



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

*“The work is tangible so you can actually see what you’ve learnt”*

*Pedagogical rationale and student evaluation of the project-based learning module “I am an author”*

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# Background

## Micro-context

- Advanced university students of Italian studies (level B2 of the CEFR) in Melbourne (AU)
- Enrolled in 12-week Italian subject
  - 3 contact hours per week (2 culture and conversation, 1 language, i.e. reflection on grammar and development of writing skills)
  - Project included in the language component

## Macro-context

- Italian in Australia as a prominent community language, particularly in Victoria (ABS, 2022)
- Need for free and easy-to-access resources in Italian to promote literacy

# The “I am an author” project



(1) Reframe writing assessment to be more real-world and give students an experience of authorship

(2) Address a real problem through their work

(3) Increase motivation and well-being



**PBL** (Buck Institute of Education, 2023; Ghosheh Wahbeh, 2021) challenging problem, an authentic task, community engagement, student autonomy and reflection, final public product.

**Experiential learning** (Moreno-López et al., 2015; Efstratia, 2014) exposure to grammar and stylistic conventions of narrative writing

**Goal for the end of semester** Write and print a story of 300-500 words on a chosen topic with illustrations (individually or in pairs) in book format + a reflection of the activity.

**Assessment** Creativity (20%), storytelling and adherence to the chosen genre (40%), grammatical accuracy (20%), structure and content of the final reflection (20%).

# Meaningful learning and well-being

## Deep Approach to World Languages Education (Touchon, 2014)

- Promote meaningful learning experiences
- Students as social agents that put their skills to use to «do good» in the community
- Student agency in giving direction to their learning – individualised learning driven by personal interest and motivation

## Well-being (Oxford, 2016a, b) as a construct including psychological and identity-related factors associated with successful L2 learning

- Linked to motivation and sustained investment in L2 learning (MacIntyre, 2002; MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément, 2009; Palmieri, 2017), as well as to agency, self-efficacy, meaning and processes of self-realisation (Palmieri, 2017; Rubino et al., 2017).
- PBL impacts on key components of well-being, e.g. motivation, autonomy, self-factors (see e.g. Moreno-López et al., 2017; Imtiaz & Asif, 2012; Stoller, 2006; Supe & Kaupusz, 2015; Vega & Brown, 2013)

# Selected findings from two studies



## Research questions

### STUDY 1 (n = 31)

- What is students' perception of the project as an assessment method?
- What is its impact on the acquisition of linguistic and non-linguistic skills?
- What problems did students encounter?

### STUDY 2 (n = 21)

- What is the impact of the project on students' well-being?



## Data collection

Questionnaire eliciting both quantitative and qualitative data and

+

### STUDY 1

2 semi-structured interviews



## Data analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data  
Thematic analysis of qualitative data (O'Leary, 2010)

