GUIDED INQUIRY DESIGN® — TEACHING CASE STUDY

A Well-Designed PBL Project — And What's Missing

What happens when a thoughtful educator builds a rich, authentic project without a learning process framework underneath it

The project below is real. The educator who designed it cared deeply — the authentic context, real audience, community connections, and vision statement are genuinely strong PBL design. **This is not a bad project.** It's what a good project looks like without GID. Reading it through a GID lens reveals exactly where the learning gets left behind — and what would change if the GID phases were deliberately layered in.

PBL PROJECT

Neighborhood Challenge: Confronting the Societal Issues Pervading Our City

Goal: Identify a community problem, research its roots, propose a $15k solution, present to city leaders and elected officials

PROJECT MILESTONE	GID LENS — WHAT'S HERE, WHAT'S MISSING
Neighborhood Reflection 2 days	OPEN — PARTIAL A genuine start — but framed as a writing task rather than a curiosity-building experience. In GID, this personal thread runs through every phase, not just the opening.
Choosing Your Issue 2 days	IMMERSE + EXPLORE — MISSING This is the critical gap. Students are asked to direct their inquiry on day 5 — before any real Immerse or Explore phase. GID ensures students steep deeply in the topic landscape before anyone asks: *What do you want to investigate?*
Investigating the Issue 1 week	IDENTIFY + GATHER — PREMATURE Without Immerse and Explore, students settle for the first workable angle rather than the question that genuinely matters to them.
Neighborhood Interview 2 days in class / 1 week to complete	GATHER — STRONG ELEMENT Excellent PBL design — human sources are powerful in GID. A properly earned inquiry focus would make these interviews yield significantly richer material.
Historical Context 2–3 weeks	GATHER — EXTENDED BUT UNFOCUSED Students with a properly earned inquiry question research with urgency and purpose. Without it, this extended phase risks broad information collection rather than genuine meaning-making.
Solution on a Shoestring 2 weeks	CREATE — AUTHENTICALLY STRONG A grant application is genuinely strong Create. This is where PBL shines — and where GID-supported learning underneath would make proposals far more specific and evidence-grounded.
Vision Statement + Conclusion 2 weeks	CREATE + EVALUATE — SUMMATIVE ONLY The debrief questions are genuinely excellent — but summative only. GID embeds metacognition at the moments of highest uncertainty (after Explore, at Identify, mid-Gather) when naming the experience matters most.
Presentation Multiple sessions	SHARE — POWERFULLY AUTHENTIC Real audience, real stakes — the highest form of Share in GID. Students who arrived through genuine inquiry would present with the depth this audience deserves.

Missing / Critical gap · Partial / Attempted · Present · Authentically strong

Three Critical Gaps — And What Changes When You Fill Them

What GID adds to a project like this — and what practitioners discover when they try it

01

Immerse and Explore are missing

Students choose their inquiry focus on day 5 — before they've built the curiosity, background knowledge, or conceptual landscape that makes the choice meaningful. They're selecting from a menu, not following genuine wonder. GID's Open → Immerse → Explore sequence ensures students arrive at their question ready to own it.

02

Identify comes before it's earned

Without Immerse and Explore, the focused inquiry question is likely surface-level — students settle for the first workable angle rather than the question that genuinely matters to them. In GID, Identify is the natural culmination of exploration, not the starting gate. That difference determines the depth of everything that follows.

03

Metacognition is summative only

The project's closing debrief contains excellent metacognitive questions — but they appear only at the end. GID embeds metacognitive touchpoints throughout, especially at the moments of highest uncertainty: after Explore (disorientation is real), at Identify (focus is forming), and mid-Gather (frustration peaks). That's when naming the experience matters most.

FROM THE FIELD

What a practitioner discovered when she added GID

BEFORE — PBL ALONE

- A school in its second year of PBL implementation
- The librarian felt her first PBL project *"wasn't really successful"*
- Students completed the milestones — but the learning didn't go deep
- She went back. She reflected. She redesigned.

AFTER — PBL + GID

- She redesigned the project using the GID stages deliberately
- Students could *articulate* which resources were best — and why
- They made transfer. They were engaged. The learning was visible.
- The librarian used a modified GID tool as an exit ticket — and it worked

> *"Just had to share another example of how this works and makes PBL that much stronger."*
>
> — District Library Leader, reflecting after observing a redesigned PBL unit

The Neighborhood Challenge project is not a failure — it's a demonstration of what thoughtful PBL design looks like without learning architecture underneath it. **GID doesn't replace the project. It gives students what they need to arrive at the authentic work genuinely ready** — *curious, grounded, and focused enough to make the real-world stakes matter.*