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PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT BENEFITS STUDENTS?

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ABSTRACT

Project based learning is a nontraditional education model that seeks to better prepare students for solving real-world problems and issues while teaching them what they need to know to succeed in school right now. Project based learning structures curriculum around discrete projects, presenting students with multi-step problems to solve or asking them complex questions they are then required to answer. Such projects often force students to use multiple learning techniques to succeed, including research, logical deduction, and iterative learning (trial and error). Since these projects are usually too large and complex for one student to do alone, project based learning also tends to encourage teamwork. Connecting academic situations to the real world is one of the largest benefits of project based learning. Students learn with the same approach they will eventually use in their hobbies, passions, and careers. This ingrains essential problem-solving techniques within them early on, drastically increasing their chances of success in whatever career they choose once their education has completed. Part of this is that project based learning requires the use of multiple problem-solving methods, which helps students not only cultivate a balanced approach but also learn to switch approaches when their initial attempt fails to work. Overall, project based learning encourages students to develop a balanced, diverse approach to solving real-world problems, both on their own and in a team. Project based learning prepares students for success in the real world like no other teaching style can.

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“One of the major advantages of project work is that it makes school more like real life. It's an in-depth investigation of a real-world topic worthy of children's attention and effort.”

-Education Researcher Sylvia Chard

Project learning, also known as project-based learning, is a dynamic approach to teaching in which students explore real-world problems and challenges, simultaneously developing cross-curriculum skills while working in small collaborative groups. Because project-based learning is filled with active and engaged learning, it inspires students to obtain a deeper knowledge of the subjects they're studying. Research also indicates that students are more likely to retain the knowledge gained through this approach far more readily than through traditional textbook-centered learning. In addition, students develop confidence and self-direction as they move through both team-based and independent work. Project-based learning has proven to be one of the most effective ways to engage students and provide a practical application for what they're learning? what project-based learning looks like? and how it helps students master key skills as they complete each project. Project-based learning not only provides opportunities for students to collaborate or drive their own learning, but it also teaches them skills such as problem solving, and helps to develop additional skills integral to their future, such as critical thinking and time management. And maybe more importantly, it provides students with an opportunity to create authentic projects which are personal and meaningful to them. Students have the chance to pursue their own interests and as a result, opportunities for learning for students and teachers are tremendous.

HISTORY OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:

Confucius and Aristotle were early proponents of learning by doing. Socrates modeled how to learn through questioning, inquiry, and critical thinking, all strategies that remain very relevant in today's PBL classrooms. Fast-forward to John Dewey, 20th-century American educational theorist and philosopher, and we hear a ringing endorsement for learning that's grounded in experience and driven by student interest. Dewey challenged the traditional view of the student as a passive recipient of knowledge (and the teacher as the transmitter of a static body of facts). He argued instead for active experiences that prepare students for ongoing learning about a dynamic world. As Dewey pointed out, **“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”**

DEFINITIONS OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING :

- BIE defines project-based learning as “a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks.” This process can last for varying time periods and can extend over multiple content areas.
- John Thomas (2000) explains that project-based learning requires “complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in design, problem-solving,

decision making, or investigative activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations.”

- According to Ronald Marx (1994), project-based instruction often has a “driving question” encompassing worthwhile content that is anchored in a real-world problem; investigations and artifacts that allow students to learn concepts, apply information, and represent knowledge in a variety of ways; collaboration among students, teachers, and others in the community so that participants can learn from one another; and use of cognitive tools that help learners represent ideas by using technology.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF WELL-DESIGNED PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:

- Learners are at the centre of the learning process.
- Projects focus on learning that is aligned with assessment standards.
- Projects are driven by Curriculum-Aligned Questions.
- Projects involve on-going and multiple types of assessment.
- The project has real-world connections.
- Learners demonstrate knowledge through a product or performance.
- Thinking skills are integral to project work.
- Teaching and learning strategies are varied and support multiple learning styles.

STEPS OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:

1. The teacher-coach sets the stage for students with real-life samples of the projects they will be doing.
2. Students take on the role of project designers, possibly establishing a forum for display or competition.
3. Students discuss and accumulate the background information needed for their designs.
4. The teacher-coach and students negotiate the criteria for evaluating the projects.
5. Students accumulate the materials necessary for the project.
6. Students create their projects.
7. Students prepare to present their projects.
8. Students present their projects.
9. Students reflect on the process and evaluate the projects based on the criteria established in Step 4.

IMPORTANCE OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:

- Project-based learning gives students a more “integrated” understanding of the concepts and knowledge they learn, while also equipping them with practical skills they can apply throughout their lives.
- The interdisciplinary nature of project-based learning helps students make connections across different subjects.
- Project-based learning mirrors the real-world situations students will encounter after they leave school.

