Foundations of Project-Based Learning: Session 1 Guide

Purpose

This document serves as a guide for Session 1 of the Foundations of Project-Based Learning series. Included is an overview of the session, topics to cover, strategies to model, and activities to consider. Facilitators should refer to the [Foundations of Project-Based Learning Edmodo group](#) for resources. [Session slides can also be found here.](#)

Session 1

The first session introduces principles of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to participants, modeling strategies along the way. The driving question should guide the inquiry for all sessions of the professional learning (PL). The key question should be answerable by the end of each session. This helps participants check their progress in a learner-centered manner. As the first session is an introduction, consider a key question that defines and justifies the use of PjBL (e.g., What is project-based learning and why should anyone bother?).

Topics to Cover

PjBL Definition: During this session, facilitators should define Project-Based Learning. The AOE's definition is as follows:

> Project-Based Learning is a student-centered approach that guides learners through seeking answers to a Driving Question or challenge, placing them on a self-directed path of inquiry as they discover, develop, and apply key knowledge and skills to the creation of a public product.

There are many ways to define PjBL. Facilitators are encouraged to prepare a definition that honors the principles of PjBL while aligning with their school or SU/SD's learning values.

Definitions of and Explanations for the Elements of PjBL: Clearly define your PjBL design elements. Definitions for the AOE's Foundational Elements are as follows:

- **A Driving Question or challenge anchored in academic content:** This is an open-ended question to which students don't have the answer. It places them on a path of inquiry on which they seek answers to the question by exploring academic content and applying their new knowledge to a product or event.

- **An authentic, student-developed concept:** Students' responses to the Driving Question need to be their own responses. There is no right or wrong answer for *how* students respond to the question, but there are guidelines for what they use to respond to the question.

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- **Active learning and guided inquiry:** There are embedded opportunities for students to explore knowledge and skills actively and independently. Additionally, students can receive direct instruction or observe a teacher model a technique when necessary (keeping in mind that the purpose of learning the content is to apply it to their response to the Driving Question).

- **A culminating product or event for a specific audience:** Students answer the Driving Question by applying their new knowledge and skill to a product or event created with a target audience in mind. This audience should exist in the real-world (i.e., outside the classroom). Teachers facilitate the PjBL experience; they should not be the audience.

Culminating Event/Public Product: Define and engage in activities to support learner understanding of the Public Product.

Driving Question: Define and prepare activities to support understanding of Driving Questions and their purpose. Participants should develop a draft Driving Question during this session (this will guide the other elements of their unit plan).

What to Model

Entry Events: Facilitators should prepare an entry event that leads participants to the Driving Question for the series. This will begin to build the culture of Project-Based Learning. Additionally, question-driven pedagogy is integral to learner-centered experiences. Entry events establish this early in the series. Refer to the [Entry Event Checklist](#) for guidance.

Collaborative Learner-Centered Activities: Prepare activities that allow participants to collaboratively explore their understanding of Driving Questions and Public Products. Options for activities can be found in the [Session 1 Slides](#).

Feedback and Praise: As participants explore the key question for Session 1, facilitators should model productive [project-based teacher language in their feedback and redirection.](#) Consider how your participants would need to speak to their students in a learner-centered and direct manner. Explore these resources as you prepare for the first session:

- [Power of our Words Educational Leadership article:](#) This is a short article by Paula Denton on concepts discussed in her book, The Power of our Words.

- [Reinforcing, Reminding, and Redirecting language:](#) This is an overview (also adapted from Denton's book) of RC language that can be helpful for both academics and behavior. Consider how it might fit for your Entry Event and how you build the culture of Project-Based Learning.

- [What Having a Growth Mindset Actually Means:](#) An Harvard Business Review article by Carol Dweck on some GM misconceptions. This, and growth-oriented language in general, might help as you consider ways to validate students and build the culture of Project-Based Learning.

Activities to Consider

Participants should engage in an activity for any new piece of content introduced to them. This will allow them to explore and consider new material through their own lens while identifying

opportunities to apply their new competence to practice. For Session 1, participants are exploring definitions and general principles of PjBL via Public Products and Driving Questions. Consider these activities as they explore the content:

- **Visual Analysis**: Participants can engage in an adapted Visual Thinking Strategies activity as part of their PL series launch. Consider finding a relevant image or work of art that can be used to support participant understanding of the Driving Question and the principles of Project-Based Learning.

- **Compare and Contrast Projects and Project-Based Learning**: As PjBL is often misperceived as traditional projects, consider comparing phases and tasks of traditional projects with those of PjBL. This can make the definition of PjBL clearer for participants. See Session 1 slide 9 for a table that can guide this activity.

- **Outcomes of PjBL**: Consider having participants collaboratively brainstorm potential outcomes for students when all the design elements of PjBL are in place. This will help participants see the importance of the design elements for their context. A virtual whiteboard (e.g., Jamboard) on which participants can post stickies with their responses works well for this activity.

- **Give New Meaning to an Old Lesson:** The Session 1 slides as a chart of content-based objectives and real-world context versions of them. To understand a Public Product, break participants into groups to have them brainstorm how to give their content-based objectives real-world relevance (e.g., instead of painting a landscape, create an advertisement of an important place).

- **Develop a Driving Question for a Public Product:** Participants should prepare a draft Driving Question based on their Public Product. This can be done in pairs or groups using the formula in the Session 1 slides as a guide.

Closing

Closing for each session should focus on clarifying questions from participants, reflection, and next steps. For Session 1, participants can share out their Driving Questions and/or Public Products. Session 2 will focus on Entry Events, which is how we lead students to the Driving Question and begin to build the culture of PjBL learning environments.