

Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning is an attempt to create new instructional practices that reflect the environment in which students learn the core curriculum; Science, Technology, English, Math and Social Studies. The most important shift in education has been the increased emphasis on standards, clear outcomes, and accountability.

Defining PBL

There is no one accepted definition of PBL. The best definition that applies to our specific Academy is as follows: PBL is a systemic 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 allows our teachers to work on projects of two weeks based on a single subject in one classroom to yearlong, interdisciplinary projects that involve community participation. Perhaps the most significant criteria of this definition are the proven results of well planned projects extended from other classroom activities. Carefully planned projects result in the following:

- ❖ By putting students at the center of the learning process, it recognizes students' inherent *drive to learn*.
- ❖ Engages students because the work is *central* rather than peripheral.
- ❖ Creates an *in-depth exploration of authentic and important topics*.
- ❖ It requires the use of *essential tools and skills*.
- ❖ Solutions require *products or multiple products*.
- ❖ It uses *performance based assessment*.
- ❖ It encourages *collaboration* among students

PBL is designed to acknowledge the importance of standards and evaluation of student learning. It is important to all concerned that in this era of accountability, with testing and performance uppermost in the minds of parents and educators, it is extremely necessary that all instructional methods incorporate high standards, rigorous challenges and valid assessment methods.

Essential Elements of PBL

In standards-based PBL, students are pulled through the curriculum by a Driving Question or Authentic problem that creates a need to know the material. More important, PBL enhances the quality of learning and leads to higher-level cognitive development through students' engagement with complex problems that are more rigorous, relevant and engaging instructional strategies that support authentic inquiry and autonomous learning for students. Whatever forms a project takes; it must have these essential elements to meet our definition of PBL:

1. **Significant Content;** must focus on teaching students important knowledge and skills.
2. **21st Century Skills;** must build skills valuable for today's world
3. **In-Depth Inquire;** must have a process of asking relevant questions, resources and develop answers
4. **Driving Question;** Work is focused on an open-ended question that captures the task they are completing.
5. **Need to Know;** Students must see the need to gain knowledge, understand concepts and apply skills
6. **Voice and Choice;** Students must be allowed to make some choices about products to be created, use of time, how they work, plans and deadlines.
7. **Revision and Reflection;** must contain a process for students to have feedback, consider additions and changes and time to think about how they are learning.
8. **Public Audience;** Students must be able to present their work to their peers, other people beyond their class.

PBL is an important and valuable because it effectively teaches content knowledge and skills, builds deeper understanding of concepts and makes a school curriculum more engaging and meaningful for students. It is a means of preparing students for the demands of life, citizenship and work in today's world.

If you wish to see the research behind these claims, see bie.org/research