

# Leading with Arts Education

The newsletter for Vermont's Visual and Performing Arts Educators and supporters



September 2021

## Arts and Project-Based Learning

### Looking Ahead

Description of this issue's elements.

### Arts as a Tool for Instructional Change

Vermont art and music teachers discuss arts education's role in and the value of Project-Based Learning.

### Project-Based Learning Recent Research

A collection of research briefs from the most recent studies on Project-Based Learning.

### PL Facilitation Resources

Information and resources on facilitating PjBL professional learning.

## Looking Ahead

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) can support self-efficacy, student-directed learning, intrinsic motivation, and engagement, all of which have shown to be effective in beginning to close the opportunity gap (Boaler, 2002; Deutscher et al., 2021). Studies also continue to suggest that PjBL can support academic achievement and social emotional learning throughout students' K-12 experience (Krajcik et al., 2021; Saveedra et al., 2021). PjBL should not be viewed as prescriptive; it is context-based and, therefore, requires context experts (i.e., teachers and school leaders) to guide initiatives. As arts education and arts integration have positive associations with student long-term retention of non-arts content, student engagement, and self-motivation (Moorefield-Lang, 2010; Hardiman et al., 2019), systems can look to their arts educators to support school or district efforts related to Project-based Learning. Therefore, this newsletter offers an overview of Vermont arts educators' experiences with the Agency of Education's (AOE) Foundations of Project-Based Learning professional learning (PL) series. The art and music teachers who participated in this PL discuss how the arts can inform broad Project-Based Learning initiatives and how Project-Based Learning can inform art and music education in Vermont.

## From the Field: The Arts as a Tool for Instructional Change

The AOE recently conducted a professional learning series to support curriculum directors, administrators, and teachers with developing the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to understand and apply Project-Based Learning principles to their context. The professional learning occurred in five two-hour sessions over a six-week period. Participants' roles included special educators, interventionists, art and music teachers, instructional coaches, expanded learning providers, a work-based learning coordinator, curriculum coordinator, and MTSS coordinator.

The following elements were used as a framework for the professional learning experience: (1) a driving question anchored in academic content, (2) a student planned original concept that responds to the challenge, (3) active learning and guided inquiry opportunities, and (4) a culminating event or public product that is presented to a public audience. Whether new to or experienced with Project-Based Learning, arts educators can see the prominent role of arts education and its elements in the Project-Based Learning approach. Art and music teachers who attended the series met to share their current practices of arts education that fit well with Project-Based Learning, new takeaways to add to their practice, and the key principles of the approach that can refine both arts and non-arts programs.

“If you are focused on the art making process, you’re focused on creative thinking, problem solving, independent thinking, and critical thinking skills; that’s an integral part of what Project-Based Learning is about. It comes so naturally to the art classroom” said Tessa Carpenter, a K-6 visual arts teacher at Vernon Elementary School and Guilford Central School. “Just the nature of teaching art is experiential and experimental. In doing that, you’re connecting with the project more deeply. When you’re starting to think about what you’re going to make, you’re thinking about the materials you are going to use, the process you’ll follow, and how you’ll apply it.”

In addition to the process-oriented intersections of PjBL and arts education, there are several strategies that overlap. Ashley Broderick, a K-5 art teacher at Dothan Brook School, noted that “an audience is an integral part of both Project-Based Learning and arts education” with Rebecca Mills, a 6th-8th grade music educator at Mt. Anthony Middle School, adding “public performances were the easiest part of the thing to plan for me as a band teacher. During the lesson, it reminds kids that they have a stake in it; we have a public audience, and we want to sound good for them.” Rebecca adds that arts educators are well-versed in guiding student-centered conversations that take place during an entry event to Project-Based Learning, noting that music educators “always start a lesson or project or a unit that hooks students and makes them excited.” Ashley echoed this, stating that “entry events are nothing new for arts teachers.”

There were a number of key takeaways for these arts educators, too. The nuances of student-centered learning can be approached thoughtfully and intentionally in a project-based learning arts experience. Rebecca noted that she wants to target student-centered and driven learning: “My band rehearsals usually go ‘okay let’s play this song and we’ll go from here to here and I’ll tell you what I heard that went wrong and tell you how to fix it.’ Now, we’ll play something and I’ll ask them what they noticed, for strategies that they think can fix it instead of ‘well, I heard this is wrong so this is how we’ll fix it.’ You tell them what the goal of the project is and they can figure it out. I’ve learned that some of my band students hear some things that I didn’t hear.” The student-directed focus opens up opportunities to support self-efficacy when the learning takes place in a PjBL context.

Ashley noted the potential to support self-directed learning through interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning: “I love to collaborate with teachers and really want to collaborate fully with someone on a unit. Sometimes, the arts are involved in a class if, for example, students are learning about Monarch butterflies and, in art class, they make a picture of a Monarch butterfly. The interdisciplinary learning becomes deeper when the collaboration happens in a Project-Based Learning approach. How can they use the art-making process to learn about butterflies? Instead of only focusing on the elements and principles (monarch butterflies have bright oranges and bold black lines), how are they using their knowledge of butterflies and their understanding of art to make something meaningful?”

As Ashley suggested, engaging in a collaboratively developed and interdisciplinary unit can add meaning to the learning experience for both teachers and students. In reference to her participation in the Foundations of Project-Based Learning PL series, Tessa stated “Being with teams of people gives you this revitalization of what you’re doing and gives new takes of what you’re doing. I think, for me, taking a hard look at what I’m doing and putting more intent into it was key. Bringing in some of the lessons that I’ve worked on for years and putting this structure to it in a Project-Based Learning framework makes it really valuable, in addition to talking with others and hearing them speak about their lessons and ideas.”

### **Project-Based Learning Recent Research (2020-21)**

[Rigorous Project-Based Learning is an Effective Lever for Student Success \(Research Brief\): Lucas Education Research](#)

[Project-Based Learning Boosts Student Achievement in AP Courses \(Research Brief\): Lucas Education Research](#)

[Project-Based Learning Leads to Gains in Science and Other Subjects in Middle School and Benefits All Learners \(Research Brief\): Lucas Education Research](#)

[Project-Based Learning Increases Science Achievement in Elementary Schools and Improves Social and Emotional Learning \(Research Brief\): Lucas Education Research](#)

[The Impact of Project-Based Learning on Social Studies and Literacy Learning in Low-Income Schools \(Research Brief\): Lucas Education Research](#)

### **Facilitating Project-Based Learning PL**

Members of the Agency of Education’s (AOE) Proficiency-Based Learning Team designed and delivered a professional learning (PL) series – *Foundations of Project-Based Learning* – to support Vermont educators in developing the knowledge and skills needed to begin shifting their instruction to a Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach. More information on the PL can be found [online](#). Information on and recommendations for delivering a similar PL series on PjBL can be found below:

- [Foundations of Project-Based Learning: Facilitation Guide](#)

Want to learn more? Email [Kyle Anderson](#) for information about upcoming professional learning related to the topic of PjBL.

### **References**

Hardiman, M., Rinne, L., & Yarmolinskaya, J. (2014). [The effects of arts integration on long-term retention of academic content. \*Mind, Brain, and Education\*, 8\(3\), 144-148.](#)

Moorefield-Lang, H. M. (2010). Arts voices: Middle school students and the relationship of the arts to their motivation and self-efficacy. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(1), 1-17.

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