

ESSENTIAL PBL

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

IS THIS A WORTHY PROJECT?

These questions are designed to help you determine the value of a project while you are in the development phase.

Wonder

Does this project begin from a place of wonder? Does it encourage students to look at the world with a sense of awe or engender in them a desire to explore?

Sufficiently ambitious

Is there a legitimate possibility that we could fail at this project? When I tell people about this project, are about half of them convinced I will fail?

Interdisciplinary

Will this project provide a point of access for all of my students? Will my Math Kid get as much out of this as my Writing Kid?

Checkpoints

Does this project provide frequent opportunities to recalibrate?

Reflection

Will students have the opportunity to reflect on their learning and contribution to the project?

Fierce engagement

Can I picture my students talking about this project outside of the classroom? Will they merely be engaged in class or will they drag the material to their lair and feast on it like a wild animal?

Obscurity/novelty

Can I give them something they have never heard about before?

Supported failure

Will this project provide my students opportunities to see me model failure? Will they have a chance to practice failure?

Discrete parallel tasks

Will this project allow my students to work in concert with each other? Will each student be able to contribute to the project without relying on the finished work of another student?

Compelling conclusion

Is there a compelling souvenir that students are going to be proud of?

HOW DOES THIS WORK IN MY CLASSROOM?

Below are practical tips to help you integrate collaborative Project-Based Learning in your classroom.

Deliberate ignoring

Students need the time and space to fail, argue, innovate, and re-imagine without constant teacher mediation. They must trust that you will step in, but only when needed. Students have the right to a period of struggle.

Scaffold teamwork

In the beginning, pair students with friends to help initiate project buy-in and gradually adjust the groups. Have another teacher join you and demonstrate effective teamwork.

Fail every day

Fail openly and honestly in front of your students. Admit that you don't know the answers and then investigate them with the students. **Use the word "failure" as much as possible.** If students are not comfortable failing in front of each other, team-based projects will not work.

Manage the emotional temperature of the room

At the end of the day, team-based projects are a social-emotional endeavor. Cultivating, tending, and managing an environment of trust, respect, honesty, and support are paramount to ensuring a successful project.