

Out of the Gate: Third Interim Evaluation Report

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Out of the Gate: Preparing Preservice Teachers to Use Project Based Learning (PBL) is a program designed to transform teacher education programs (TEPs) by providing high-quality PBL professional development and coaching to faculty members, cooperating teachers, and pre-service teachers. This gives TEP faculty members and cooperating teachers the skills they need to teach PBL strategies and support pre-service teachers in conducting PBL activities as soon as they enter the teaching profession.

The program was developed by the Buck Institute for Education (BIE), with funding from the ECMC Foundation. Participating TEPs receive ongoing support from BIE, as well as PBL professional development. BIE hired Education Northwest to conduct a three-year (2017–2020) external evaluation of the program. This interim report provides information regarding participating TEPs and a plan for case study comparison in years 2 and 3 of the evaluation. During the past year, the evaluators gathered information about the TEPs through institutional websites, as well as participant surveys and interviews. In addition to addressing the evaluation questions listed below, this report describes case studies to be integrated into the evaluation in years 2 and 3.

Evaluation questions

- What are the similarities and differences in how *Out of the Gate* is implemented and experienced across TEPs?
 - What characteristics define each TEP at *Out of the Gate*'s partner institutions?
 - How does TEP participation in *Out of the Gate* vary?

Key findings

- The Francis Marion University TEP left the *Out of the Gate* project at the end of year 1. Three TEPs remain in year 2: Grand Valley State University, Otterbein University, and the University of Mary.¹ Based on attendance at BIE events, TEP participation varied, with the University of Mary and Grand Valley State University showing the strongest participation.
- TEPs vary in their degree and certification offerings, as well as their advertisement of their participation in *Out of the Gate*.

¹ Francis Marion University is not included in the remainder of this report.



TEPs vary in their degree and certification offerings

Evaluation question: What characteristics define each TEP at Out of the Gate's partner institutions?

In 2018–19, three TEPs and their local school districts are participating in the project: Grand Valley State University (Michigan), Otterbein University (Ohio), and the University of Mary (North Dakota). Details on each TEP are listed below.

Box 1. University of Mary

- **Characteristics**
 - Private, Catholic college
 - 3,314 students
 - Location: Bismarck, North Dakota
 - Community: Suburban/rural
 - First MEd issued: 1986
- **Graduate Degree Programs and Certificates**
 - Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment (MEd)
 - Early Childhood Education Licensure Track
 - Reading (MEd)
 - Education (EdD)
- **Undergraduate Educator Licensure in North Dakota**
 - Elementary Education (eligible to teach grades 1–6)
 - Early Childhood Education (eligible to teach children from birth to grade 3)
 - English
 - Math
 - Social Studies
 - Special Education
- **Student Teaching**
 - A capstone teacher event occurs over the course of one semester
- **Accreditor**
 - The University of Mary's education program is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

The University of Mary provides graduate-level coursework, as well as undergraduate teaching licensure. It is the only participating TEP to offer a doctoral degree.

Box 2. Grand Valley State University

- **Characteristics**
Public, liberal arts university
25,049 students
Location: Allendale, Michigan
Community: Suburban
First MEd issued: 1964
- **Graduate Degree Programs and Certificates**
Intensive, one-year, full-time teacher training program for adults who hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited college
Master of Education
Educational Leadership
Educational Technology
Higher Education
Instruction and Curriculum
Literacy Studies
School Counseling
Special Education
- **Undergraduate Elementary Education Program**
Candidates who earn an elementary certificate teach all subjects for grades K–5 or major subject areas for grades 6–8
Academic majors for certification are offered in language arts, mathematics, integrated science, and social studies
- **Endorsements**
Spanish (Undergraduate, Elementary Education)
Early Childhood Education (Graduate)
Reading Elementary (Graduate)
Reading Secondary (Graduate)
Reading Specialist (Graduate)
English as a Second Language (Graduate)
Elementary Education (Graduate)
Secondary-Level Education (Graduate)
- **Student Teaching**
The graduate program combines teacher education coursework with two consecutive semesters of field placement in a local school
- **Accreditor**
Grand Valley State University's educator preparation programs were most recently accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education in 2012

More extensive than the other TEPs, Grand Valley State University offers numerous endorsements, mostly related to reading education.

