Project-Based Learning (PBL) Through Magazine Making

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What is PBL?

Project-based learning (PBL) is an instructional approach that presents learners with an authentic problem or challenge that involves collaboration, extensive research, and reflection/assessment in order to overcome the problem/challenge. In PBL, the focus is on the process of doing the project rather than the project itself, encouraging a deeper level of engagement, cultivating a deeper knowledge of content as well as a wider variety of skills.

Why PBL for SLA?

Advantages of PBL:
- Student-centered
- Promotes active learning
- Meaningful/Authentic
- Fosters learner autonomy
- Interdisciplinary
- Produces tangible results

In second language acquisition (SLA), PBL can be utilized to integrate language with content and skills. The L2 becomes a means for overcoming a challenge, and as the learner investigates a topic, they will encounter language content (words, phrases and grammar) within a meaningful and relevant framework. PBL can also encourage the use of all four major language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

PBL in motion: Magazine Making (Why?)

Challenging Problem/Question: the task requires creating a magazine that is appealing both visually and in terms of content. Also, the body articles must be written with the target audience in mind, so that the content is both meaningful and accessible.

Sustained inquiry: students must do in-depth research related to their groups' topic of choice. This may involve in-person interviews and conducting surveys in addition to traditional literature review.

Authenticity: the goal was to create and publish a magazine that will address a real issue concerning university life. The authentic nature of the problem makes the learning process more meaningful and relevant to the learner.
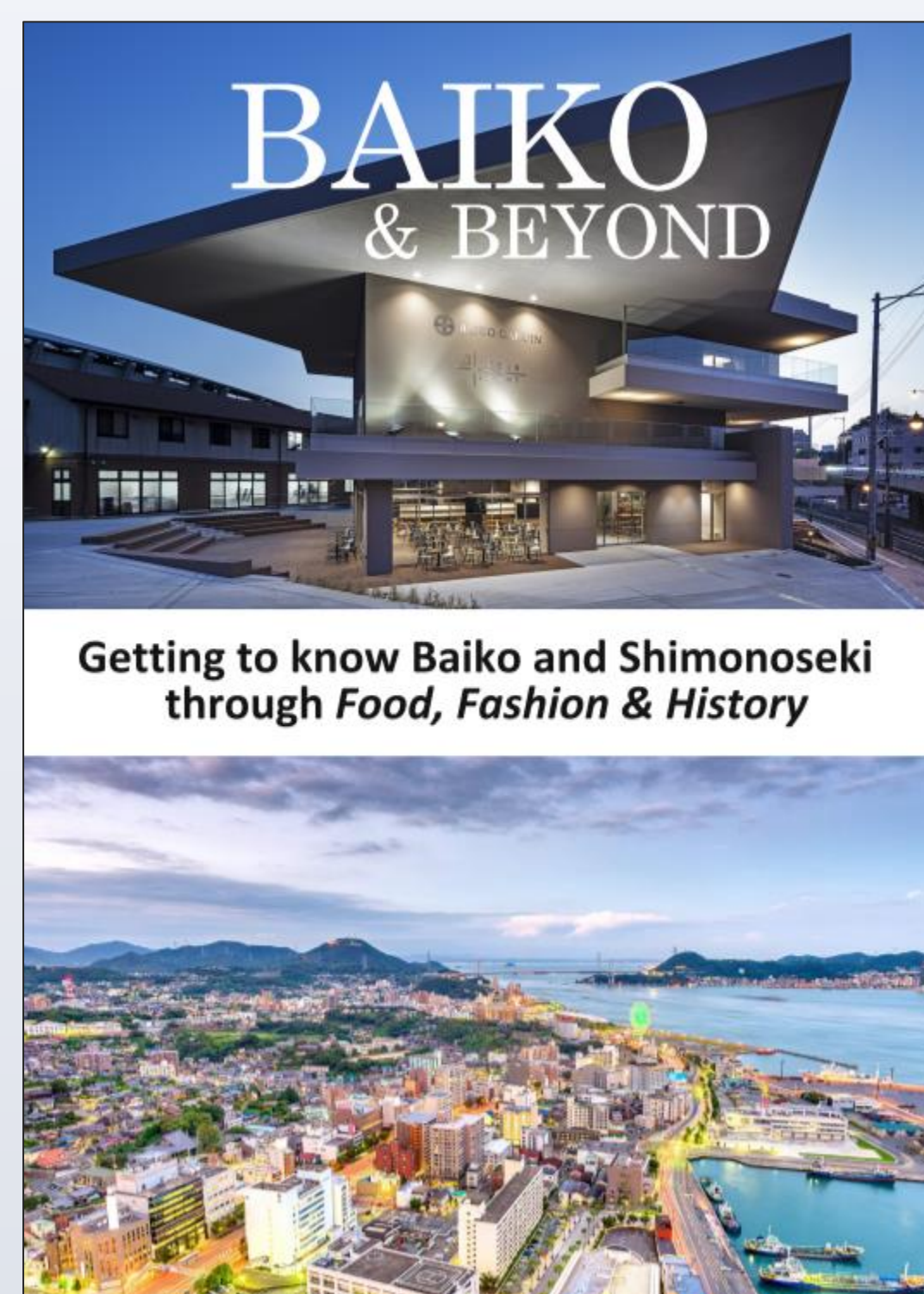
Student Voice & Choice: each group was given the choice to select their own topic as long as it fits within the overall theme of the magazine. They also had full autonomy in terms of layout and design choices. Lastly, each student is assigned a specific role (e.g. grammar editing, layout/design, photos, etc.) within his/her group.

