APPLICATION OF PROJECT BASED LEARNING IN STUDENT'S ENGAGEMENT IN ADVERTISING COURSE

Ida Puteri Mahsan [1]**, Sathish Kumar A/L Manoharan** [2] **, Muliyati Mat Alim** [3]**, Norlis Ismail** [4]

[1] Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, MALAYSIA, idam@utar.edu.my
[2] Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, MALAYSIA, sathish@utar.edu.my
[3] Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, MALAYSIA, muliyati@utar.edu.my
[4] Tunku Abdul Rahman, MALAYSIA, norlis@utar.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Project-based learning is defined as a complex task based on challenging questions or problems that involves students in design, problem solving, decision making or investigative activities. It gives students the opportunity to work in a relatively independent manner over extended periods of time and resulting in realistic products and presentations. Thomas (2000) projected five features of Project-Based Learning (PBL). They are; curriculum based, student driven, constructive investigations, autonomy and realism. In PBL the project is part of the teaching and learning strategy. Students explore and learn the concept and application through the project which means projects that are not designed based on curriculum will not be considered as PBL (Thomas,2000). The projects may focus on activities, products, performances and presentations that challenge the cognitive and learning skills of the students. There must be connectivity between academic work , life and the work skills of the students in completing the project (Railsback, 2002). Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Advertising programme can be linked to the PBL since most of the course required students to do presentation, group project for advertising campaign, develop new product and etc. Projects should also characterized by constructive investigation that involves planning, decision making, problem solving and discovery. This exploratory study looked at the application of PBL on student engagement in learning and teaching in Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Advertising programme. This study identified kind of project used by lecturer and to examine its effectiveness to maximize student's engagement in learning by four criteria, namely responsible learning, strategic learning, collaborative, and energized by learning (Learning Point Associates, 2004). One of course offered namely Sales Promotion Design has been chosen whereby the real project was implemented and student's are given a real design competition as a projects. The result reveals that students viewed working with real project using digital technology as more engaging and entertaining.

Key words: PBL, Advertising programme, engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Project-based learning is an instructional method centered on the learner. Instead of using a rigid lesson plan that directs a learner down a specific path of learning outcomes or objectives, project-based learning allows in-depth investigation of a topic worth learning more about (Harris & Katz, 2001). Through the construction of a personally-meaningful artifact, which may be a play, a multimedia presentation or a poem, learners represent what they've learned (Harel & Papert, 1991; Kafai & Resnick, 1996). In addition, learners typically have more autonomy over what they learn, maintaining interest and motivating learners to take more responsibility for their learning (Tassinari, 1996; Wolk, 1994; Worthy, 2000). With more autonomy, learners "shape their projects to fit their own interests and abilities" (Moursund, 1998, p. 4). So, project-based learning and the construction of artifacts enable the expression of diversity in learners, such as interests, abilities and learning styles. With the new approach in teaching and learning, Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Advertising programme can be linked to the PBL since most of the course required students to do presentation, project for advertising campaign, develop new product and etc. Projects should also characterized by constructive investigation that involves planning, decision making, problem solving and discovery. The concepts of PBL are considered be able to meet the objectives by Sales Promotion Design subject. Objectives of the unit are as follows :

1. To enhance students' knowledge of sales promotion design as an important part of marketing
2. To develop students' creativity and practical skills in producing artwork for promotional purposes
3. To enhance students' ability in manipulating software programs in assignments and projects

This is an exploratory that looks at the application of PBL on student engagement in learning and teaching in Advertising course. This study is to identify kind of project used by lecturer and to examine its effectiveness to maximize student's engagement in learning. Student engagement is characterized by four criteria, namely responsible learning, strategic learning, collaborative, and energized by learning (Learning Point Associates, 2004). Collaborative or cooperative learning may also employed peer reviews or group brainstorming session. Engaged students should be able to work collaboratively in a group and play their own role as group members (Learning Point Associates, 2004b).

In this study, researcher selected one of course in Advertising programme namely Sales Promotion Design whereby the real project was implemented and student's are supposed to use software programs in assignments and projects. Studies suggest that students viewed working with technology as more engaging and entertaining (Heafner, 2004). As mentioned by Thomas (2000), the projects have to be realistic and a real challenge to the students. Therefore, students were assigned the project given by industry in the beginning of term as a part of their continuous assessment. They were required to discuss, plan and research, visualize new ideas using current technology and do presentation.

The topics, tasks, roles and the products that are produced or presented are realistic or logical for implementation (Thomas, 2000).

The progress of the project was reported to instructor every week and they were given consultation in group. For examples, if they lack of skill using software, the instructor thought them steps and techniques in using the software. They were given seven weeks to complete the project. As for the assessment, instructor and external examiners were invited to grad students mainly on the originality of idea, content, creative execution, presentation skills and teamwork. All presentations were conducted in one day and this enables each group to overview among their classmate presentation. Energised by learning, students find excitement in learning and are intrinsically motivated by their own interest and enjoyment in learning and they can also be motivated extrinsically by grades and competition (Learning Point Associates, 2004).

