits into their classroom context (Webster-Write, 2009). Additionally, participants need to feel that the content is feasible, something that would work in their classroom, and something that they feel capable of implementing.

Comments given by participants during interviews and post-surveys reflect that some activities were not perceived as useful by participants because they were unable to see the connections between some of the workshop content and their classroom practices. Participants mentioned activities as being ineffective, unclear, or lacking in purpose when the content was not

contextualized. It seems that the lack of connection between the content and their classroom practice made the content seem infeasible.

Although the wording in participants' comments varied, participants repeatedly mentioned that certain aspects of the content did not apply to their classroom context. For instance, when discussing the career pathway focus of this year's institute, one participant mentioned that the career pathways are not very relevant to the grade level of the students he works with. Another participant mentioned the project management session was practical for a business setting, but not applicable to a classroom setting. Another example is that of a participant feeling that watching a documentary about a project-based school was not useful because that school was unique and therefore the concepts they applied could not be replicated at other institutions.

Providing clear examples and helping the participants make connections between the content and their classrooms might increase the effectiveness of the professional development. When examples did not fit the participants' contexts, helping participants brainstorm ways they could modify the principles in the examples to fit their context may have also helped them feel that the content was feasible. Participants also mentioned that they expected more content on career pathways. This could be because they had preconceived ideas on how that content would be presented at the institute.

**Too much new content.** The lack of connection could also be attributed to the amount of new content the participants were receiving. Some participants felt overwhelmed with the new content that was presented and wanted more time to process it. It seems that the amount of content also contributed to the participants not being able to make connections between the content and their classroom practices. Perhaps adding more time for reflection into the structure

of the institute or diminishing the amount of content would help the participants process the information. One participant, who had also attended a previous institute, commented on the amount of new content presented. It seems that even when some of the content was a repetition from the previous year, he still felt overwhelmed. This indicates that it takes time to process new information, let alone begin to apply it into classroom practice. Thomas (2000) also states that when working on implementing new teaching strategies, teachers normally “focus on one or two aspects” of a new method (p. 25).

If the purpose of the institute is to have participants implement PBL, then future institutes should consider reducing the amount of content to the most essential elements, adding more time for reflection, and providing more concrete examples. This may help participants feel more comfortable with the content and promote change in their classroom practice. Overall, the aspects that participants identified as negatively impacting their learning of PBL can serve as useful feedback for other institutions who may wish to offer similar PBL institutes.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

There were three main pedagogical implications that stemmed from this study. One pedagogical implication is for professional development facilitators to limit the amount of content presented and provide more time for participant reflection and self-assessment. By selecting less content to present, it would allow participants to grasp the content more fully and better understand the content. It would also allow more time for reflection and self-assessment. Less new content would also minimize the cognitive demand and allow participants to spend more time making connections between the content presented and ways they can apply it to their classroom practice. The gold standard elements seemed to be enough new content for the participants along with the technology tools, teaching strategies, and other resources presented.

The second pedagogical implication is that facilitators should consider participants as multifaceted individuals when planning learning activities. Participants at the intensive summer institute valued the aspects that did not directly relate to the learning activities, such as breaks, food provided, and how the facilitators and staff made them feel, as much as the learning activities. By including aspects that addressed the participants as a whole, participants are able to focus on the learning activities and feel more comfortable engaging with others during the professional development.

The third implication is that language needs to be brought to the forefront and addressed explicitly during a PBL professional development workshop. Given the fact that the participants were all language teachers interested in implementing PBL, it is surprising that very few comments were about language. It is possible that participants automatically thought about language because they are language teachers. Another, more likely, possibility is that participants did not recognize the language as a relevant aspect. It could be that they were not entirely convinced that PBL could be implemented with novice students. Highlighting this aspect might also help language teachers see how the other content presented during the workshop was directly relevant to their individual classroom contexts.