Reflection: throughout the project, each group is required to reflect on and present their experiences and findings on a regular basis. They can monitor and evaluate their experience, using the feedback they receive from their peers.
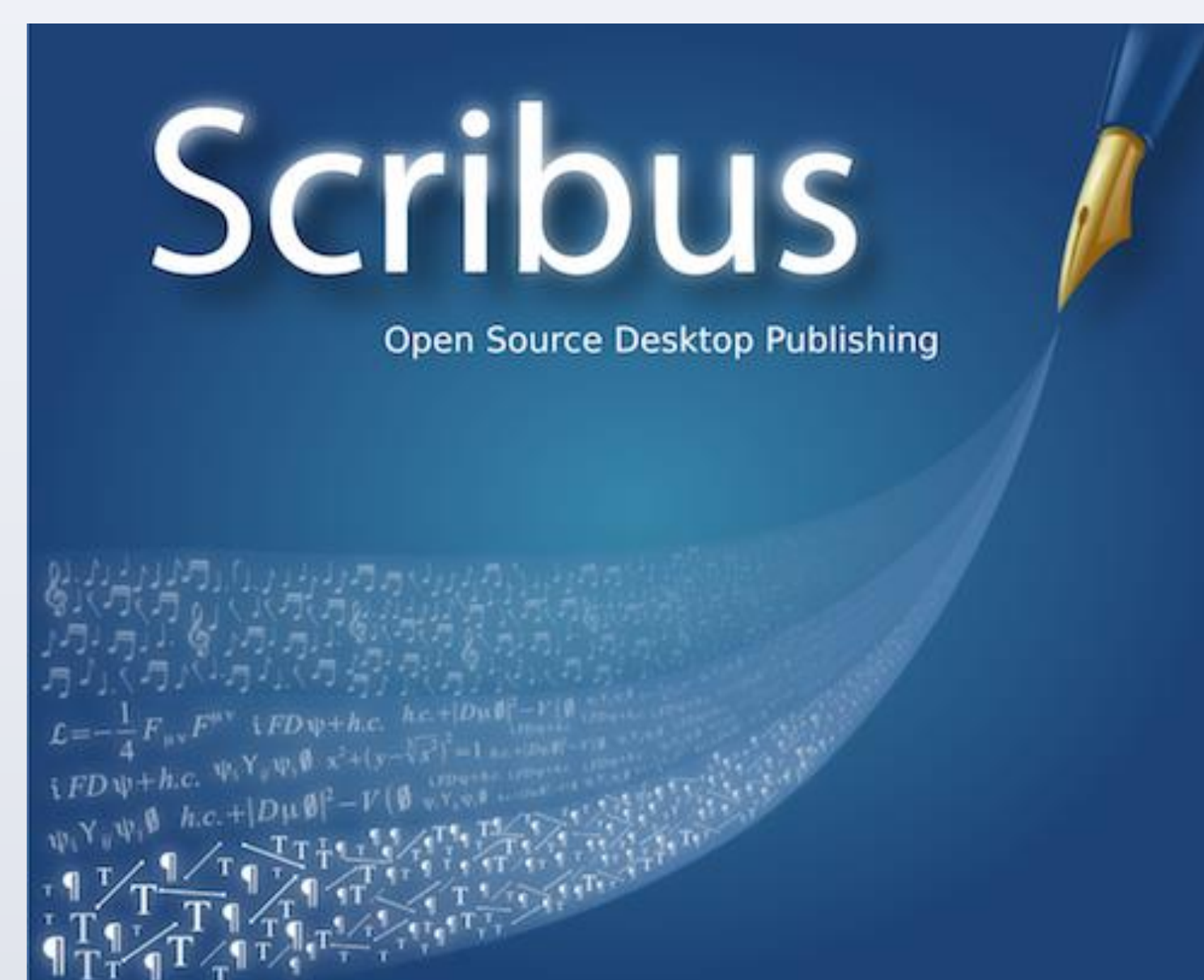
Critique & Revision: during presentations, each group is required to provide feedback in addition to the feedback that's provided by the instructor. Also, the instructor provides continual guidance throughout the project.

