

PDIG Final report - 2019
New Pedagogies for Deep Learning Lessons
Macdonald High School

Project Description

The project was designed to have Mac teachers compile a small bank of unit or lesson plans that merge the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL) framework with both Quebec's secondary school curriculum and Google Apps for Education (when applicable). We hope that by starting a system where lessons can be organized and shared in a uniform way, the lesson bank grow as the years go on.

The primary philosophy behind our lessons and units is open-endedness. All lessons must be student-centred and open-ended, and should not only involve the NPDL Six Cs, but Quebec's general cross-curricular competencies as well.

We were quite surprised at how long it took to organize lesson plans in a manner that is informative, yet concise. Many of us have not formally written a lesson plan in some time, and there were many discussions pertaining to the level of detail required for a teacher at another school to be able to take our materials and implement them into their courses with a limited barrier to entry.

As a group, we worked quite cohesively, but there were instances that were clearly not run as efficiently as they could have been. To be frank, a major regret is not asking for enough release time. I believe that the organization and pre-planning before the actual lesson designing was somewhat rushed. The pre-planning stage does not feel productive, as there is little physical content to show for it, but it is such a vital stage. We started to rush in fear of running out of time for the actual designing, but should have spent more time at the onset planning out more minute details so to not curtail momentum later on in the process.

One major change from the initial plan, is the shift towards multiple smaller lessons to one major project. After seeing presentations at a New Pedagogies for Deep Learning convention that described Passion Projects as the epitome of a student-centred open-ended project, we could not stop thinking about a grade-wide Passion Project unit at the high school level. After speaking to colleagues at other schools who are also piloting NPDL, such as Pierrefonds Comprehensive, and Forest Hill Sr. Academy, we all agreed that teaching staffs will be able to better understand Deep Learning pedagogy by seeing a passion project in action, rather than smaller lessons or units. While our goal was to have a small number of lessons for a small number of courses, we felt that shifting focus to a larger project that touches upon Quebec's general competencies instead of a specific course would be more beneficial and exciting. Passion projects can be done at any grade level, thus this is much more transferrable and scalable than our initial plan.

Logistical Changes

Release time was not required for one project member that went on sick leave right before the project started. Other than that we stuck to our timeline more or less. We did, however, have to spend a great deal of time after regular work hours and during Ped Days, as our project grew to a level that would not be achievable within the original timeline.

Project Goals

Our main goal for this project was to create content based on the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning framework that can be used by other schools who are attempting to incorporate this framework. Our initial plan was to have multiple smaller lesson plans, but after attending various conferences and workshops, we morphed the project to focus on one significantly larger project. The Passion Project is the epitome of open-ended, student-centred learning, and can be incorporated during any point of the year and at any grade level. We have definitely accomplished our goal of creating content that can be used at other schools, but we strongly feel that the final product is not as complete or as polished as it could be, as we ran out of time. Having said that, we of course wish that we could have added a greater number of smaller lessons, and we hope to do so this June after exams are completed.

Our Deep Learning lesson plan folder is dynamic and will hopefully constantly evolve. We will maintain the initial link to the folder for ease of shareability, but the content inside can grow and evolve as the years go on.

We will have to complete the final portions of the shareable material after this final report is submitted, as we ran out of release time, and have to make use of ped days near the end of the school year. Again, our project grew to a level of complexity far beyond the scope of the original PDIG plan, and thus time became our primary nemesis. We remain immensely proud of the work we did, and hope to perfect our plans in the future.

We are very glad that we have a strong framework for undertaking the passion project again next year, and have reapplied for a PDIG to be able to expand on the project, and perhaps make modifications for it to be scaled to a different grade at Mac as well. There will obviously be an opportunity to debrief near the end of May when this year's Passion Project is complete, and we will use those notes to expand on the project next year.

Project Outcomes

The four pillars of New Pedagogies for Deep Learning lesson planning are: Learning Environment, Pedagogical Practices, Leveraging Digital, and Learning Partnerships. When designing lessons to maximize Deep Learning, educators must pay an incredible amount of attention to these elements and all project members were able to engage with all four pillars in an incredible way.

The Passion Project could not have been completed within the confines of a regular classroom with the standard 50 minute period school schedule. We had to get creative with logistics, and organize two days where regular classes were temporarily suspended, and students would be spread out around the building according to the type of project they were working on. The organizing the logistics of the varied learning environments was an invaluable experience for us, and further demonstrated to the rest of the staff the importance of spaces that differ from the standard classroom with desks in rows, and the typical six-period per day timetable.

Undertaking a grade-wide project for the first time is inherently risky for teachers. With so many moving parts, and no guarantee that the project will be a success, we had to have a lot of faith in each other, and in the soundness of the pedagogy. While the main project members involved clearly grew as teachers, it was also important for the rest of the staff to see that major initiatives can be done at the grassroots level. A staff seeing a major student-centred project that was dreamed up by teachers and not a school board official or policy-maker is a crucial step towards the acceptance of the NPDL philosophy. We learned that an open-ended project can strike a balance between structure and creative freedom when properly modelled and scaffolded. Not only does this provide confidence in the pedagogical practices of NPDL, but it lays the foundation for educators at both Mac and other schools to be able to undertake open-ended student-centred initiatives.

Reinvestment

We sincerely hope to be able to garner more planning time that can be entirely devoted to improving upon the passion project through a PDIG in the 2019-20 school year. We wish to improve upon the student workbook, submission forms, and other materials, while also expand on how students are able to share their final products.

Thus far, we have shared our content with teachers at three local schools (Edgewater, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and Pierrefonds Comprehensive), shared our experiences with our school board's Educational Services department, and some Mac staff members spoke about our project at a NPDL conference in Seattle this April. We are also planning on further sharing our NPDL lesson folder at a school board Ped Day workshop in May.

The benefit of sharing the Passion Project specifically is that it conforms to both NPDL standards, and Quebec's general competencies. More importantly, however, is the fact that it can be undertaken at almost any grade level, and is not tied to a specific course's content.

At present time, our materials are somewhat Mac specific, as reproducible materials have our school logo, name, and other specific references on them. Next year, we would like to modify our templates so that other schools and centres can easily add their own personal touches to them.

We are extremely proud of our achievements, and hope to continue to improve and them!