Because of their beliefs, teachers already think they know how they want to address language use; therefore, they failed to consider the language aspect. Many participants mentioned the mini-project presentation with surprise that it could be done in the target language. This suggests that one possibility for shifting teachers' beliefs is to give them personal experiences outside their area of expertise.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study derived from the data collection process. A pre-institute survey regarding participants' knowledge and experience with PBL was administered after the online institute. However, because not many participants took the survey, it made it difficult to compare pre- and post-survey responses. In addition, the pre-survey questions needed to be more parallel to the post-survey questions. Another limitation was that participants were not contacted after their participation in the institute. It would have been helpful to have follow-up interviews or surveys to better gauge how participants actually implemented their learning in their classrooms once they returned home from the intensive summer institute.

After analyzing the data, one unexpected finding was that participants identified various activities as positively impacting their learning that did not directly relate to learning activities. Because the connection between participant learning and addressing participants' affective and social needs was not a focus of the study, this limited the data available regarding this possible connection.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study sought to find out which aspects and activities of an intensive summer institute helped or hindered participants' learning of PBL. One surprising response was that many participants positively commented on aspects of the institute that did not directly relate to learning activities during the summer institute. These positive aspects referred to the breaks, food, and the way facilitators and staff made participants feel. This demonstrates that the institute included activities that addressed participants' learning and also their affective and social needs. Because of the positive effect these activities had on participants' attitudes, experience and learning, future research on professional development should further explore the impact of



addressing participants as a whole, factoring in affective and social aspects of the professional development experience that extend beyond planned learning activities.

Another recommendation for future research involves professional development that presents an established definition of PBL. A clear takeaway from this study was that many participants had various definitions of PBL, something that is also evident in other PBL research. The NFLRC chose the gold standard elements as a way to define PBL for participants. The gold standard elements were clearly effective in helping participants have an established definition regardless of their prior knowledge, which seemed to provide anchors for their project development. However, we need more research on the two foreign language pieces of PBL, such as using the target language and including cultural authenticity.

Moreover, some of the experiences in the intensive summer institute were powerful in changing participants' perspectives regarding pedagogical beliefs. Therefore, more research is needed on how current professional development experiences can impact change in teachers' beliefs and classroom practice. This research should also include how, and if, participants are implementing their learning when they return to their classrooms.

## **Conclusion**

One focus of this study was to gain an understanding of what participants learned about PBL while participating in the online institute and the intensive summer institute. Most of the participants mentioned learning about the gold standard elements and participating in the mini-project enhanced their practice and shifted the way they planned PBL projects. However, more research aimed at understanding other aspects of PBL, such as using the target language, the inclusion of cultural authenticity, and how professional development that addresses participants as a whole impacts classroom practice would build on these findings. Overall, the findings

suggest that professional development plays a critical role in changing teachers' beliefs that lead to classroom change.

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## Appendix A – Pre-Survey Questions

### Pre-Online Institute Survey Questions

#### Likert-Scale Questions

Highly Knowledgeable		Somewhat Knowledgeable		No Knowledge
5	4	3	2	1

1. Please indicate your existing knowledge of Project-Based Language Learning.

Highly Experienced		Somewhat Experienced		No Experience
5	4	3	2	1

2. Please indicate your experience with implementing Project-Based Language Learning in the classroom.

#### Open-Ended Questions

1. What language do you teach?
2. What levels and grades do you teach?
3. How did you get involved with PBL?
4. How would you define PBL?
5. What elements of PBL do you implement in your classroom?
6. What questions do you have about PBL?

## Appendix B – Post Survey

**PART A - OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS** Please take the time to respond to the following openended questions. Your comments will help participants in future Summer Institutes and assist us greatly in preparing our evaluation report for the 2017 Summer Institute.