Public Product: the goal is to not just create but publish a magazine that will be made available to other students through the cooperation of the university library.
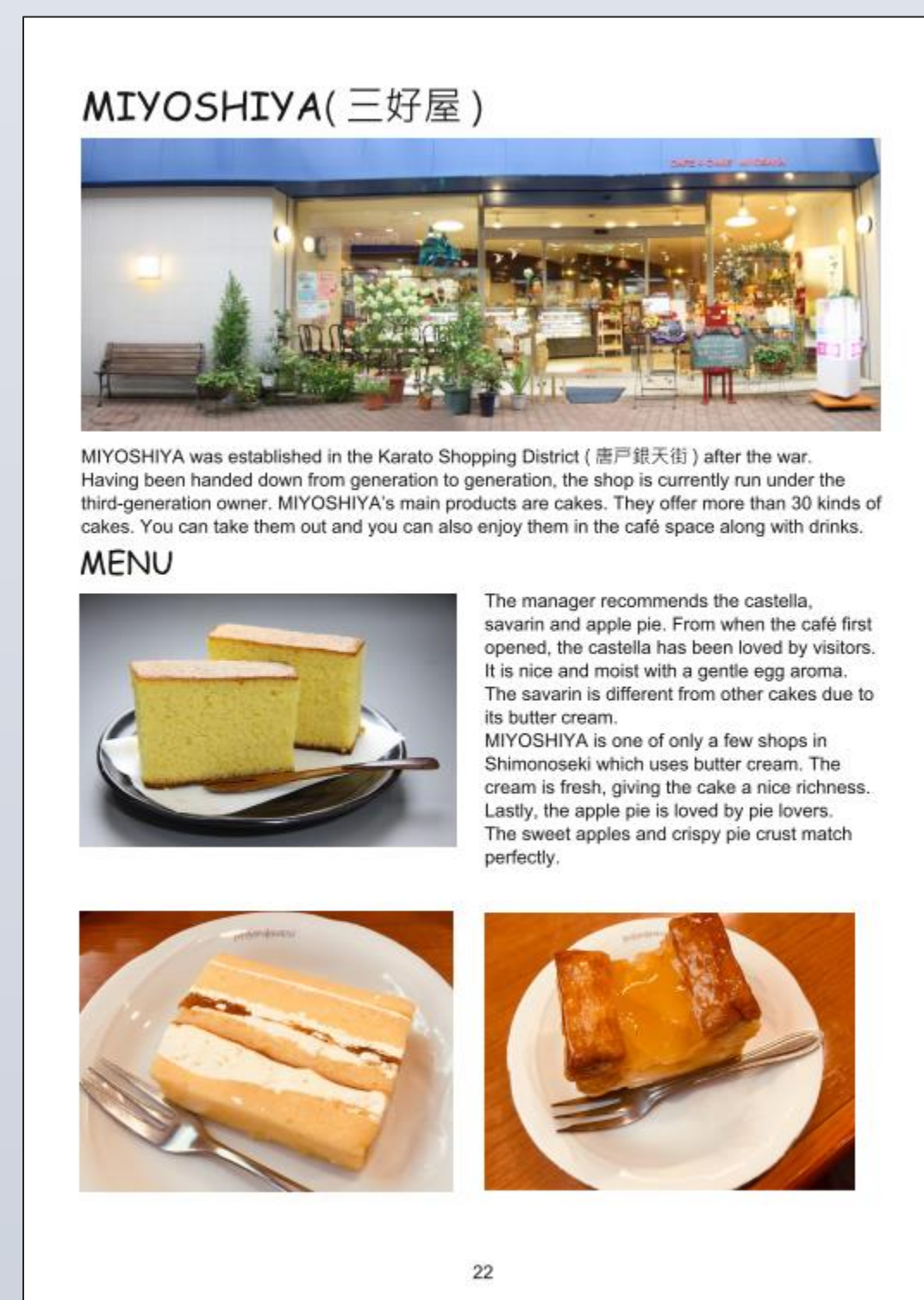
(Larmer, Setting the Standard for Project-Based Learning)

