



Project Learning Institute

Professional Development for Teachers

Introduction

Technology and globalisation have transformed the world. The challenge that educators now face is to prepare students for work and life in this new paradigm, sometimes referred to as the “Knowledge Economy,” in which success relies heavily on 21st century skills. Significant resources are needed to meet this challenge rapidly and sustainably, requiring contributions from multiple stakeholders such as education organisations, government agencies, and Ministries of Education.

To that end, the Oracle Education Foundation (OEF) has developed a worldwide professional development programme for teachers called the Project Learning Institute (“the Institute”). The Institute trains educators on how to use a project-oriented, technology-supported teaching approach that engages students in developing critical skills for success in the 21st century. Teachers enrolled in the Institute participate in online and in-class training, and then must put their learning into practice by designing and implementing projects with their students upon returning to the classroom. OEF provides ongoing mentorship and support throughout the programme to ensure that teachers are positioned for success.

After completing the Institute, teachers are prepared to do the following:

- Integrate 21st century skills instruction into their curricula
- Design and implement online learning projects that develop students’ 21st century skills
- Apply best practices to their learning projects using OEF’s online project-learning environment ThinkQuest Projects.

To date, 330 teachers from 23 countries have participated in Institute pilots held in Singapore, the United States, South Africa, and Brazil. Future Institutes are planned for India, Europe, and the United States, and OEF seeks to partner with education organisations and government agencies to launch additional Institutes around the world.

“Schools have a critical role to play in teaching 21st century skills. But changing the direction, nature, and results of schooling on a grand scale is beyond the capacity of local schools alone.”

Partnership for 21st
Century Skills

“The course material gave me a very clear understanding of setting up a project to fulfil both the curricular requirements and to promote the acquisition of 21st century skills. I recently completed a project with my class and found that project learning is not mere theory—it does work in the classroom.”

Krishna Lyer
Ramachandran
Principal
Kendriya Vidyalaya,
Bangalore, India

What are 21st Century Skills?

21st century skills are the capabilities and behaviours that must be acquired by our youth to be competitive in a global, knowledge-based economy. The Institute focuses on seven core skills, which OEF believes to be the most critical to success in the 21st century workforce: Critical thinking, Creativity, Teamwork, Cross-cultural understanding, Communication, Technology, and Self-direction.

The importance of 21st century skills has been recognised by a broad spectrum of stakeholders worldwide, including the Partnership for 21st Century Skills in the United States (a partnership comprised of business leaders, education leaders, and policymakers) and the European Commission (ICT Task Report, November 2006).

What is Project Learning?

Project learning is a dynamic approach to teaching that engages students in self-directed learning. Students acquire skills and knowledge by collaborating on projects that investigate and propose solutions to real world challenges. At its core, project learning fosters an environment in which students can develop key 21st century skills, gain a deeper understanding of relevant curricular concepts, improve knowledge retention, and become highly motivated and engaged in the learning process.

Components of the Project Learning Institute

The Institute is a comprehensive programme designed to make the learning relevant for teachers upon their return to the classroom.

- 1) Online training
 - Sixty hours of training over six weeks, supported by an online mentor
 - Teachers master key concepts prior to attending the in-class training
 - Teachers learn how to operate in a virtual learning environment
- 2) In-class training
 - Four days of training at an OEF-appointed location
 - Teachers work under the guidance of experienced facilitators to design a project for implementation in their classrooms
 - Teachers meet and exchange ideas with peers from around the world, building connections that can result in future collaboration between schools
- 3) Classroom project
 - Three months from planning to implementation
 - Teachers apply their learning in a real classroom setting by

“ThinkQuest Projects is a powerful tool for schools to house project-based learning activities. It represents 21st century learning in a relevant and rigorous manner—the type of tool vital for today’s instruction.”

Stephen Paine
West Virginia
Superintendent of
Schools,
United States

- implementing the projects they designed during in-class training
- Teachers develop a proven structure and model for future curricular projects

- 4) Ongoing tools and support after “graduation” from the Institute
 - Teachers receive ongoing support from OEF throughout the year, including proactive follow-up on classroom project outcomes
 - Teachers have access to a free and protected online environment for designing and implementing learning projects (ThinkQuest Projects)

Success Factors

The impact of the Institute cannot be fully realized without the following:

Committed partners who share OEF’s vision and often serve as the primary channel to reach potential teacher participants.

Enthusiastic teachers who can demonstrate commitment to teaching 21st century skills, support from school administrators, appreciation for and ability to take on the time commitment required for the Institute, and previous experience with OEF’s online project environment.

Alignment with **education standards** where possible. OEF welcomes the opportunity to work with education agencies to identify how best to align the programme with local education standards.

Impact

Deb Austin Brown, Teacher

Alban Elementary School, St. Alban, West Virginia, United States

A teacher for 32 years in the public school system of West Virginia, Ms. Brown strives to inspire her students with fresh ideas. After participating in the Institute, Ms. Brown designed and implemented “The Success Project,” which challenged her 5th grade students to spend six weeks studying the lives of successful people and then give two-minute speeches on the keys to success. Since then, the project has gained national and international media attention and resulted in a partnership with Verizon, a prominent multinational corporation.

Maria Mead, Teacher

St. Catherine’s Primary School, Brisbane, Australia

Ms. Mead has used ThinkQuest Projects for the past five years to deliver content, facilitate collaboration between her students, and give them a safe place to explore the online world. After participating in the Institute, Ms. Mead designed and implemented “Outside My Window,” a joint project between her 5th grade students in Australia and students in the United States. This Life

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Sciences project challenges the students to look at the world, its organisms, and plant life, all from the perspective of their own backyards. This project is still ongoing.



Conclusion

Through the Project Learning Institute, OEF aims to play a vital role in equipping teachers with the tools and skills they need to empower students for success in the 21st century. OEF is committed to partnering with education organisations, government agencies, and Ministries of Education to share the task of bringing 21st century skills to the students of today in preparation for tomorrow. We invite you to contact us so we can meet this challenge together.



About the Oracle Education Foundation

A nonprofit organization funded by Oracle, the foundation delivers ThinkQuest – a widely acclaimed education technology program – to K-12 schools globally. ThinkQuest is a protected, online learning platform that enables teachers to integrate learning projects into their classroom curriculum and students to develop critical 21st century skills.

For more information, visit <http://www.oraclefoundation.org>.