

Edge Future Learning

Project Based Learning Toolkit





Project Based Learning (PBL) – Getting Started

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this toolkit is to give you an introduction and overview of PBL. It is designed to provide you with a practical ‘how to’ guide to help inform your thinking of how you can develop and create projects in order to introduce PBL to your school or college and students.

It is worth acknowledging from schools and colleges that PBL is called different things in different schools and it can form part of, or be the central ethos of, a school’s or colleges approach to teaching and learning. For ease of explanation throughout this toolkit the teaching pedagogy is referred to as PBL. However, in your school or college PBL might be referred to as, for example, ‘teaching through the lens’ or ‘applied learning’. You may already use different aspects of PBL in your teaching. For example, you may already focus on authenticity and addressing real-world problems and questions by working with and co-creating projects with experts and the community. This toolkit is designed for you to apply the framework and stages outlined to your context, and build upon your existing practice. It has been designed as a starting point. You can explore PBL as a pedagogy further through the links and additional information in the appendices and provided in the footnotes.

The toolkit addresses key questions including: what is PBL? What are its key elements? What does ‘good’ PBL look like?

The toolkit is split into two sections, stage 1 and stage 2, and is designed to systematically lead you through the process of creating a PBL project for your students, based on your idea. You will be required to focus on an area of the curriculum which would lend itself to PBL in order to create the project.

WHAT IS PBL? HOW CAN IT BE DEFINED?

As a starting point it is useful to define what we mean by PBL, as defined by the Buck Institute for Education:

” Students work on a *project over an extended period of*

time – from a week up to a semester – that engages them in solving a real-world problem or answering a complex question. They demonstrate their knowledge and skills by developing a public product or presentation for a real audience.

As a result, students develop deep content knowledge as well as critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills in the context of doing an authentic, meaningful project. Project Based Learning unleashes a contagious, creative energy among students and teachers.”¹

WHAT PBL IS NOT

There are a number of common misconceptions about PBL. These are *not* features of the approach where it is delivered rigorously:

- Learning is unstructured
- Students just do what they want around a general topic or theme
- Students are left to their own devices
- There is no ‘input’ from the teacher until the end
- It’s a ‘free for all’
- There is no ‘formal’ learning/input or teaching from the teacher
- Students will be assessed as a group and as such individuals can get away with doing very little and leave it to the rest of the group
- There are no checks and balances through the project

1. Buck Institute for Education – www.bie.org/about/what_pbl

THE CONTINUUM OF PBL PRACTICE

There is a wide range of practice with regards to PBL and different schools and education organisations have taken and adapted elements of PBL to fit with their context. Looking across them all, it is clear that they have common themes and elements running through their approach, ethos and execution of PBL. In addition, they are all clear about the purpose of PBL, its

power and impact and why they are embracing it as a pedagogy. Their common overarching aims are that PBL has a positive and identifiable impact on their students' learning and it supports their goals as institutions to ensure students have developed academic and life skills which will set them in good stead in the 21st century, whether as an employee or employer.

EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONS LEADING ON PBL AND THE CONTINUUM OF PRACTICE

STANLEY PARK HIGH

Surrey

- PBL in years 7 and 8. Discreet PBL delivered in 12 week blocks
- www.stanleyparkhigh.org.uk



SCHOOL 21

London

- Elements of the curriculum are taught through PBL with an additional focus on oracy
- www.school21.org.uk/sec-curriculum
- www.school21.org.uk



XP SCHOOL

Doncaster

- PBL is part of the school's ethos of Expeditionary Learning <https://eleducation.org> PBL is mapped to curriculum 'standards' at KS3 and KS4 and scaffolded for learners
- www.xpschool.org



HIGH TECH HIGH

San Diego

- PBL follows students' interests and projects are co-created with learners
- www.hightechhigh.org



The toolkit has been split into stages 1 and 2. The stages have been further split into manageable steps which are designed to provide you with a systematic

framework designed to help you formulate your project idea, taking it from inception to the starting point for delivery.

Stage 1

STEP 1 – GENERATING PROJECT IDEAS

The starting point for PBL is to generate an idea which will give students an opportunity to undertake a sustained inquiry. Whilst at the same time ensuring the project delivers the curriculum area(s) or ‘standards’ which students need to learn, developing their knowledge, skills and understanding.

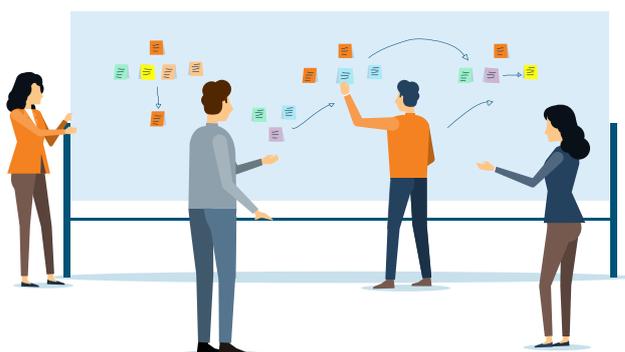
When deciding on a potential project idea you need to consider:

- Is it academically rigorous? Can students pose questions, gather and interpret data, develop and evaluate solutions or build evidence for answers, and ask further questions?
- Does the inquiry have the potential to be sustained over time? How long do you envisage the project lasting?

In developing your project idea it is often helpful to begin with the end in mind. Be clear about what you want your students to learn or do and the skills you wish them to acquire through the project, and do not lose sight of this in your planning.

Common types of project

- **Addressing a real-world problem** e.g. climate change
- **Meeting a design challenge** e.g. create a physical or digital artefact, a piece of writing, multimedia or work of art; develop a plan, produce an event; or provide a service
- **Exploring an abstract question** e.g. when is violence justified?
- **Conducting an investigation** e.g. a historical event or natural phenomenon
- **Taking a position on an issue** e.g. a present day or historical controversy



Sources of inspiration for PBL projects

- **Community** – what are business needs in the community? Can they share a problem, issue or perspective?
- **Current events** – real world
- **The curriculum or ‘content standards’** – what are you looking to teach? What skills knowledge and understanding do students need to acquire?

You may wish to utilise or adapt a project which has been delivered before or gain some inspiration. The following links may help:

Sources of information and inspiration:

- **XP School, Doncaster**
www.xpschool.org/our-expeditions/
- **School 21 London**
www.school21.org.uk/sec-curriculum
www.school21.org.uk/sec-beautiful-work
- **Buck Institute for Education**
www.bie.org/project_search
- **PBLU**
<http://pblu.org/>
- **Envision Schools Project Exchange**
www.envisionprojects.org/
- **High Tech High**
www.hightechhigh.org/student-work/student-projects/
- **iEARN (International Education and Research Network)**
<https://iearn.org/cc/search/groups>
- **Expeditionary Learning**
<https://modelsofexcellence.education.org/projects>

If you are new to PBL and starting from scratch, firstly reflect on your current practice and consider the areas of the curriculum or 'standards' you are looking to cover this academic year. It is often a good idea to develop the project around an area of the curriculum you are looking to deliver and cover, so that the project is an integral part of your teaching. The project is something

students would experience and be taught and experience as part of the curriculum for the academic year. So, in designing the project – decide what you want your students to learn and plan backwards from there. This approach also helps you identify the learning goals and assessment strategy for the project from its outset.

● **List the general topics and themes you plan to teach**

Subject

Topic(s) Key Stage

Topic(s) Key Stage

Topic(s) Key Stage

● **Circle the Key Stage and topics that jump out at you as a potential starting point for project ideas.**

