

Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 6: Meaningful Work
Intentional Step One



Chapter 6

Intentional Step One: Incorporate Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) typically features collaborative, group-based work that invites students to tackle complex real-world problems with multiple open-ended solutions. This approach has been gaining popularity among educators, and for good reason. Several gold-star studies on the use of PBL in diverse classrooms have yielded impressive results. One of the studies examined 6,000 high school students from across the country, with more than half identifying as low-income. Comparing AP courses that utilized PBL with more conventional teaching methods, researchers found that the students exposed to PBL significantly outperformed their peers. The same was true for elementary students. Of the 2,371 third-graders observed, those who engaged in PBL scored eight percentage points higher than their peers when tested on their learning. These studies and others have led educators to conclude that PBL generates better academic outcomes for students across grade levels, socioeconomic status, and reading abilities (Terada, 2021).

Many teachers see the benefits of including project-based learning in their curriculum, but implementing it might seem complicated or overwhelming. First, PBL doesn't have to involve a semester or month-long project. If teachers are trying to encourage students to find meaning in the content, they can start small. Begin with one-day project-based learning and build from there.

Strategy 1: Project-Based Learning Tools

A helpful list of PBL resources is included with this chapter. Start with the Designing Effective Project-Based Learning Experiences worksheet to help shape instructional plans.

Teachers can then map out their broader ideas using the Planning Project-Based Learning Experiences sheet. Working from those bigger ideas, teachers can break their project down into daily goals, lessons, and assessments using the Project Planning Snapshot. For example, let's say the teacher wants to spend one week on a project. The learning snapshot is valuable for helping plan what's realistic to accomplish each day. Additional PBL graphic organizers are available below to help walk teachers and students through the rest of the planning process, including Student Goal Sheet, Daily Check-In, and Group Roles and Responsibilities.

Teachers should consider how to generate student interest in the project as well. What scenarios will teachers give students to ensure they're connecting to the content? Let's say the project is about how different chemicals interact to dye someone's hair. The scenario might be: a client comes into the salon with orange hair, but the client had asked for it to be pink. How would students handle this situation? The teacher then asks students to reflect on what they know about the scenario, what they need to know, and if they know of any resources they can use to find that information. See the "Scenario Reflection" handout for a sample.

Utilizing the Scenario Reflection sheet helps ensure students are planning to use appropriate resources. If students struggle to find the right resources, the teacher might help them come up with ideas. Ultimately, this strategy helps students organize their thoughts about the work and helps the teacher understand where students are in their thinking and what they might need for support.

PBL is student-centered and encourages creativity, innovation, and interactive thinking. Students can discuss their ideas, consider different perspectives, and engage in deeper, more meaningful work that feels authentic. It also creates a sense of purpose, can be implemented across grade levels, and helps expose students to various career and success skills, such as

problem-solving, working in teams, and effectively communicating ideas. PBL incorporates cooperative learning (.53) and problem-solving teaching (.68), both high-effect strategies.

Teaching Tip: For additional Project Based Learning resources, visit: www.reflecttolearn.com.