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

As for Advertising course in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, students were given the task to explore different types of hands-on project. Most of the course work breakdown was 70% for assignment and 30% for final exam. They then needed to present their project specifically in advertising approach in a well printed document and oral presentation. Students are expected to explore variety of designing techniques, software and produce original artwork based on their own ideas and fulfill the project's requirement within the deadline. The challenge is on the educators' part to vary their teaching techniques in order to increase student engagement in learning. The existing research suggests that project based learning generally has a positive impact on the learning experience. It increases the level of student attendance, attention and engagement in the learning process (Thomas, 2000).

The main objectives of this study are to determine the effect of project-based learning on the students' engagement and to improve the teaching and learning experience. The two pertinent research questions for this study are: (1) How does project-based learning affect the engagement of students in their learning process? (2) How can a teacher use projects to maximise a student's engagement in learning? Project-based learning known as a model that organizes learning around projects whereby the teaching and learning will be more interesting and interactive if students are given an opportunity to explore a real project such as entering competition as compare to a common traditional classroom activity.

Students were given the real project of Mascot Design competition organized by Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, the task to motivate them to win the competition encouraging them to put more effort. The subject called Sales Promotion Design was chosen to apply the concept of project-based learning for year 2 students. The objectives of the unit are to enhance students' knowledge of sales promotion design as an important part of marketing, to develop students' creativity and practical skills in producing artwork for promotional purposes and to enhance students' ability in manipulating software programs in assignments and projects.

This project-based learning which we are emphasizing is on the instructional approach in which the students work cooperatively over time to create a product, presentation, or performance in their advertising units. The two essential components of project-based learning are an engaging and motivating question and a product that meaningfully addresses that question. There are few problems that the advertising students face during their learning curve.Firstly the students were never explored to the real industry task and they accommodate the assignments to fit their own interests and abilities. Students rarely collect and analyze information, make discoveries, and report on their assignments. Students conduct poor research using multiple sources of information and mostly the research comes from the internet. Most of the assignments keep the students from cutting across a number of disciplines. They would keep themselves focused on one disciplines. By introducing this project-based learning the students will be able to draw on a broad range of knowledge and skills on the targeted audiences. The project extends over a significant period of time. The project also involves the design and development of a product, presentation, or performance that can be used or viewed by others and this will be a tremendous added experience for the students.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Studies comparing learning outcomes for students taught via project-based learning versus traditional instruction show that when implemented well, PBL increases long-term retention of content, helps students perform as well as or better than traditional learners in high-stakes tests, improves problem-solving and collaboration skills, and improves students' attitudes towards learning (Strobel & van Barneveld, 2009; Walker & Leary, 2009).

The mascot project aligns with students' skills and interests and it requires learning clearly defined content and skills (e.g. using mind map, or exemplars from local designers and students). The structured also learned to work in groups, a group of three to four students, with diverse skill levels and interdependent roles in teamwork rewards and individual accountability, based on student growth for the mascot project. Since the mascot was a industry project, the students was challenged by multiple learning outcomes such as problem-solving, content, collaboration with art flair. Students also were required to present to encourage participation and signal social value. The bottom-line of the project based learning for the Sales Promotion Design was a successful outcome because they had the opportunity to collaborate and reflect upon Project-based learning experiences in the classroom with their mates.According to Hermie Fuller Speckels (2012), a significant of literature postures the effectiveness of Project-based Learning (PBL) as a teaching strategy are to rise student achievement, especially students who are low performers on traditional test taking instruments. Besides that, Project-based learning engages students in active and responsible learning. Students also participated in an extended process of inquiry in response to a complex question, problem, or challenge, and students who otherwise found school boring or meaningless were motivated to learn. Furthermore, PBL motivated students to engage in their own

learning and offered them opportunity to pursue their own interest as they made decisions to solve real problems.

According to the definitions found in PBL handbooks for teachers, projects should be a complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problem, that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities. Other than that we will give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations. (John W. Thomas,2000)

According to Jane L.David (2008),the core idea of Project-based Learning is that real-world problems capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. The teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame worthwhile questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from the experience. Advocates assert that PBL helps prepare students for the thinking and collaboration skills required in the workplace. Besides that, to use Project-based Learning effectively, teachers must fully understand the concepts embedded in their projects and be able to model thinking and problem-solving strategies effectively. Worthwhile projects require challenging questions that can support collaboration, as well as methods of measuring the intended learning outcomes. Without carefully designed tasks, skilled teachers, and school conditions that support projects, project-based learning can devolve into a string of activities with no clear purpose or outcome.

Project-based learning has the potential to promote high-level thinking-analysis, synthesis, and evaluation-which can improve student achievement and motivation. According Rob Kelly (2008), PBL will gives the ability to individualize and find out individual strengths and weaknesses .It also offers the ability to provide more personalized learning than do more traditional teaching techniques.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative method of research. Data were collected from 20 students of Sales Promotion Design class and majority of students are in 2nd year of study. All students were involved in the project of Mascot Design competition as a part of their assignment requirement. A variety of data collection methods were used to inform the results of this study. The sources of data were observation and focus groups interviews. PBL approach motivated students to engage in their own learning and offered them opportunity to pursue their own interest as they made decisions to solve real problems.

