SILC Journal

Report on New PBL Elective Course: Adventure Education and Event Planning

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This report outlines the development, implementation, and evaluation of an eight-week experimental project-based learning (PBL) elective course that was trialed during the spring semester of 2023 at Sojo University. The course project consisted of a real-world educational and recreational event attended by local elementary and junior high school students. The report serves as a process-oriented example for potential course authors of similar elective courses featuring experiential and project-based learning, as well as an outcomes-based justification for future development of a related community program.

本報告書は、崇城大学で 2023 年度前期（春学期）に試行された、8 週間の実験的プロジェクトベース学習（PBL）選択コースの開発、実施、評価を概説したものである。このコースのプロジェクトは、地元の小中学生が参加する現実的教育及びレクリエーション活動で構成された。本報告書は、同様の体験学習型選択コースの作成者に向けプロセス指向の例として、また将来のコミュニティ・プログラム関連の開発に対する成果ベースの根拠として役立つものである。

Introduction

In 2023 Sojo University administration announced an updated medium- and long-term plan which detailed goals and measures characterized by learner-centered education (Sojo University, 2023). With this plan, the university joined other higher education institutions in Asia encouraging the development of student-centered learning (SCL) practices that aim to prepare students for participation in collaborative and creative digital environments (Abdullah, 2021). In this trend, course instructors are increasingly encouraged to apply innovative teaching methods such as project-based learning (PBL), which has become a popular method due to its core features of authenticity, public product, student voice and choice, challenging problem or question, sustained inquiry, critique and revision, and reflection (Boss & Larmer, 2018).

This report outlines the development and implementation of an eight-week experimental PBL elective course that was trialed during the spring semester of 2023, titled *Adventure Education: An Event Management Project* [アドベンチャー教育：企画プロジェクト] which has since been expanded into a 15-week permanent elective course with a follow-up course under development. The report, which chronologically details the ideation, design, implementation, and evaluation of the experimental course, serves two purposes. First, it is a process-oriented example for potential course authors interested in developing and proposing similar student-centered project-based courses. Second, it supports an argument for developing a new educational program aligned with the university's updated medium- to long-term plan by illuminating key factors relating to stakeholder interest and capability.

Ideation and Design

The idea for this course was seeded by a failed attempt at a larger endeavor. In February 2021, the university administration put out a call for proposals to all faculty members for ideas that could potentially transform a defunct research facility located on a large, remote, wooded property into a profitable asset. The author of this report (who is also an instructor at the university) recognized an opportunity to apply his experience and interest in outdoor learning. With significant contributions from a colleague in the administrative bureau, they

submitted a proposal to develop a series of week-long overnight summer camp programs for elementary and junior high school students (hereafter "youth"). These programs were aimed at developing 21st century skills such as communication, creativity, and collaboration skills (Voogt & Roblin, 2012) in connection with the university's academic programs. After a year of background research, content development, and business modelling, the author and his colleague presented the idea to university administrators, who ultimately rejected the proposal in February 2022 but encouraged the proposal authors to develop the idea further on a smaller scale.

Feedback from university administrators revealed several key questions: Would there be enough interest and participation from the university's student body to fill all the part-time positions needed to implement the camp program? Would students at this (largely science and technology-focused) university have the adequate knowledge and skills required to deliver a youth program centered around communication, collaboration, and creativity? Would parents of local youth be interested in participating in an overnight program offered by a higher education institution? Unanswered, these questions reflected an overwhelming amount of risk in the proposal, yet they also targeted specific aspects of the program that could be tested in a low-stakes environment. To create this environment, the author identified core elements of the initial proposal and set about reformulating them as an elective academic course.

In place of a week-long overnight program featuring activities developed by the author, the elective course would task university students with developing a day-long program with similar skill-development objectives as the target outcome for participating elementary and junior-high school students. As the elective course would primarily involve the collaborative creation of an authentic public product, PBL was chosen as the primary instructional strategy. The author reasoned that this approach was appropriate not only for the learning outcomes of the course, but also as a means of addressing the university administrators' questions. In other words, with the involvement of a real-world event (i.e., a day-long program open to the public) and minimal instructor support given only when necessary (i.e., self-directed problem solving), a PBL framework could provide ideal conditions for measuring student capability and interest from the public.

Learning objectives, course schedule, class activities, and assessments were formatted according to the university template used for all course syllabi. With guidance from the author's department director, several existing courses with similarly non-traditional course features (i.e., experiential and project-based learning methods) were consulted to identify common language patterns, gauge reasonable scope and depth of content, and uncover possible alternative approaches to instruction and assessment. Access to existing syllabi was instrumental in adapting the original concept into a format with which the university's committee for reviewing new course proposals was familiar and thus likely to accept.