- Student not only acquire important knowledge and skills, they also learn how to research complex issues, solve problems, develop plans, manage time, organize their work, collaborate with others, and persevere and overcome challenges.
- Project-based learning reflects the ways in which today's students learn.
- project-based learning represents a more flexible approach to instruction.
- Project-based learning allows teachers and students to address multiple learning standards simultaneously.
- students can work progressively toward demonstrating proficiency in a variety of standards while working on a single project or series of projects.
- Many teachers will not have the time or specialized training required to use project-based learning effectively.
- The projects that students select and design may vary widely in **academic rigor** and quality.
- Project-based learning could open the door to watered-down learning expectations and low-quality coursework.
- Project-based learning is not well suited to students who lack self-motivation or who struggle in less-structured learning environments.
- Project-based learning raises a variety of logistical concerns, since students are more likely to learn outside of school or in unsupervised settings, or to work with adults who are not trained educators.

TEACHER ROLE IN PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:

project-based learning is both challenging and rewarding for the teacher. Projects build vital 21st-century skills and lifelong habits of learning. Student enthusiasm, confidence, social interactions, and motivation are noticeably improved during project work. The teacher's role in project-based learning is twofold—sometimes the teacher acts as facilitator and sometimes as manager. In facilitator mode, the teacher works with students to frame relevant and meaningful questions and to present logical arguments, guides students in seeking answers and researching, structures knowledge-building tasks, coaches necessary social skills, and assesses student progress. As manager, the teacher directs small groups and independent work experiences. Often, there are multiple activities in the classroom at one time. For example, students may be viewing online simulations, conducting research in small groups, or collaborating with others in remote locations. The success of diverse opportunities certainly takes managerial skills. Project-based learning is only possible in classrooms where teachers support students by giving sufficient guidance and feedback. The teacher must thoroughly explain all tasks that are to be completed, provide detailed directions for how to develop the project, and circulate within the classroom in order to answer questions and encourage student motivation. In order to create successful units focused on project-based learning, teachers must plan well and be flexible. In this approach to instruction, teachers often find themselves in the role of learner and peer with the students. Teachers can assess project-based learning with a combination of objective tests, checklists, and rubrics; however, these often only measure task completion. The inclusion of a reflective writing component provides for self-evaluation of student learning.

- Resource Provider
- Facilitator and Counselor
- Help students select a topic
- Help students generate ideas through brain storming/mind mapping
- Guide students to formulate their project objectives
- Develop a contract/proposal for the group.
- Help students gather ideas, define objectives, draw up the schedule and provide input for language skills.
- Intervene if students' direction not practical
- Offer suggestions to solve problems.
- Respond to requests from students
- The teacher seeks to help the students to focus on relevant aspects.
- The teacher guides the students by asking questions and negotiating meanings with them.
- The teacher tries to frame the problems by referring to the findings of the problem.
- The teachers tries to monitor the students' strategy for solving the problem.
- The teacher attempts to guide the students' negotiation of meaning.
- Stimulating students' thinking
- Making appropriate requests to students
- Providing appropriate learning materials
- Devising appropriate learning activities
- Shifting from one role to another agilely
- Respecting students' different views
- Well informed of current news and events
- Establishing good collaboration relationships with colleagues
- Taking project learning as an open learning curriculum

STUDENT ROLE IN PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:

Students generally work in small, collaborative groups in the project-based learning model. They find sources, conduct research, and hold each other responsible for learning and the completion of tasks. Essentially, students must be “self-managers” in this approach to instruction. Results of project-based learning research is mixed. Some studies suggest that it is an engaging instructional approach, but numerous studies have also claimed that students are not motivated by this type of learning, and that it places a great amount of stress on teachers.

- **Key Knowledge, Understanding, and Success Skills** - The project is focused on student learning goals, including standards-based content and skills such as critical thinking/problem solving, communication, collaboration, and self-management.
- **Challenging Problem or Question** - The project is framed by a meaningful problem to solve or a question to answer, at the appropriate level of challenge.
- **Sustained Inquiry** - Students engage in a rigorous, extended process of asking questions, finding resources, and applying information.

- **Authenticity** - The project features real-world context, tasks and tools, quality standards, or impact – or speaks to students’ personal concerns, interests, and issues in their lives.
- **Student Voice & Choice** - Students make some decisions about the project, including how they work and what they create.
- **Reflection** - Students and teachers reflect on learning, the effectiveness of their inquiry and project activities, the quality of student work, obstacles and how to overcome them.
- **Critique & Revision** - Students give, receive, and use feedback to improve their process and products.
- **Public Product** - Students make their project work public by explaining, displaying and/or presenting it to people beyond the classroom.

CONCLUSION:

“**problem based learning**” – is a unique approach to teaching students while developing their critical thinking and problem solving skills through collaboration with a small group of others, while combating problems and situations more commonly faced in ‘real-life’ than in the classroom. With problem based learning lesson plans, the focus becomes much more on ‘student learning’ as opposed to the ‘teacher teaching’. In this manner, students are encouraged to become not just passive learners and note-takers, but rather critical thinkers who are highly capable of solving real-life problems that they are likely to encounter as they grow and mature into adults. Within the small group collaborative effort, students are encouraged to facilitate a constructive investigation of a problem in which they are fully engaged in the learning project. The hands-on approach with this type of education really focuses on the student’s taking the initiative, rather than simply being directed by their teacher. As students learn from their mistakes, they are encouraged to make the necessary corrections and establish the proper channels through which to effectively solve the problem at hand.

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