



## LESSONS IN THIS SERIES

Overview of Project Based Learning

Getting Started

Balancing the Assessment

Teamwork Tips

➔ Managing the PBL Experience

Wrapping Up

# MANAGING THE PBL EXPERIENCE

## AND WE'RE OFF!

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So, you have spent a fair amount of time prepping and planning for this PBL experience. You have:

- Chosen two or three outcomes from your course curriculum.
- Picked out an NB Global Competency to focus upon along with Collaboration.
- Aligned the outcomes with a real world problem that can be tied to your community.
- Crafted a snazzy title and an awesome driving question.
- Planned a balanced assessment and learning activities, and prepped the rubrics.
- Mapped out everything on the PBL calendar.
- Prepped the briefcase.

On day 1, the *grabber* gets the students fired up. You introduce the driving question, hand out the briefcase, and explain what they would be doing over the next few weeks. The students complete their strengths questionnaire and got started on the first individual activity.

Now all that's left is for you to assign the teams and then sit back to watch the incredible learning happen, right? Nope. While awesome and active learning will indeed happen during a PBL, it is more likely to happen if you manage the environment carefully.

## MANAGEMENT BY WANDERING AROUND

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Management by wandering around ([MBWA](#)) with random visits to each team is an excellent way to keep progress on track. Frequently and randomly sitting with each team for a few minutes as a “fly on the wall” allows you to get a feel for the team dynamic. Is everyone pulling their weight? Are they getting 'er dun?

## OTHER MANAGEMENT TIPS

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Have **scheduled check ins** with the team leaders frequently to see how the work is progressing.

If there are differences of opinion or dissention within the team, give them an opportunity to work it out on their own. If they can't work it out, suggest that they refer to the team contract and follow the process they had previously agreed upon. Conflict resolution is a skill that must be practised to be learned. **Try not to resolve issues for your students** unless it is necessary.

Do **frequent progress checks** with individuals. Ask to see rough drafts, concept maps, models, storyboards, plans, proposals, research notes, etc. for formative assessment and feedback (no evaluation at this point).

Learn with your students. Encourage them to share their discoveries and aha moments. **Model learning with enthusiasm!**

## REHEARSALS

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Rehearsals serve three main purposes. They:

1. give teams a chance to **test drive their presentations** in front of an audience of their peers. This helps to build confidence for the final presentation performance.
2. serve as a **jigsaw approach** to collaborative learning so that students on the other teams can strengthen and expand their understandings in the subject area with the diverse solutions and perspectives they see from their peers during the rehearsals.
3. are **formative assessment** opportunities with peer review either by a feedback form (see example on the right) or, if time permits, by using a Critical Friends Protocol.

## CRITICAL FRIENDS PROTOCOL

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A Critical Friends Protocol is an excellent way for students to learn to give and receive constructive criticism on their presentations so that they can fine tune and improve them before the public presentations. They are time consuming, however. (In the *Getting Started* section of this series, you were advised to pad the calendar in case your students needed extra time. If things went well and you didn't need the extra time, consider using the Critical Friends Protocol.)

There are three roles in a critical friends process.

- The facilitator, and that's you. Your role is to keep track of time and to keep the discussion on point.
- The presenting team.
- The audience of the remaining students.

Here are the steps.

1. The **presenting team** presents their presentation. At the end, they could ask for feedback on a specific issue for which they would like advice.
2. The **audience** asks clarifying questions, if required, to ensure their understanding of the solution presented. (maximum of 2 minutes)
3. The **presenting team** turns their chairs around so that they cannot see the audience. They can hear the next part of the protocol but are not permitted to react or respond. They should keep notes of the discussion that follows.
4. The **audience** discusses the presentation.
  - *Warm* comments that start with, "I liked ..." (maximum of 3 minutes)
  - *Cool* comments that start with, "I wonder if..." (maximum of 3 minutes)
5. The **presenting team** rejoins the group by turning their chairs back to face the audience. They reflect on what they heard non-defensively. (maximum of 2 minutes)

The total time required is about 10 minutes per team plus the time spent on the presentation.

You can also use this protocol to fine tune your PBL plan with your colleagues!

## RESOURCES

Rehearsal Feedback: [Example](#)

Critical Friends Protocol: [Video](#)

## PRESENTATIONS

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It's the big day; the culmination of all the hard work you and your students have put into this PBL experience.