In order to gain local experiential and cultural perspective, the proposed syllabus was drafted with guidance from a Japanese member of the department's management team who answered questions, provided feedback, and scheduled a consultation with a senior faculty member who had expertise in course design and student experience. This faculty member identified logistical issues including course duration, credit bearing, student eligibility, and scheduling. Additionally, because the course would not directly relate to language learning (the author's department), an educator profile was suggested to be included with the syllabus, detailing the author's experience with outdoor and adventure learning. After numerous feedback cycles sustained throughout the 2022 spring semester, the final syllabus was proposed and approved by the university's academic affairs committee. An English language translation of key syllabus sections is included in the following section.

Course Syllabus

Course Outline

This course offers students first-hand experience in project management through the planning and execution of a real-world "adventure education" event. The project objective is a full-day event targeting elementary and junior high school students, featuring a mix of educational

and recreational activities that promote teambuilding, communication, creative problem solving, and fun, otherwise known as "adventure education."

Having first developed knowledge of activities conducted in similar events, particularly in the United States, students will outline their own unique project needs and challenges before creating a plan (outcome, timeline, benchmarks, resources, evaluation) to achieve the objective. Blending product- and process-oriented approaches, students collaborate in teams on the event, while routinely engaging in individual reflection and formative self-assessment. Throughout the course, students will adopt a humanistic perspective as they complete basic event management activities (scheduling, budgeting, coordinating, etc.) to achieve their goal. Students will base their decision-making on international literature and content curated from the fields of social sciences (especially youth development and adventure education) and event planning.

Students who successfully complete this course will have gained knowledge and experience of event management and adventure education and will have developed a set of highly useful and transferrable skills.

Required Background Knowledge
A willingness to communicate and collaborate to discover and solve problems, and an interest in contributing to local youth development initiatives.

Learning Objectives
1. I can collaboratively synthesize knowledge gained about event planning and youth development into a real-world product.

2. I can gain first-hand experience with collaborative event planning and project management.

3. I can gain a cross-cultural perspective of activities that facilitate human development, especially in youth.

Evaluation Criteria
1. Quizzes: Demonstrate understanding of key points discussed during lectures and concepts addressed in required readings and online content. Administered via Microsoft Forms, immediate feedback will remediate knowledge gaps, reinforce understanding, and probe further inquiry.

2. Reports: Reflective reports composed after participation with key activities provide students with an opportunity to internalize beneficial qualities of activity design, make connections between first-hand anecdotal and empirical data, and apply knowledge and experiences to the course final project. Submitted via Microsoft Teams (Assignments), all reports will be assessed with a rubric and returned with feedback.

3. Presentations: Student-generated plans for reaching target objectives will be presented to the class and the teacher. Rubric-scoring will be used to evaluate clarity and feasibility.

4. Portfolio: In accordance with Sojo University policy, students reflect on their ability to reach the course objectives via written reports at the end of the term.

5. Other: Evaluation of final project (the event) will include such data sources as feedback from program participants (parents and students), teacher observations, and student self-assessments.

Basic Schedule
This course is organized into four phases based on the Dowson, Albert and Lomax (2022) Event Planning Process:

1. (weeks 1-3) Research, Concept Development and Screening: Students acquire factual and conceptual knowledge and insight of project context.

2. (weeks 3-7) Detailed Planning and Design: Students actively contribute to the preparation of the final project.

3. (week 7) Managing the Event On-Site: Students deliver a real-world event.

4. (week 8) Evaluation and Reporting: Students take a data-driven approach to evaluating their project and performance.

Notes and Cautions

1. This course is bilingual, meaning that lectures, communication, and course content will make use of both English and Japanese. *English proficiency is not required and is not reflected in course evaluation.* However, students will be encouraged to use English whenever possible. While much of the source material was published in English, student comprehension will be aided through translation technology.

2. The course includes one day-long weekend event, to be scheduled on a Saturday or Sunday (around week 7). All students are expected to participate in this event, though in emergency circumstances exceptions can be made.

3. Microsoft Teams will be utilized by students to access important course information (office hours, syllabus, etc.) and class materials (quizzes, required readings, etc.), as well as for submitting reports and communicating and collaborating with classmates.