\* indicates a required field •

A1) Please describe your most valuable learning experience(s) at the summer institute (e.g., a specific session, a conversation with a workshop facilitator / another participant, the project work, etc.).\*

A2) What was the most challenging aspect of (or experience in) this workshop? \*

A3) What could we have done better at the workshop? \*

A4) What did we do particularly well? \*

B1) The Fundamentals of PBL Online Institute that I completed previously adequately prepared me for the 2017 Pathways to PBL Intensive Summer Institute. \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B1) •

B2) The information about the Summer Institute that I received prior to attending the sessions was adequate for my needs \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B2) •

B3) The workshop was well organized and well run \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B3) •

B4) The staff was helpful \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B4) •

B5) The workshop facilities and technical support were adequate \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •



Comment (B5) •

B6) The length of the workshop (6 days) was appropriate \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B6) •

B7) I enjoyed the overall format of the workshop (mini-PBL project experience, lectures, scaffolding sessions, project work, etc.) \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B7) •

B8) I found the variety of perspectives represented by workshop leaders, facilitators, and participants valuable\*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B8) •

B9) Participating in this Intensive Summer Institute will have a transformative impact on my work as an educator \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B9) •

B10) I plan to share the insights I have gained in this Intensive Summer Institute with my colleagues (specify some possible means for sharing in the Comments field) \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B10) •

B11) I found the materials provided or created to be valuable\*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B11) •

B12) I found the process of learning about, developing, and discussing PBL projects relevant to my professional development \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B12) •

B13) I was satisfied with the facilitation of the summer institute\*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B13) •

B14) Overall, my expectations of the summer institute were met \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (B14) •

**PART C - LEARNING OUTCOMES** Please rate the following statements using a 5-point scale where 1 indicates 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicates 'strongly agree.' Feel free to add any comments to clarify or enhance your responses.

\* indicates a required field •

C1) The summer institute enhanced my knowledge of fundamental principles of PBL \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (C1) •

C2) The summer institute strengthened my knowledge about career pathways \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (C2) •

C3) The summer institute increased my understanding of integrating technology in PBL \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (C3) •

C4) The summer institute broadened my knowledge and skills for developing PBL materials \*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (C4) •

C5) The summer institute improved my knowledge about assessment in PBL\*

1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree •

Comment (C5) •

## **PART D - BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

\* indicates a required field •

D1) What is your position title? \* •

D2) Years of foreign language teaching experience \* •

D3) What language(s) do you teach? \*

• MAHALO FOR YOUR TIME! Please press the Submit button below to submit your evaluation form answers.

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL-WORLD LANGUAGE EDUCATORS

### **Instructions**

*Good morning (afternoon). My name is Florencia. Thank you for coming. The purpose of the interview is to get your perspective as a world language educator participating in professional development regarding Project-based Language Learning. There are no right or wrong answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.*

### **Audio Recorder Instructions**

*If it is okay with you, I will be audio-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential.*

### **Consent Form Instructions**

*Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read this consent form.*

### ***Background information***

1. Please describe your current role as an educator. What language do you teach? Where do you teach? What levels? What grades?
2. Briefly describe your teaching experience.
3. How did you get involved with PBLL?

### ***Perspective on NFLRC Professional Development***

4. What aspects of your participation in the NFLRC institutes have positively/negatively impacted your ability to implement PBLL in your classroom?
5. Have you notice any changes in how you think about PBLL as you have participated in the trainings? If so, please describe them.
6. In what ways will you take what you have learned about PBLL and apply it in your classroom?
7. Will you make any changes in your teaching practices as a result of your participation in the NFLRC institutes? If so, please describe the changes. If not, please explain why not.
8. What questions do you still have about PBLL?

## Appendix D – Online Recruitment Email

Online Symposium Registrants,

My name is Florencia Westenskow and I am a graduate student in the Master's in Spanish Pedagogy Program at Brigham Young University. In preparation for writing my thesis, I am conducting a research project about Project-Based Language Learning in collaboration with the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The purpose of my study is to investigate teachers' experiences as they learn about and implement Project-Based Language Learning. I am asking you to participate because you are enrolled in the Online Institute designed and facilitated by the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief survey during and after your participation in the Online Institute. In addition, your Project blueprint may be studied by the research team.

Participation is completely voluntary and any answers you provide will be kept anonymous.

If you are willing to participate, please click on the link for the survey and additional information.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [florenciawestenskow@gmail.com](mailto:florenciawestenskow@gmail.com).

Thank you,

Florencia Westenskow  
M.A. Student Investigator