Magazine Making PBL (schedule)

Phase 1 (prepare)

Duration: 3 weeks

- Set the stage (explain PBL)
- Set magazine theme
- Form groups
- Choose group topics
- Decide member roles
- Scribus tutorial
- Develop research plan
- Present plan

Phase 2 (research)

Duration: 5 weeks

- Research tutorial (Quantitative/Qualitative)
- Conduct surveys
- Conduct interviews
- Literature review
- Collect data
- Analyze data
- Present findings
- Reflect on findings

Phase 3 (create)

Duration: 5 weeks

- Choose layout/design
- Choose titles
- Choose graphics
- Create table of contents
- Write body articles
- Present content
- The editing process

Phase 4 (present)

Duration: 2 weeks

- Compile all the pages
- Final edit (layout consistency)
- Number pages
- Decide paper quality
- Decide
- Print/Publish
- Present in class
- Display to public

NOTE: The schedule above is based on a 15-week seminar course that meets for 90 minutes per week.

Project Details

Course: seminar (research)
Grade level: 4th year
No. of students: 17
No. of groups: 4 (4-5 members per group)
Duration: one semester (15 weeks)

Result: at the end of the semester, a 56-page magazine was printed. A copy was given to each participating student, and other copies were placed in the university library and in other locations for perusal.

Challenges in PBL

Time constraints: the nature of PBL requires for a challenge to be presented which involves an extended time of consideration and deliberation.

Background constraints: the learner may be unfamiliar with the theory and workings behind PBL. It may take a long time for the learner to adjust to such a setting, where they are required to take ownership over their own learning process.

Lack of knowledge/skills: the completion of such projects requires higher-order thinking skills that go beyond rote-learning. Learners must analyze, evaluate and create in order to successful accomplish the tasks set before them. In addition, the learner needs an L2 proficiency level that's high enough to accomplish such tasks. Lastly, projects such as making a magazine requires one to be familiar with publishing software (Scribus in this case).

Variability: due to the complex nature of the challenges, variability in problems and obstacles that arise is inevitable. This can make the PBL experience very discouraging and overwhelming at times.

Conclusions

In light of the challenges mentioned above, there are many considerations that need to be made before embarking on a PBL project. Despite these challenges, however, advances in technology and the globalization of society has made such types of learning more relevant and feasible than ever. By properly setting the stage and ensuring that the learners are equipped with the foundational skills needed to accomplish such projects, PBL can be an effective means in cultivating language content and skills in an engaging manner in any language classroom.

References

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