Civics Education: Project-Based Learning

School Engagement

Course/Setting: IELCE; small community-based program

Theme: Sharing our expertise with local schools (with the byproduct of more involvement in schools overall)

NRS Level(s): ESL Low Intermediate

This same project could be used at many levels and in ABE or ESL classes. The students find their own resources, so this allows for student-led differentiation.

Timing: The project unfolds over several weeks. The instructor allocates 2 hours each week to work on the project. This project is one of many instructional processes happening in the class. Learners also do work on their own time as feasible.

According to Alan and Stoller (2005), Parrish (2019), and Wrigley (1998), it is always important to have a clear plan for project-based learning to be successful. We always start with an issue or learner need to be explored, and we end with a clear product that is shared with others. This plan represents possible stages for a successful project.

Stages in the Project	Activity/Task Descriptions and Possible Materials	The Skills that Matter Addressed or Evident
Working collaboratively, the class chooses a topic based on a real-world issue affecting the learners' lives.	Two students in this IELCE class shared the following story: They were attending an event at their children's local elementary school and the Spanish language interpreter was working with them to translate what the principal was talking about. The focus of the talk was on how to become involved at the school. Members of the parent–teacher organization complained that the ESL parents were talking at the back of room and not paying attention. These parents felt offended because they were very concerned about learning what the principal had to say about how parents could help out at the school. This led the class to talk about other ways they want to get involved either as parents or community members. For example, some want to help out in the foreign language classrooms (there are both Spanish and Chinese enrichment classes), and some are interested in coaching sports teams. As a class, they have decided they want to investigate how to make their skills and expertise known and find ways to become actively involved in the local schools. Some of the students in class do not have children in the schools, but they are intrigued to learn more about this topic. **With input from the class, the teacher has determined that the line of inquiry/essential questions for this project are the following:** • *What might be some obstacles to equitable parental involvement in our children's schools and how can we become equal players?* • *What are some concrete ways we can have more voice and become equal members of the school community?*	**Start of processing and analyzing information**

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The learners decide what they would like to create as a final product, such as a presentation, video, or brochure.	Class members determine the most suitable products: • Teams first generate lists of possible products (a brochure, poster, slide presentation, or short video). • Options are posted around the room on cards, and class members walk to the product that most appeals to them. Then teams brainstorm how they may want to disseminate the products they create.	**Self-awareness**
The learners choose their roles and responsibilities for completing their project.	Start with an interest/skills survey to determine team roles. I am comfortable with … • finding information online • creative design • writing • inviting speakers to class • contacting people in the community • attending school events • attending school board meetings • creating movies with my phone	**Adaptability and willingness to learn**
The learners determine the necessary resources for their project.	**Possible sources of information:** • The school website • A catalogue of the after-school enrichments • Other parents • School personnel and a school visit **Review questions to ask at a school visit:** https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/the-school-visit-what-to-look-for-what-to-ask/ What questions need to be added?	**Navigating systems**

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Groups start doing their research. Remember this is an ongoing project, so some work can be done individually, some in teams in the classroom, and some in the community. **Learners could consult resources in their first language, giving them access to a broader range and complexity of resources. The final product would still be in English (as suggested by Van Dyke-Kao & Yanuaria, 2017).** **The teacher can provide the language supports needed to complete the tasks.**	**Possible activities/events:** • Invite guest speakers. The students lead and host the event. They invite other classes at the site, prepare an introduction for each speaker, and prepare questions to ask the speakers. • Attend school events (sports, music, or an enrichment that interests them). • Ask to meet the principal at a local school to ask about volunteer opportunities. • Interview other parents about their experiences. The students develop questions based on their concerns/needs, such as the following: • What have been obstacles to participating at your child's school? • How would you describe the school climate? • To what extent does the school have inclusive practices? • How welcome do you feel at your child's school? What contributes, positively or negatively, to that? The teacher develops lessons on areas of language, such as making polite requests (*"Could I please set up a time to meet." "Would it be possible for us to work with the coaching staff?"*). Using suggestion models, the students practice making suggestions about ways they can help out: *"Many of us could help out in the Spanish class."*	**Adaptability and Willingness to Learn**

Stages in the Project	Activity/Task Descriptions and Possible Materials	The Skills that Matter Addressed or Evident
The learners create the final product. The teacher, peers, and class volunteers can provide ongoing feedback.	In teams, the students develop the final products. Here are some possibilities: • A brochure on steps for volunteering at local schools • A video on how to become a community expert at your child's school • A video showcasing parent leaders in local schools • A calendar of events open to the public at local schools (plays, music, sporting events, cultural events) • A poster or PPT presentation on the best ways to become involved (including how to overcome obstacles)	**Navigating systems** **Respecting differences and diversity**
The learners share the product.	**Audience:** Other parents and teachers, coaches, and administrators at local schools • Host an event to share products with class colleagues and other members of the school. • Ask to present products at a local school parent–teacher event or local school board meeting.	**Interpersonal skills** **Communication**

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Provide a means for assessment of the project through self, peer, and audience feedback.	Ultimately, success is measured by any changes in the participation of the students at their child's school or in the local school community. Realistically, some may not have the time to get involved, but this project provides rich language practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing and addresses an issue of concern that came from the students themselves, one of the hallmarks of project-based learning. Create an action plan based on what the students learned. Commit to two avenues they will explore to become engaged in new ways in their children's schools if they are parents. Others can make recommendations to the schools (e.g., respect language needs and use interpreters at school events). When the students present their work, provide audience members with a feedback form. Collect the forms and share with the presenters. {table below}	**Self-awareness**

Questions	Responses
What did you learn from the presenters?	
What could the presenters contribute to your school?	
What will you do to promote broader parent engagement based on what you learned?	
What questions do you still have for the presenters?	

References

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Wrigley, H. (1998, December). Knowledge in action: The promise of project-based learning. *Focus on Basics, 2*(D), 13–18.