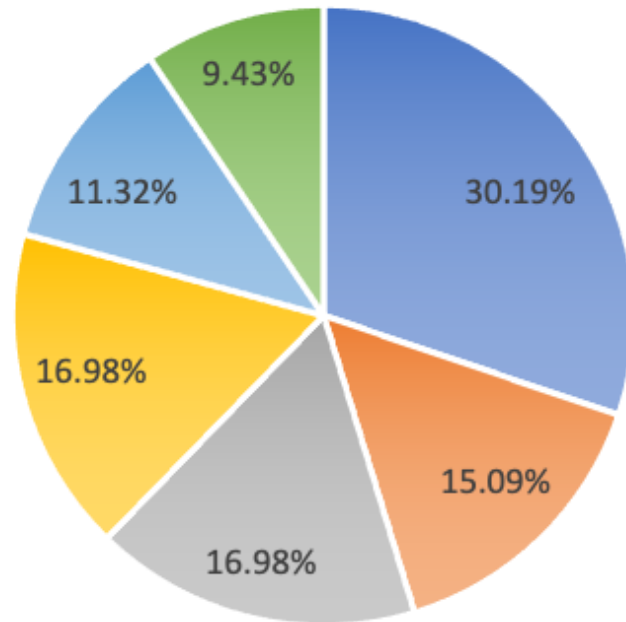


# (Study 1) Students' perceptions of PBL and of the project

| Question  | strongly disagree | disagree   | not sure  | agree      | strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|------------|-----------|------------|----------------|
| 1) I like learning by doing   | 0                 | 6.5% (2)   | 9.7% (3)  | 51.6% (16) | 32.3% (10)     |
| 2) I enjoy doing projects as an assessment method   | 3.2% (1)          | 6.5% (2)   | 12.9% (4) | 61.3% (19) | 16.1% (5)      |
| 3) The book project allowed me to do something completely different from what I do as part of my university studies | 0                 | 6.5% (2)   | 3.2% (1)  | 35.5% (11) | 54.8% (17)     |
| 4) The short-story project was a fun way to be assessed on what I learnt during the semester                        | 3.2% (1)          | 19.4 % (6) | 16.1% (5) | 29% (9)    | 32.3% (10)     |

- I think it is very rewarding to see that what you learned can be applied through the practical work and that... the work is tangible so you can actually see what you've learnt (INT-2)*

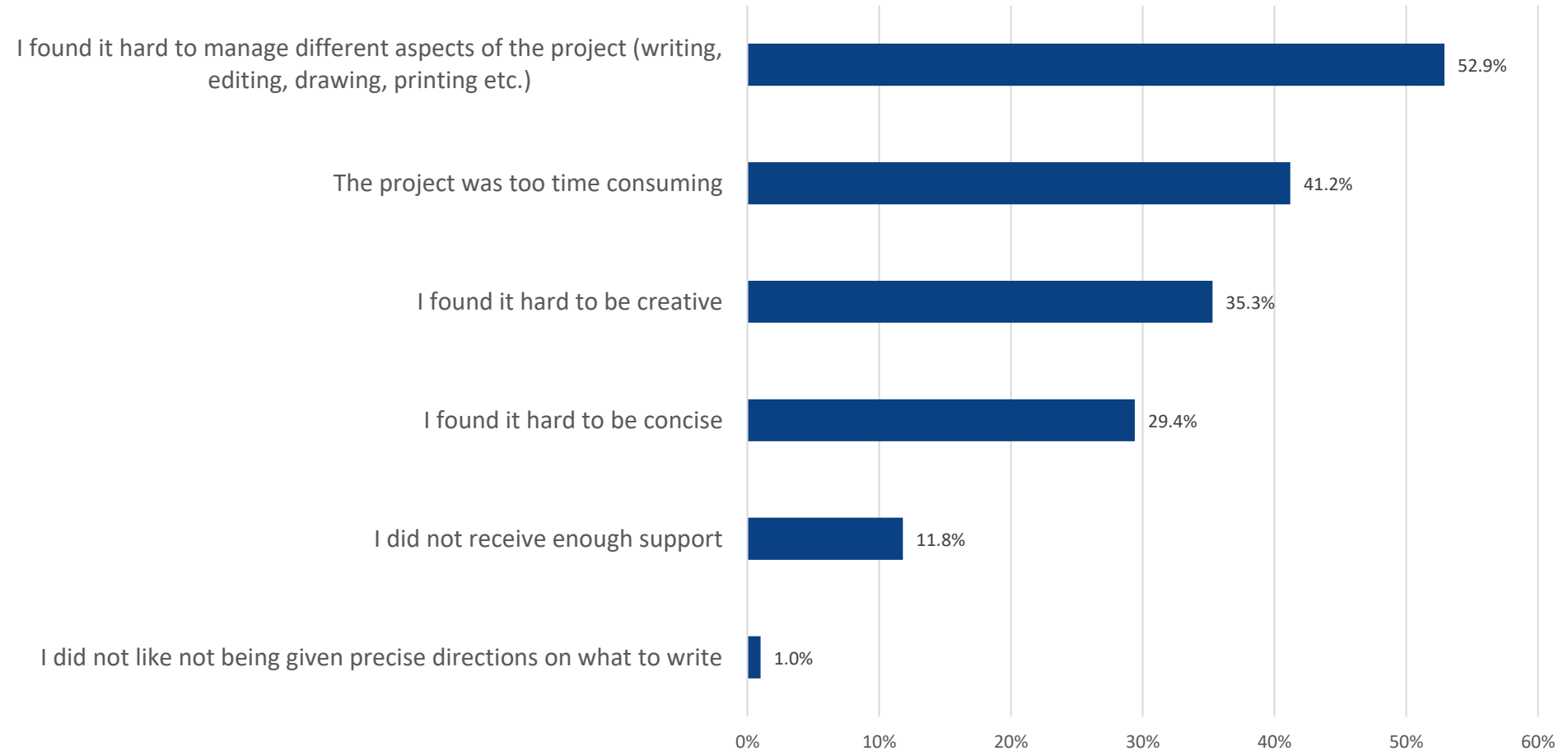
# (Study 1) Skills developed



- 1) language skills (e.g. vocabulary, structures, registers and styles)
- 2) time management
- 3) organisation skills
- 4) problem solving
- 5) critical thinking
- 6) other



