

Foundations of Project-Based Learning: Session 3 Guide

Purpose

This document serves as a guide for Session 3 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 3

The third session guides participants through preparing student planning processes. Planning processes vary with different units and student readiness. The inquiry and ideation phases are integral to planning a product or event in response to the Driving Question. These phases are initiated during the Entry Event as students begin to consider the “need to knows.” It is, therefore, recommended that this session be framed in a model unit. Initiate this session by modeling an Entry Event to a unit and ask participants what they need to know to answer the Driving Question. Facilitators can also consider the [Question Formulation Technique](#) in lieu of the “need to knows” activity. The “need to knows” or Question Formulation Technique will serve as the Entry Event for Session 3. This gives participants (and students) an opportunity to form their own questions, places them on a path of inquiry, and triggers conversations on relevance and authenticity. Consider a key question for Session 3 related to guiding the planning process (e.g., How do we guide students through planning an original concept?).

Topics to Cover

Need to Knows: PjBL is question-driven and learner-centered. As such, students in PjBL settings should develop their own questions to guide their inquiry. Identifying the “need to knows” for a Driving Question can aid in planning.

Transferable Skills: Participants of this PL are already content experts and should be familiar with content standards and indicators. What sets PjBL apart from traditional projects is the focus on application of knowledge (what do students actually do with their content skills and understanding?) and transferable skills. Share definitions and information on transferable skills to guide planning processes for units (see [Sample Graduation Proficiencies – Transferable Skills](#)).

Learning Targets: Performance indicators (PI) and learning targets will inform planning matrices, graphic organizers, and other planning materials. Share clear and simple definitions for learning targets and criteria. For example:

Target: The “I can” statement for PIs - the “what” that students will be able to do

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Criteria: The specific items that students need to include for this unit to show they have met the target.

Documented Planning: There are a lot of ways to plan a response to a Driving Question and student readiness will be key on how teachers prepare planning materials. The aims of planning processes should be to:

- Offer guidance for students to consider how they will apply content knowledge and skill.
- Embed opportunities for students to develop original and relevant responses to the challenge.
- Intentionally support the transferable skills on which the unit focuses.
- Maintain a well-documented and organized plan.

Although there are any number of ways for students to plan ideas, any process they follow should have the qualities listed above. Critical to planning is documentation. Many learning targets (especially transferable skills) will have the most evidence during ideation and inquiry. The learning targets need to be assessed and, therefore, evaluators need documentation of the target to assess objectively (this is the focus of Session 4). Share some strategies to document the planning process in a variety of ways:

- Teachers can offer a planning matrix or graphic organizer using the targets and/or project criteria as a guide.
- Students identify or have access to additional tools that allow them to effectively go through a self-directed inquiry process (e.g., data collection forms).
- Students can use their “need to knows” as a guide for planning their concept in a journal.

What to Model

Identifying Need to Knows/Formulating Questions: As you model the start of a unit, guide participants through developing the own questions to guide their inquiry. Say the Driving Question for a unit is “How can we use data to advocate for a cause?”. After introducing the question to learners, the facilitator of the unit can ask “What do we need to know to successfully answer this question?” and ask participant responses to come in the form of a question. People might respond with:

- What causes do we care about?
- What is the difference between data and opinion?
- How can we use statistic to generate a conclusion or observation?
- What do we want people to know about this cause?
- What or who are involved in our cause?
- How can we use art or design to send messages?
- Whom are we sending a message to?
- How can we collect data?

When students identify questions to drive their inquiry, they think more intentionally about transfer of knowledge and their individual solutions to the Driving Question. Importantly, they will have a sense of ownership of learning and assessment. Student-identified questions (i.e., the “need to knows”) will almost certainly be directly aligned with the teacher-identified learning targets for the unit. When students have identified the targets for themselves, they will have an easier time understanding the assessment tools and the reasons for certain criteria in their process and product.

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 3, the new content is the preparation of a planning process for students, which includes understanding learning targets associated with transferable skills and where those skills are evident in the unit. Consider these activities as participants prepare a planning process:

- **Locating Transferable Skills:** Content standards and transferable skills should be assessed in a unit. Documentation of indicators for both content and transferable skills are necessary for evaluators to objectively assess student process and product. Consider using Jamboard or other virtual whiteboard to identify where specific transferable skills are evident in participants’ units. Where is there documentation that students are using informed and integrative thinking? Where is there documentation that they can communicate effectively?
- **Connecting Learning Targets and Planning Matrix:** Session 3 needs to be framed in a model unit. The unit should have learning targets and a planning matrix or graphic organizer that supports students in meeting those targets. Consider an analysis activity during which participants can compare the targets and planning matrix to determine how the targets are embedded in the plan (see Session 3 slides).
- **Drafting Learning Targets for Content and Transferable Skills:** Participants should prepare clear student-friendly learning targets for their unit’s content-specific performance indicators and transferable skills. This can be done collaboratively or individually, but peer feedback should be embedded in this process.
- **Drafting Planning Materials:** Participants should prepare planning matrices, graphic organizers, and other planning materials that support the targets. Refer to the [Edmodo Planning Materials folder](#) and the slides for Session 3 for samples and templates.

Closing

Closing for each session should focus on clarifying questions from participants, reflection, and next steps. For Session 3, participants can share how their draft planning matrices support the learning targets and/or reflect on how a documented planning process influences student engagement in a sustained PjBL unit. Note that Session 4 is on developing criteria and assessment tools; opportunities for students to provide evidence of the targets are necessary for these materials.