

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Just as it sounds, project-based learning (PBL) centers on facilitating meaningful, powerful learning experiences through project work and the context that projects provide for learning.

According to nonprofit foundation [Edutopia](#), the five keys to PBL are:

- **Establish real-world connections in projects.** Start with an authentic problem, need, or opportunity in the community and anchor the learning with a driving question.
- **Build projects that are core to learning.** In schools, projects and standards can easily coexist, where projects anchor the curriculum and enable students to apply and practice their knowledge.
- **Structure collaboration for student success.** Choreograph collaboration by helping students develop roles/responsibilities and processes, teaching them how to use each other as resources.
- **Facilitate learning in a student-driven environment.** Introduce the topic in a way that promotes curiosity, allowing students to find their own answers or generate more questions. Make time for reflection and have students track their own progress.
- **Embed assessment throughout the project.** Because projects can span weeks, build in mini learning targets to assess, not just by the educator but also by the students themselves and the group as a whole. End with a presentation or performance.

Often, concrete projects are used as a step towards learning a technical skill, familiarizing oneself with tools, or becoming more adept at tackling larger and more individualized projects. For example, educators have prompted students to “make a pillow.” Inherent to this project is the development of sewing skills and familiarity with sewing tools and materials, along with application of math and measurements. Pillows take on forms of their own: youth (in pairs or groups) may create body pillows, dog beds, pillows for homeless shelters, travel pillows, seat cushions, or pillows with lights and sensors.

While PBL is naturally focused on projects, it’s complemented well by approaches that emphasize process, such as playing, exploring, and tinkering, where creating a finished product isn’t a goal. And though PBL curricula tends to focus on real-world situations as the inspiration for projects, youth-derived projects based purely on whimsy or individual interests can also provide valuable learning experiences with personal meaning.