Box 3. Otterbein University

- **Characteristics**
Private, four-year, liberal arts college
2,800 students
Location: Westerville, Ohio
Community: Suburban
- **Graduate Degree Programs and Certificates**
Master of Arts in Education
 Curriculum and Instruction
 Reading
 Intervention Specialist
Master of Arts in Teaching
 Middle Childhood Specialist
 Intervention Specialist
Certificates
 Expertise in Applied Mathematics
 Expertise in Foundational Mathematics
 Expertise in Metrics and Visualization
- **Undergraduate Ohio Resident Educator Licensure**
Early Childhood Program (license to teach ages 3–8 or pre-K–grade 3)
Middle Childhood (license to teach ages 8–14 or grades 4–9)
Adolescent to Young Adult (students must pursue a bachelor’s degree in their content area)
Multi-Age License (students must pursue a bachelor’s degree in their content area)
- **Endorsements**
Early Childhood PK–3 Generalist (Undergraduate/Graduate)
Middle Childhood 4–9 Generalist (Graduate)
Adolescent to Young Adult 7–12 (Undergraduate/Graduate)
Reading (Graduate only)
Intervention Specialist (Graduate only)
TESOL (Graduate only)
- **Pre-service Teacher Eligibility**
Post baccalaureate programs are available for qualified candidates who already have a bachelor’s degree. This leads to nondegree licensure.
- **Student Teaching**
Undergraduate teacher candidates complete 165 to 245 contact hours (based on licensure program) in classroom-based field experiences prior to student teaching. Each placement is embedded in a course, enabling candidates to put into practice what they are learning. Graduate teacher candidates complete a full-time, full-semester teaching experience.
- **Accreditor**
Otterbein University’s educator preparation programs are accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.
- **School District Partners**
Otterbein University partners with five school districts.



TEP participation and buy-in

Evaluation question: How does TEP participation in *Out of the Gate* vary?

Participation

Grand Valley State University had the highest attrition among the TEP partnerships. It started with 20 faculty members, and 13 participated in the symposium at the end of the year. In addition, 16 cooperating teachers and 16 pre-service teachers began the program, and 11 and nine, respectively, attended the symposium at the end of the year.

The University of Mary and Otterbein University appear to have steady participation. Otterbein University engaged 10 faculty members, 10 cooperating teachers, and 10 pre-service teachers in its *Out of the Gate* TEP throughout the year, and the University of Mary engaged 12 faculty members, 25 cooperating teachers, and 25 pre-service teachers.

The varying ratios of faculty members to cooperating and pre-service teachers might also be of interest in the case study analysis. Specifically, Otterbein University maintained a ratio of 1:1:1, and the University of Mary maintained a ratio of 1:2:2. It would be valuable to know if having a higher ratio of faculty members to participating teachers is beneficial or whether a lower ratio is adequate.

TEP recognition of participation in *Out of the Gate*

The recognition of participation in *Out of the Gate* varies across institutions. Grand Valley State University has done the most to showcase its participation in *Out of the Gate* on its website.

- Grand Valley State University's website includes a story and an accompanying short video recognizing and describing its partnership with BIE (<https://www.gvsu.edu/coe/community-engagement-in-education-178.htm>).
- A story on the University of Mary's website describes *Out of the Gate* and the teacher symposium held in spring 2018 (<https://news.umary.edu/new-local-and-national-multilateral-partnership-puts-childrens-education-at-the-forefront/>).
- Otterbein University's website includes a side banner recognizing its partnership with BIE (<http://www.otterbein.edu/graduate-school/education.aspx>).



Case study plan

Per the evaluation plan,² case studies in years 2 and 3 will address the following questions:

1. How do TEPs change how they prepare pre-service teachers with PBL over the course of *Out of the Gate*?
2. What are the similarities and differences in how *Out of the Gate* is implemented and experienced across the TEPs?
3. How and to what extent do *Out of the Gate* faculty members promote PBL among pre-service teachers? How does their implementation of PBL change over time?
4. What supports and challenges do TEP participants (faculty members, as well as pre-service and cooperating teachers) experience related to the implementation of *Out of the Gate*? How can these supports be sustained and these challenges overcome?