The project given was a real project called as Designing Mascot competition organized by Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. According to the definitions found in PBL handbooks for teachers, projects should be a complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problem, that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities. Researcher believed that Mascot Design competition project

be able to offer a challenge and give motivation for students since its offer a privilege for students to win the competition.

Our open ended interview question was designed based on the four criteria of student's engagement namely responsible learning, strategic learning, collaborative, and energized by learning (Learning Point Associates, 2004). Engaged students should be able to work collaboratively in a group and play their own role as group members (Learning Point Associates, 2004b). As for the assessment, instructor and external examiners were invited to grad students mainly on the originality of idea, content, creative execution, presentation skills and teamwork. Presentation was conducted in one day and this enables each group to overview among their classmate presentation. The focus group interviews were done during the assessment and final presentation for the subject in approximately 30 minutes per session. Students were divided into 2 groups with 10 people in each group of students exchanged their opinions about the project assigned. Each of students spoke on their own words on the project and explained the idea and meaning of their Mascot design.

Observation was done in tutorial class once per week from week 1 until week 7. Students are supposed to produce a few sketches and discuss among their classmate and lecturer. Collaborative or cooperative learning may also employed peer reviews or group brainstorming session. From the instructor's observation in tutorial class, majority of students were aware of their responsibility in completing their projects.

RESULTS

Sales Promotion Design
The instructor for the Sales Promotion Design subject started the observation from the day of project briefing, tutorial class, and consultation hours until the presentation day. Meanwhile, the focus group interviews were conducted during the presentation after the projects were assigned. The instructor provided constructive evaluation for the artwork submitted by the students. There were 20 students involved in the Mascot Design competition organized by Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Responsible Learning
From the observation of the instructor, the majority of students were aware of their responsibility in completing their projects. Through the interview conducted, the instructor found that most of the students knew the main purpose, concept of the project and the deadline. Some students mentioned that they do not know what is mascot all about. They were very responsible in carrying out the project by showing full commitment to their learning project. Almost 80% percent of the students consulted the lecturer about the project and said that they benefited from the consultation. However, some students did not consult the instructor from time to time, but were aware of the project objectives and what they needed to achieve this project.

Strategic Learning

The information gathered by the students was mainly from the search engine, social network, group discussion among classmate and instructor consultation. They were also doing idea development sketches on paper and discuss on the subject matter, color impression, layout and used graphic software such as Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop for designing purpose. Clear planning determines the efficiency of the execution of the project. All the students had a rough plan but lacked detailed planning, such as how to write design rationale for the mascot design.

This had caused some of the students to face problems in producing writing the background of mascot design, resulting in the poor performance during presentation of the project. This problem could have been resolved if the students had allocated extra time to do research on the subject matter of their mascot design. There were also more than half of the students that depended mainly on the Internet for their idea and information. They could have produced a better piece of work if they had explored different sources of information.

Collaborative Learning

Data from the interview with the focus group showed that working with the project by individual was much easier as compare to project by group. This was through their previous experience whereby some of the group members did not give full commitment. But some of students agreed that group project was good since they will gain varieties ideas and perception among group members. Even this project was done by individual, all the discussion during tutorial class was done with collaboration of classmate and instructor. Through the instructor's observation, students collaborated well as they planned and executed their plans together from the beginning of project given until during the assessment and presentation.

Energized by Learning

The observation and focus groups interviews shows students agreed that marks were very important for them. But some students were really proud of their piece of work and valued their experience. Most of the responses show that the students enjoyed doing a real project and entering competition as apart of their assignment. During class presentation, all the students looked proud of their work. Although the students were faced with challenges, they were eventually energised and motivated to complete their project within the deadline of submission. The competition and real project essentially increased their motivation, collaboration and teamwork.

CONCLUSIONS

The data collected from the instructor's observation, focus group interviews showed that the students were highly engaged in their learning. Tretten and Zachariou (1995) expounded that Project Based Learning (PBL) had many positive impacts towards responsibility in learning and strengthening the students' thinking skills and productivity. PBL could also increase the motivation of students. Generally, this study shows the same findings, whereas the less motivated students or students who were less engaged in the beginning of the project showed a marked improvement in their

attitude after they became more involved in the project (Thomas, 2000). The findings of this study also demonstrate that PBL could be done by individual project. Many projects always includes group and teams especially in classroom where resources are limited. The study also revealed cooperative learning with peer reviews, group brainstorming session, and instructor collaboration should be employed to achieve successful in project. However, the findings of this study indicate that students were able to explore the new knowledge and skills, especially in the Mascot design competition project. They learnt to produce a mascot design even though some of them had no idea and knowledge in producing one.

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