Foundations of Project-Based Learning: Facilitation Guide

Purpose

This document serves as a guide for curriculum directors, administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers to deliver introductory-level professional learning (PL) on Project-Based Learning. This guide stems from the Agency of Education's (AOE) *Foundations of Project-Based Learning* PL series. Though it is organized by the same structure as the *Foundations* series, facilitators should focus on adapting the format to meet the needs of their context. It is recommended that facilitators who use this guide have attended or plan to attend a *Foundations of Project-Based Learning* series (or something similar) and the AOE's *Foundations of PjBL Facilitator's Training.*

Introduction

Facilitators should prepare for the PL by (1) identifying the essential design elements of units, (2) determining a driving question to guide the series, and (3) developing and collecting appropriate presentation materials, resources, and structure. This section outlines steps, offers recommendations, and provides resources for all three areas.

Design Elements

Educators new to Project-Based Learning often share several logistical concerns with the approach, including the open-endedness, enduring design and delivery process, and internal and external resources needed to effectively implement units. Though valid concerns, a PjBL experience does not rely on these qualities (e.g., open-ended and enduring processes, field work outside of the school) to meet the desired outcomes of the approach. It's critical to demonstrate the manageability of PjBL for those interested in shifting their instruction or rolling out Project-Based Learning initiatives. As facilitators, consider connecting with teachers and school leaders to identify the design elements in which your PjBL initiative or PL can be framed.

To prepare for the *Foundations* series, AOE facilitators started by meeting with educators of different grade levels and content areas with varying levels of understanding of and experience with PjBL to identify the essential elements of the approach that teachers who are new to PjBL need to understand and have in place to make it valuable. Through these conversations, they identified four *Foundational Elements of Project-Based Learning* to use as a framework for the professional learning experience and subsequent materials: (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.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information please contact:

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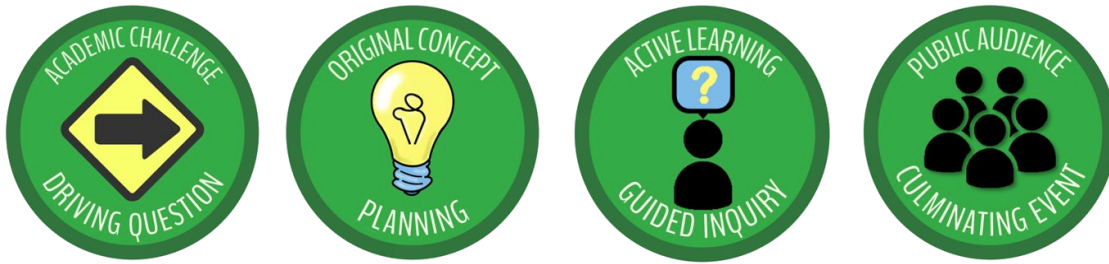
If facilitators are interested in identifying their own essential elements, consider the following:

- Identify teachers who represent the profile of educators in your context.
- Meet with teachers one-on-one or in small groups to discuss the PL objectives and overarching principles of PjBL.
- Share backgrounds in and experience with different PjBL models.
- Discuss roadblocks with implementing a PjBL unit.
- Brainstorm ways to adapt models or strategies to your context.
- Identify key elements from other models or adaptations of other models.
- Emphasize the manageability of PjBL in the language of your elements.

Determining a Driving Question

The driving question is an integral piece of the PjBL process. As facilitators should model PjBL throughout the PL, they should prepare a driving question to guide participants' inquiry. Consider a driving question that aligns with the culture of your school or district. What are some key concepts in your school/district mission or vision that align with PjBL principles? Does your school/district have a portrait of a graduate? How can PjBL help students reach the attributes of that portrait? Elements of ongoing school/district initiatives can be included in the driving question to model how the approach supports the context. Facilitators can also consider the following driving questions as starting points for their own:

- How can we design authentic learning experiences for all students?
- How can we support learner agency through a Project-Based Learning approach?
- What does it mean to have a student-centered classroom?
- How can we design and deliver authentic performance assessments using a PjBL framework?

Developing Materials, Resources, and Structure

The AOE has an ongoing series of Project-Based Learning documents that can support facilitators' PL. Information on this series can be found here. Anyone can also join the *Foundations of Project-Based Learning* Edmodo group, which will provide them access to *Foundations* materials, past participants' plans and unit materials, and other resources.

