

What is Project Based Learning (PBL)?

Project Based Learning is an instructional model which engages students in purposeful learning as they investigate a real world problem or complex question. Enthused students learn content and skills while making choices, being creative, researching, and reflecting. The teacher offers guidance and provides appropriate lessons along the way as students develop a product, presentation or display to share. It is not just doing projects.

Is it just a Project or Project Based Learning?

Project:

- Add on to a unit
- Based on following teacher directions
- Mostly done at home, independently
- Focus is on the product
- Not authentic

Project Based Learning:

- Project is the unit or major way to teach the content standards
- Open ended including student choice
- Mostly in school, with teacher guidance
- Focus is on the process
- Authentic to the real world or students' lives

Ashford School Vision and Mission Statements

Vision:
Empowered Learners Striving for Positive Change

Mission:
Ashford School learners engage in authentic EXPERIENCES to DISCOVER their passions, STRIVE for excellence, CONNECT with their community and the world, and CONTRIBUTE in positive and meaningful ways.

PBL is a major way in which we empower our students to strive for positive change in themselves and in the local and global communities.

FAQs

Q: Is PBL the only type of instruction used at Ashford School?

A: No, other instructional models such as stations, centers, workshops, and interactive lectures are also used.

Q: Do students take tests and quizzes?

A: Yes, even as part of PBL students may take these traditional assessments to ensure that they have learned important content and skills.

Q: Are all projects done in groups?

A: No, some projects are individual ones and even group projects contain individual components.

Project Based Learning at Ashford School



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Research on PBL

Multiple studies show when PBL is done well, students score higher on assessments compared to peers learning the same material using traditional instructional methods. No studies show lower scores.

PBL increases student motivation and interest in learning.

PBL helps students learn with understanding, retain what they learn and apply it to new situations.

Schools using PBL see fewer discipline problems and a rise in attendance.

Differentiated Goals for All Students

Often, teachers and students work together to set individual goals for PBL.

For example, one student may focus specifically on elaboration in their writing, while another student may work on improving their transitions between sentences and paragraphs. The reading level of novels or articles may also be different based on the student's current reading abilities. There are many other ways in which PBL is differentiated to appropriately challenge each student.

STEAM

STEAM refers to Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics. Art includes reading, writing, social studies, languages, as well as the visual and performing arts. Many of these subjects are linked together in PBL.

8 Essential Design Elements of PBL

1. Key Knowledge, Understanding, and Success Skills (see Habits of Mind)
2. Challenging Problem or Question
3. Sustained Inquiry
4. Authenticity
5. Student Voice and Choice
6. Reflection
7. Critique and Revision
8. Public Product

Habits of Mind

When designing units and lessons, we include opportunities for students to develop transferrable, or 21st century skills, which serve them well now and in the future. Employers and recent educational standards demand that students are able to think critically, solve problems, collaborate with others, effectively communicate ideas, and utilize other skills. We call these skills the Ashford School Habits of Mind:

Autonomy
Collaboration
Communication
Creativity
Critical Thinking
Cultural Competency
Innovative Problem Solving
Motivation to Learn
Perseverance
Reflection
Self Control

While students are assessed on content knowledge and subject-specific skills, they are also responsible for showing proficiency on these habits of mind. At times, students choose their own habits of mind as part of their PBL. They become part of the project rubric or expectations for the work.

Sources of Information:

Getting Started with Project Based Learning, www.ASCD.org

An Introduction to PBL, 2nd edition, Buck Institute for Education