Plans for year 4 case studies will be developed in consultation with BIE through Education Northwest's contracting process and are not discussed in this document.

TEP characteristics and participation

What characteristics define each TEP at *Out of the Gate*'s partner institutions

To address this question, we will work with BIE staff members and TEP leaders to collect program descriptions, course requirements, and syllabi. This is important, as TEP programs may change from year to year—which may affect the success of *Out of the Gate*. Program descriptions will indicate whether teacher training programs at each institution are changing more broadly. Course syllabi can provide valuable data related to how faculty members teach PBL. Syllabi from multiple faculty members at all TEPs can indicate whether there is continuity within each TEP in PBL implementation and what differences are found among TEPs. Knowing the varied characteristics of each TEP will provide an important foundation for understanding how *Out of the Gate* is implemented and experienced at each institution.

How does TEP participation in *Out of the Gate* vary?

To investigate the level of participation in each TEP, we will investigate attendance at in-person gatherings (Project Slice, PBL 101, and the regional symposia), in-person sustained support visits, and the Online Coaching Academy. We will continue data collection methods developed in year 1. From these data, we will calculate rates of attendance (or contacts), as well as

² This may or may not apply to year 4, depending on BIE's choice of the small, medium, or large evaluation proposal in year 4.

participants' feedback on the events. We are particularly interested in the change in the number of faculty members participating in *Out of the Gate* from year 1 to year 2.

We will also survey faculty members and cooperating and pre-service teachers about their participation in *Out of the Gate*. The faculty survey will ask faculty members to report on their beliefs about PBL, their knowledge of BIE's Project Based Teaching Practices, and their confidence with using PBL in their own university teaching and with supporting pre-service teachers in using PBL in their K–12 classrooms. Additionally, faculty members will report whether they attribute any changes in their knowledge and confidence to participation in *Out of the Gate*. The faculty survey also includes a section on faculty members' use of PBL in the university classroom. This section asks faculty members to report the number of high-quality projects they have implemented, their instructional methods used when teaching about high-quality PBL, challenges they perceive in using PBL in university and K–12 settings, and their endorsements of PBL to other faculty members and pre-service teachers.

The teacher survey will ask pre-service and cooperating teachers to report on the number of high-quality projects they have implemented in the classroom, their beliefs about PBL and teaching in general, their confidence with using PBL in the classroom, their knowledge of BIE's Project Based Teaching Practices, whether they attribute changes in their PBL knowledge or confidence to their participation in *Out of the Gate*, and challenges they perceive with using PBL in their teaching.

Survey data will measure faculty members', cooperating teachers', and pre-service teachers' professional growth in PBL over time. The surveys will be conducted annually, which will allow us to investigate and compare changes over time. We will use the same survey items from year 1 to year 2 to ensure continuity. To capture the changing direction of this evaluation, we will add a unique faculty survey that will address new research questions.

Working with our contacts in TEPs and relying on BIE's advertisement of our evaluation goals, we will administer the surveys to participating faculty members, cooperating teachers, and pre-service teachers. We will analyze the data for closed-ended survey items using descriptive statistics (such as averages and frequencies) and inferential statistics (such as correlations and t-tests). We will use content analysis for open-ended survey items to detect themes in participants' write-in responses.

TEP faculty members

To what degree do faculty members engage in *Out of the Gate*?

To address this question, we propose conducting annual semi-structured interviews with faculty members from each TEP. The interview data will also increase our understanding of changes in the TEPs and assist with extant data identification and collection. We will discuss how faculty members integrate PBL materials into their TEP courses. During the interviews, we

will also ask that faculty members teaching pre-service teachers share their syllabi with us and discuss how participation in the project has changed their university teaching.

Only one faculty member from each TEP participated in an interview with Education Northwest during the first year of *Out of the Gate*. As a result, we have reduced the length of faculty interviews. We plan to conduct annual 30-minute interviews by phone at the convenience of TEP leaders/faculty members.³ To ensure the accuracy of the data, we will record the interviews and take notes. We will then transcribe and analyze each interview using content analysis.

