



Project-Based Learning in Theatre

Good afternoon! I'm Jess Shaw, and I'm excited to present to you today on Project-Based Learning in Theatre.

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

- ✓ Student-Centered Projects, not Teacher-Centered Instruction
 - Investigating and responding to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge
- ✓ Students work on projects for an extended period of time
 - Could be anywhere from a week to a semester
- ✓ Students learning and demonstrating skills and knowledge by creating a product for a real client

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Project-Based Learning is a student-centered approach to teaching that stems from John Dewey's ideas of "learning by doing". What this means is that class activities don't look like the traditional classroom with the teacher lecturing the class or leading all of the activities. Instead students are challenged with a real problem needing to be solved for an actual client, which leads to students researching, investigating, and crafting a solution. Doing this work often takes time, but through the process of doing, it is the project itself that teaches students skills and knowledge.

Now, all of this is very edu-jargon in its wording, but I'm hoping that you might be starting to see some connections to what we as theatre educators already do.

PBL in Theatre

- ✓ Challenge: Putting on a play for a local elementary school.
- ✓ Time frame: The full rehearsal/production process
- ✓ Skills/Knowledge: Acting technique, design & construction of technical aspects, possibly playwriting & directing, etc.
- ✓ Product: The final performance(s)
- ✓ Client: The audience of children

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You see, in theatre, we really are already doing project-based learning.

- The art we ask students to create, whether it be as actors, designers, playwrights, or directors, is the challenge. For example, putting on a play for a local elementary school.
- The extended time period is the full rehearsal and production process
- And though we as teachers may lead some activities, our students primarily learn the skills of acting, designing, scriptwriting, directing, etc. through participating in that process.
- The product being created is the final performance, and the client is the audience of that performance.

Because we are already doing this work, it is easy to make a few adjustments to how we present it to our administrators and parents so that it is framed in this established student-centered educational pedagogy.

Driving Question

Developing Inquiry Questions

Question

How can..
How do..
Should..
Could..

Who

I/we
students/teenagers
teachers/adults
community
organisations
suburb/city/state
politicians

Action

build..
create..
make..
design..
plan..
solve..
write..
propose..
decide..
produce..

For

a classroom?
a school?
an audience?
a community?
a global audience?

How do we find a solution to reduce the litter in our school permanently?

How can I create a campaign to reduce bullying in my school?

Could our school build a sustainable garden that provides ingredients to reduce our food expenses?

created by @rhonimcfarlane

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One of the key adjustments, and the one I'll speak specifically to today, is the use of a Driving Question. This question is the mission statement of the project. It gives purpose and guides students in crafting the solution. What I am sharing with you on the screen is a chart that was developed by Rhoni McFarlane which I frequently refer to when putting together driving questions.

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For

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a global audience?

How do

we

create a
theatrical
performance

that engages
local elementary
school students?

created by @rhonimcfarlane

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Using our example of putting on a play for a local elementary school, the driving question might read, "How do we create a theatrical performance that engages local elementary school students?" From here, students are able to use this question to take ownership of producing a quality children's theatre performance for their community.

Additionally, the driving question also provides a wonderful starting point for student reflection after the project is done.



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If you would like to further discuss Project-Based Learning, theatre curriculum, or curriculum development, feel free to reach out to me. My email, twitter handle, and website are noted on the screen.

"What Is Project Based Learning (PBL)?" What Is PBL? | Project Based Learning | BIE,
www.bie.org/about/what_pbl.

Vincent, Tony. "Crafting Questions That Drive Projects." Learning in Hand,
<https://learninginhand.com/blog/drivingquestions>.

SOURCES

And to give credit where credit is due, here are my sources for this presentation.