# (Study 1) Problems encountered during the project







# (Study 2) (1) Well-being as linked to positive emotions

| Question   | strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree      | strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------|------------|----------------|
| 1) I liked the feeling of being an author                            | 0% (0)            | 0% (0)   | 9.5% (2) | 33.3% (7)  | 57.1% (12)     |
| 2) It felt good that I could make this assignment relevant to myself | 0% (0)            | 4.8% (1) | 4.8% (1) | 47.6% (10) | 42.9% (9)      |
| 3) The project gave me a memorable experience                        | 0% (0)            | 4.8% (1) | 0% (0)   | 33.3% (7)  | 61.9% (13)     |

## (Study 2) Positive emotions – qualitative data

- **Positive emotions** often linked to **novelty** of the task, **freedom in creative production**, **sense of pride** and **memorable experience**:
  - *This project was a great change from a lot of my other assessments, and it was very exciting to be in control of the creative process from start to finish. It's quite fun to realise you can technically call yourself an author!*
  - *It was a very memorable experience - probably the most memorable assignment of my university journey. I never thought an assignment could bring my family such pride in me*



# (Study 2) (2) Well-being as linked to motivation and meaning

| Question   | strongly disagree | disagree | not sure  | agree     | strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| 1) I found it exciting to be able to write a book in Italian | 0% (0)            | 0% (0)   | 14.3% (3) | 33.3% (7) | 52.4% (11)     |
| 2) I found it exciting to be the author of a book in Italian | 0% (0)            | 0% (0)   | 9.5% (2)  | 38.1% (8) | 52.4% (11)     |
| 3) I enjoyed working on a project that I valued highly       | 0% (0)            | 4.8% (1) | 0% (0)    | 33.3% (7) | 61.9% (13)     |



# (Study 2) Motivation and meaning – qualitative data

- **Intrinsic motivation** linked to the intrinsic value of the task and its **real-world relevance** (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Noels, 2001, 2009; Noels et al., 2000):
  - *This project had a significant influence in my perception of the power of language learning beyond the classroom and I credit part of my strong affinity to the language to this experience.*
  - *It gave me a glimpse into the potential practical outputs that could be achieved through learning a language, beyond merely being able to engage within a classroom*

# (Study 2) (3) Well-being as linked to self-factors

| Question   | strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree      | strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------|------------|----------------|
| 1) Seeing my printed book enhanced my sense of pride and accomplishment                                      | 0% (0)            | 4.8% (1) | 0% (0)   | 52.4% (11) | 42.9% (9)      |
| 2) By the end of this project, I feel more confident about writing in Italian                                | 0% (0)            | 9.5% (2) | 9.5% (2) | 38.1% (8)  | 42.9% (9)      |
| 3) Seeing the finished product and showing it to others made me feel more confident about my Italian skills. | 0% (0)            | 0% (0)   | 9.5% (2) | 57.1% (12) | 33.3% (7)      |

- **Self factors** mostly associated with an increase in **self-confidence** and **pride** for a finished **product that could be enjoyed by others** (Buck Institute of Education, 2023; Ghosheh Wahbeh, 2021)
  - *I felt a sense of pride in having written and illustrated my own book*
  - *It makes me feel good about myself when people compliment my work. It boosts my confidence in being able to achieve tasks that I wouldn't otherwise normally do.*

# Conclusions



## Effectiveness of the project

General positive perception of the project

Positive impact on students' learning for three main reasons:

- *A novel assessment task fostering creativity and skills development*
- *Tangible, meaningful, and personally relevant learning*
- *An identity-enriching learning experience*



## Future directions

Strengthen aspects related to motivation/well-being, e.g.,

- Reframing the activity to have a **more direct involvement of the community** (collaborations with bilingual kindergartens, playgroups or schools).
- Have students share stories through videos and digital tools (digital storybooks)



# Thank you!

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