First, we will use deductive coding to capture data related to faculty members' perceptions of *Out of the Gate* and PBL. In addition, we will ask faculty members to discuss how their teaching of PBL courses differs from other courses. These themes are based on *Out of the Gate's* logic model and faculty member participation in year 1. Second, we will use inductive coding to capture emergent themes. Third, we will organize codes to examine patterns in each TEP, as well as across TEPs. The results of this analysis will contribute to understanding faculty member professional growth in PBL over time, changes in TEPs, and supports and challenges for change.

We also plan to gather valuable data via faculty survey. This data collection design considers year 1 findings; overall, university faculty members had the lowest response rate of all survey respondents (63 percent compared with 80 and 86 percent for pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers, respectively). Thus, we've created a stand-alone, shortened survey for faculty members to try to incentivize completion.

How do faculty members teach PBL?

In year 2, we plan to conduct classroom observations of faculty members at each participating TEP. During the faculty interviews in the fall, we will learn which participating faculty members plan to implement PBL in their spring 2019 courses, with the aim of observing their classrooms to better understand the quality of PBL implementation in the TEPs.

While observing, evaluators will take narrative notes guided by BIE's Essential Project Design Elements and Project Based Teaching Practices, described in BIE publications (Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss, 2015) and related literature about PBL in schools (Lenz, 2015). Evaluators will then inductively code the narrative notes to capture themes related to the quality of PBL instruction and implementation. The observations will specifically investigate pre-service teachers' engagement with PBL, faculty members' scaffolding and coaching, faculty members' project management, and the classroom PBL culture, as these constructs lend themselves well to qualitative investigation. This method of data collection will also give us the opportunity to

³ The interview length will be determined by faculty members' availability. The interview questions will be tailored to the length of each interview.

directly observe the experience pre-service teachers are having in the classroom and, thus, the quality of PBL implementation they experience themselves.

This type of data collection will enable further investigation of each TEP's implementation of *Out of the Gate*. Since faculty members have not been targeted by previous BIE initiatives, this information could be especially valuable to BIE (for example, it could inform current TEP practices and how BIE chooses to implement future programs similar to *Out of the Gate*).

How do pre-service teachers experience PBL?

In year 2, after conducting classroom observations of faculty members, we plan to conduct interviews or focus groups (depending on interest) with pre-service teachers to investigate their experiences with PBL instruction. These interviews or focus groups will take place immediately following the classroom observations of faculty members, and they will reference narrative notes from the observations. In the interviews or focus groups, we will investigate pre-service teachers' engagement in faculty members' courses on PBL, how clearly pre-service teachers understand the content faculty members are presenting, the degree of interest pre-service teachers express about PBL, and whether pre-service teachers plan to implement PBL in their classrooms. This will allow us to examine how faculty members' Project Based Teaching Practices transfer to pre-service teachers' beliefs about PBL and use of PBL in their classrooms.

How do pre-service teachers teach PBL?

In year 3, we plan to conduct classroom observations of pre-service teachers at each participating TEP.⁴ Like the faculty classroom observations, these will be evaluated based on BIE's Essential Project Design Elements and Project Based Teaching Practices. Evaluators will use these narrative observation notes to ask pre-service teachers about their planning of the overall PBL project; the implementation of the various parts of the multi-lesson project; the plan for assessment of learning; and how *Out of the Gate* influenced their planning, implementation, and assessment of the project.

These interviews and observations will take place during a two-day site visit, and the total number of observations and interviews will be determined by TEP interest and capacity to participate.

⁴ If a new TEP joins *Out of the Gate* in year 3, we will conduct faculty observations with it in year 3, and we will conduct pre-service teacher observations with it in year 4.

References

Larmer, J., Mergendoller, J. R., & Boss, S. (2015). *Setting the standard for project-based learning: A proven approach to rigorous classroom instruction*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Lenz, B. (with Wells, J., & Kingston, S.). (2015). *Transforming schools: Using project-based learning, performance assessment, and Common Core Standards*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.