To join the Edmodo PjBL group:
- Activate your Edmodo account and join the VTED Learns community, if you have not already done so, by filling out this form.
- Join the Foundations of Project-Based Learning Edmodo group with the group code **w25vri**.

Facilitators are encouraged to develop their own materials when possible, adapt materials where applicable, and carefully curate resources for their participants. For the sake of credibility, it is highly recommended that facilitators produce their own unit samples and model the phases of PjBL throughout the PL. Related, facilitators should coordinate a schedule that is conducive to their instructional style and their participants' learning style. Though this document and session-specific guides outline the series in a five-session format, this may not be the best structure for every facilitator and/or their participants.

Delivery

The following sections offer suggestions for delivering your Project-Based Learning PL. This follows the five-session format of the Foundations of Project-Based Learning series. Each session outline contains a session-specific key question, essential topics to cover, strategies to model, activities to consider, and resources to use or share with participants. Generally, participants should engage in the following planning steps through each session:

- Session 1 Guide: Identify a draft public product and prepare a driving question.
- Session 2 Guide: Plan an entry event to launch the unit.
- Session 3 Guide: Prepare planning matrices or graphic organizers based on project learning targets.
- Session 4 Guide: Draft criteria, rubrics, and other assessment tools for the unit.
- Session 5 Guide: Share final units and receive peer feedback.

Planning a Unit: Sequences and Cycles

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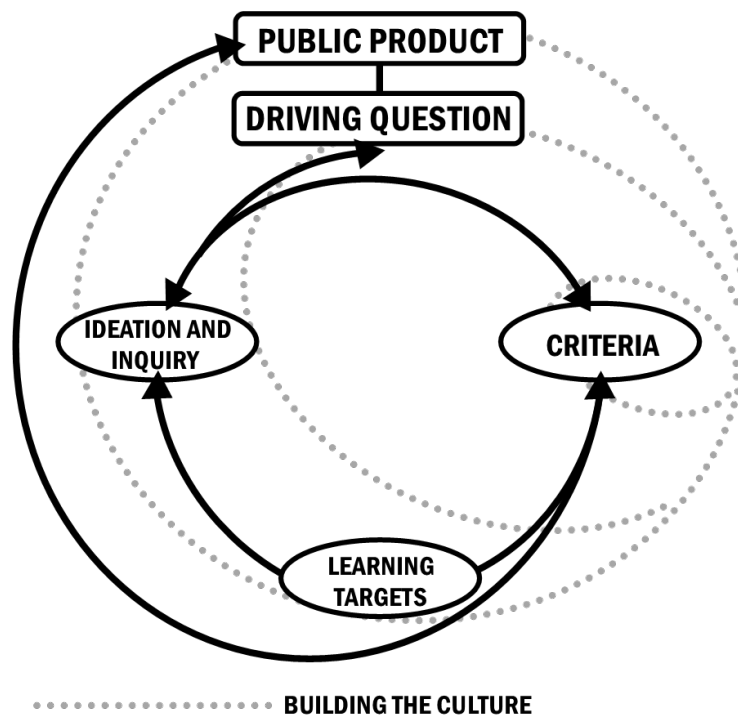
The sequence of these planning phases is intentional but iterative; each piece (e.g., entry event, planning matrices, etc.) will need to be revisited and revised throughout the series and planning process. Identifying a public product and a driving question (session 1) will inform the entry

event material, inquiry paths, and planning materials for students. Planning the entry event (session 2) will begin to build the culture of a PjBL classroom through question-driven inquiry and student-directed analysis. The entry event can also lead students to the "need to knows" of a unit, which informs students' inquiry phases, ideation, introduction to the learning targets, and the layout of the planning matrices (session 3). Student planning materials also need to be designed to guide them to meeting the learning targets. The targets, criteria, rubrics, and other tools (session 4) need to be developed with the inquiry phases and planning matrices in mind. The final session provides an opportunity for participants to present their work. Communicating the driving question, learning targets, entry event, planning process, and final product to peers will help participants think more intentionally about how to assemble the pieces of their unit strategically so the sequencing of the PjBL phases supports authentic student responses to the challenge in a meaningful and structured way.