4. Plagiarism, such as copying and pasting of reports or other submissions, is considered cheating.

Implementation

The course was offered in the first eight weeks of the 2023 academic year. Seventeen undergraduate students representing seven of the university's nine departments enrolled in the course, and an additional graduate student chose to audit the course on a recommendation from their friend. Students met once a week for 90 minutes, and for the first few weeks were assigned interactive content (self-guided slideshows and online quizzes) to build background knowledge of strategic event planning and adventure education.

Classes always began with an icebreaking or teambuilding exercise which served two purposes: to build trust and strengthen relationships among the class members, and to demonstrate activities that could be used in the final course project. Students also completed short debriefing sessions immediately after the exercises to clarify their understanding of the experience and its potential as an event day activity. These exercises were instrumental in facilitating the team environment that would be necessary for completing the kinds of student-led collaborative inquiries that defined the course. As one student commented in a course-final reflective task:

As students in this class came from different departments and different class years, it was difficult at first to communicate smoothly. But the icebreakers helped ease the tension and we were thus able to engage in class smoothly, as well as understand the importance of icebreakers.

[生徒同士のコミュニケーションについてこの授業は他学部、他学年の生徒が集まる中で最初はコミュニケーションが取りづらい場面がありましたが授業を始める前にアイスブレイクをすることで緊張が解けて、授業にスムーズに入ることができたことからアイスブレイクの重要性について認知できました。]

Early classes typically proceeded with a review of the assigned content and the setting of a goal for the current class. These goals were always tangible and directly related to the event

plan, such as "Write a mission statement for the event," "Draw and describe stakeholder interests," "Complete and submit an event proposal to university administration." Due to the short time frame of the course these goals were always outlined and set by the instructor, but how they were achieved was left up to the students. Having proposed and debated several event themes the class ultimately chose to structure the event around creative woodworking, and they defined three key terms to guide the activities of the day: cooperation [協調性], independence/individuality [主体性], and imaginative power [想像力]. The main woodworking activity would be made possible through one student's personal connection to a private firm that agreed to donate scraps of recycled wood from old houses, as well as the availability of the Sojo University Monozukuri Innovation Center, an assembly and machining space overseen by the Mechanical Engineering Department.

After the first three weeks, students were encouraged to self-organize into small teams with pre-defined responsibilities (content, registration, promotion, equipment, facilities, services, and budget) and spend class time collaborating on tasks that they themselves identified and prioritized. Due to the small class size it was necessary for some students to join multiple teams, although team leaders were typically restricted to a single team. Microsoft Teams was utilized as a virtual communication and collaboration hub, and groups of students often met via video conference outside of class to continue collaboration. During this phase of the course, student groups largely operated autonomously, seeking help or feedback from the instructor when needed. They also listened to and incorporated unsolicited guidance from the instructor, who was closely monitoring both in-class group work and asynchronous Microsoft Teams-based communications. Students, rather than the instructor, initiated and maintained communication with all external stakeholders from the private construction firm, the Monozukuri Innovation Center, the Facilities and Grounds department, the General Affairs section, the Publishing Center, and a private company that issued event insurance. Students also identified, contacted, and visited several local elementary and junior high schools to promote the event in person with leaflets that they had designed and printed, included as Appendix A.

Evaluation

For seven weeks, the students in this course worked to lay the groundwork for what appeared to be an enjoyable event, pictures of which are included in Appendix B. Despite a small turnout of only five youth participants, the experience was informally reported by students, participants, and their parents as useful and memorable. Most of the planned activities were carried out successfully, and students were able to adapt activities autonomously as needed, such as impromptu games to fill a lengthy lunch break and an adjusted format for presenting participant woodworking creations at the end of the event. Participants were overheard saying that they did not want to go home because they were enjoying the event, and post-event feedback responses solicited from participants' parents who were present throughout the event indicated high levels of satisfaction and a desire for the university to hold similar events in the future.

After the event, a final class was held in which students participated in small and large group debriefing sessions. Students were encouraged to reflect on and share their perspectives regarding the event, the course, the performance of the class, and their own individual development. Written reports were also submitted as part of their individual course grades, and through these the instructor was better able to understand how specific aspects of the course were perceived and experienced by students. Compliments were commonly attributed to the course structure and instructional approaches which forced students to take command of their own learning, despite the unexpectedly large workload. Criticisms of the course were most commonly aimed at the short duration of the course as well as the unequal balance of work among classmates—a well-documented issue in PBL contexts (e.g., Mcquade et al., 2020). These student reflections were useful in outlining specific revisions to future iterations of the course, which include a lengthened course duration and systematic peer-evaluation aimed at mitigating the impact of unequal work balance.