To ensure the public presentation goes smoothly, be sure invitations are sent well in advance and that you have some definite confirmations of attendance. As each guest arrives, delegate some student hosts to greet their guests, show them to their seats, and give each guest a copy of the presentation feedback form (see example on the right) along with a pen or pencil if needed.

At the end of each presentation, invite audience members to ask questions of the team members about what they learned and their creative process in making their video, for example. You may want to consider *seeding* some questions in advance to get the ball rolling, and to ensure that each team is asked at least one or two questions.

Be sure students are aware that they will likely get questions from the audience and that every team member should be prepared to answer those questions.

For efficiency, you might divide the presentations and guests between two areas/rooms so that teams are presenting concurrently. If so, ask a colleague to facilitate one of the sessions for you.

At the conclusion of the presentations, thank guests for coming and collect their feedback forms. The feedback forms are important to validate the students' effort.

## RESOURCES

Presentation Feedback: [Example](#)

## **LYNN AND CHUCK'S EXCELLENT (PBL) ADVENTURE**

On the day of the PBL launch, students in Lynn's PDCP class were surprised to see Mr. Miller walk into the class, coffee cup in hand. They would usually see him the next period for English.

Chuck and Lynn launched the PBL together and explained that they were co-teaching both periods 2 and 3 for the next two weeks. They spent about 10 minutes talking with the class about the problem of youth out-migration. Many of the students knew of friends and family members who had moved away from NB, but they didn't realize that it was such a problem in the bigger picture. Then, the teachers explained that they would have a guest speaker, Mr. Chang, from PETL arriving in a few minutes. The class spent some time discussing what facts they would like to know about the issue and what questions they should ask Mr. Chang.

After Mr. Chang's presentation, which got the students fired up and ready to tackle the problem head-on, Chuck and Lynn gave the students a quick overview of what PBL is all about. They introduced the driving question, "What can our province do to help stop our out-migration?" and talked about how the PBL got its title. They ended with, "On January 20<sup>th</sup>, you will stand in front of Mr. Chang, his colleagues, your parents, school board officials, and maybe someone from the NB Times newspaper and you will present your ideas about what the province can do to keep you here. And your presentations will blow them away because they will be awesome!" The students were a little nervous about that, but excitement was building.

Next, the students were given their PBL briefcase. Lynn and Chuck unpacked the briefcase with students, answering questions along the way. The briefcase contained copies of the:

- [Summative Assessment Plan](#)
- [PBL Calendar](#)
- [Journal Rubric](#)
- [Career Exploration and Conference Rubric](#)
- [Interview Report Rubric](#)
- [Presentation Rubric](#)
- [Strengths Questionnaire](#)
- [Conflict Resolution Skill Builder](#)
- [Team Contract](#)
- [Collaboration Assessment Form](#)
- [Presentation Rehearsal Feedback](#)

Finally, students completed the strengths questionnaire and handed them in. The bell rang and they left the classroom talking excitedly about ideas they already had.

Chuck looked over at Lynn and confessed, "That went better than I hoped." Lynn smiled. "With the amount of planning we did, I am not surprised at all!"

Over the next six school days, there were a few hiccups (which was to be expected after all) but the teachers were able to put out the fires, help settle a few disputes between team members, give helpful formative assessment, and provide coaching in the form of guidance and encouragement.

On the day of the rehearsals, because they had enough time, they decided to try the Critical Friends Protocol so that teams could receive constructive criticism from their peers. Both Lynn and Chuck were amazed at how effective the protocol worked to provide good constructive criticism in a friendly way. Both agreed that they would like it to try it with their own peers the next time they were working on a PBL plan.

Finally, the big day (well, evening really) arrived. The students arrived at the school at 5:45 pm as planned, excited to share what they had learned and their ideas.

Chuck spent a few minutes showing a few boys how to tie a half Windsor knot (again remember, this is fiction) while Lynn made sure the SmartBoards in both her (session A) and Chuck's (session B) classrooms were up and running. They had students escort audience members to the respective classrooms. The student escorts also gave each audience member a copy of the [Audience Feedback form](#) and a pencil.

When they welcomed the guests to begin the presentations, Lynn and Chuck both encouraged audience members to ask questions after each presentation. They had privately spoken to a few people to seed a few questions as well.

Well, the presentations went off without a hitch. Scanning the audience, both Lynn and Chuck noticed a lot of heads nodding in agreement both with the explanation of the problem and with the students' proposed solutions. Parents were beaming at their offspring and the PETL reps were busily scribbling notes. The students went home feeling proud of their accomplishments and Chuck and Lynn went out for a celebration coffee!

To be continued...