Reflections

One purpose of this report was to provide an example for potential course authors. To that end, the main relevant takeaways are summarized in the following recommendations:

- Identify any overlap that exists between the instructor's experiences and the current and future needs of the instructor's institution and its students. Direct experience, rather than particular certifications, may be sufficient to qualify an instructor in particular institutions to instruct on particular elective courses if direct experiences match the learning objectives and scope of content coverage.
- Catalog the stock of available resources that may contribute to engaging learning experiences for students by considering a wide range of sources. Other academic departments, university staff, community members, friends and relatives, even the students are all potential sources of content, assistance, or ideas.
- Carefully consider the instructor's commitment to the outcomes of a course. Tailoring original course content that can be delivered in hybrid learning environments (namely, self-guided slideshows) can be a time-consuming process, even with generative AI technologies. Interest in seeing a new course proposal come to fruition may help sustain lengthy content development efforts.
- Prepare a roadmap of what an ideal group project might look like, with specific attention given to necessary tasks and potential roles for individual students. A clear image of one pathway towards successful project completion can help an instructor provide clear and useful guidance. However, alternative pathways should not be categorically discarded.

The second purpose of this report is to address the key questions raised by administrators.

Is there interest and participation from university students?
Most of the university's departments were represented in the course, and students from every eligible grade were enrolled. As part of a course survey, reasons for taking the course included a need to earn credits (3 students), an interest in event planning (3), an interest in adventure education (3), a desire to engage in practical skill-focused learning activities (2), a desire to take more courses with the instructor (2), a desire to take on new challenges (1), and a desire to use English (1). Though it remains to be seen whether the success of this course implementation will result in more student enrollment in future semesters, currently it seems this type of experience can attract students from different departments and different years.

Do these university students have the adequate knowledge and skills needed to run a youth program?
Despite the short duration of seven weeks to prepare for the event, most of the university students were observed in positive engagements with the youth participants. Several students played impromptu games with the youth participants during the lunch break. The author was especially intrigued to observe unexpected relationships as they emerged throughout the event. For instance, two youths became particularly attached to one university student who had, throughout the course, demonstrated an unremarkable contribution to the project. In this role however, the student was observed by the author taking on a mentoring role and engaging with the youth eagerly and effectively. In contrast, it was also informally observed that some university students who had been particularly engaged during the course were less effective when working directly with the youth participants. From these informal observations, the author has made a note to incorporate content that can help students with less experience interacting with youth more effectively prepare for such interactions. Generally speaking, however, the success of this event suggests that students at this university are capable of delivering interesting and enjoyable experiences for younger people.

Is there interest from participants' parents?

Despite promoting the event in person to several local schools, participant turnout was small. Though this may indicate a lack of interest in this kind of event, it is also plausible that promotion for this event began too late (two weeks prior to the event), and that the event timing conflicted with other school and community events in the area. It should also be noted that feedback responses from participants' parents indicated high levels of satisfaction with the event and included requests to hold similar events in the future.

In sum, the eight-week elective course was a successful trial of a PBL course focused on the creation of a youth-focused skill-building event, as measured by both the ability of students to plan and implement the event and the positive feedback from participants and the course instructor. An extended version of the elective course, scheduled to begin from the spring semester of 2024, should provide more insight towards the feasibility of a larger program.

Acknowledgements

References

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Promotional Flyer Made by Students

「ものづくり」を通して、
みんなで
楽しい思い出を作ろう！

廃材を使用して、
自分だけのオリジナル作品を作ろう！

捨てられてしまうものでも、
まだ使うことが出来るものはたくさん
あります！
価値がなくなったものを一つの作品、
思い出に変えてみませんか？

↑今回使用する古材(木材)
株式会社東田工務店様、
FAD建築事務所様
より提供頂きました

●日時　　6月3日(土)

●会場・主催　崇城大学
　　　　　　　ものづくり創造センター

●対象　　小学校高学年、中学生
　　　　　※他の学年でも可
　　　　　(低学年の場合、親の同伴が必須)

●持参品　お弁当、動きやすい服装

●参加費　　無料

●スケジュール

09:00–09:30　受付・準備
09:30–10:30　オリエンテーション・グループ分け
10:30–11:00　アイスブレークタイム
11:00–12:30　作品制作
12:30–13:30　昼食休憩
13:30–15:00　作品制作
15:00–15:40　発表
15:40–16:00　写真撮影・解散

●お問い合わせ先

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●応募締め切り

5月30日(火)

※児童、生徒の参加は
先着20名様限定とさせて
いただきます。
申し込みは下記のQRコード
よりお願いいたします。

●駐車場情報

※野球場近くの学生駐車場を
ご利用ください。

Appendix B

Photos of the Event